

Time, Memory, and Identity: Autoethnographic Practice in Filmmaking

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Dedication

I dedicate this PhD by Published Work to my mother, Lyn Hunter; to Clare Heney; and to my children, Kate Heney and Chay Heney.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Director of Studies, Professor Colin Fallows at Liverpool John Moores University, for his belief, guidance, and encouragement throughout this PhD by Published Work. My sincere thanks also go to, Peter Appleton, Reader in Creative Technology, for his invaluable co-supervision and insight. I am especially grateful to Clare Heney, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Frank Boyce Snr, Martin McQuillan and Hurricane Films for their generous support and belief in my work. The opportunity to undertake this research in Liverpool has been profoundly important and resonates deeply with the nature and spirit of the content.

Abstract

This research towards PhD by Published Work critically examines, time, memory and identity via autoethnographic practice in filmmaking, aiming to fill a significant gap in the literature regarding the integration of personal narrative from the perspective of a film director and the associated stylistic innovations in cinema. While current approaches often neglect how subjective storytelling can transform conventional film practices, this research aims to contribute original knowledge to the field of film studies by foregrounding the primary source of the director's voice and methodology. The research investigates and questions the interplay between personal experience, cinematic form, and cultural representation.

Utilising a practice-led methodology, Carl Hunter analyses three of his films *More Than Time* (2020), *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), and *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), while engaging with Henri Bergson's theories of time and the nature of consciousness. This critical reflection incorporates practice-led research methodologies, narrative techniques, stylistic innovation, and processes, including the use of visual scrapbooks as an immersive experience and communication device. The findings of this practice-led research demonstrate that the director's employment of long takes and understated performances promotes a richer engagement with temporal perception. This aligns with the insights of film theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Andrew Nestigen, who emphasise the importance of unique visual and narrative grammar in film.

The thesis also explores the importance of cinema as a medium through which British narratives are articulated and disseminated, influencing both domestic and international perceptions of British culture. In this thesis, the term Britishness on screen encompasses prevalent, clichéd portrayals of the working class often characterised by anti-working-class propaganda.

The film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) endeavours to subvert these entrenched cinematic tropes by employing a distinctive juxtaposition of form and content. This thesis finds that autoethnographic practice in filmmaking not only challenges dominant narratives but also enhances understanding of identity and memory, providing a rare glimpse into the research processes and theoretical frameworks that inform the directorial approach. By revealing these methodologies, the thesis suggests valuable implications for future research in film studies, advocating for the importance of personal narrative in understanding the complexities of cinematic representation.

Key words: Carl Hunter, Filmmaking, Autoethnography, Autoethnographic practice, Time, Identity, Personal Narrative, Cultural Representation, Memory, Film Theory.

Biography

Carl James Hunter

Producer | Director | Designer | Musician | Academic

Carl James Hunter is an interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, musician, designer, and academic whose practice foregrounds the intersections between music, visual culture, and moving image. His career demonstrates a consistent integration of professional creative practice with academic and pedagogical innovation. He has directed, written, and produced major feature films and more than thirty broadcast documentaries, alongside a portfolio of short films screened and awarded internationally. His work has been exhibited at film festivals across the world and received recognition from professional bodies including BAFTA and the Royal Television Society.

Hunter's expertise extends across filmmaking, design, photography, and music, underpinned by a strong commitment to contemporary practice and collaboration. He has maintained enduring connections with both the film and music industries, while also contributing to higher education through curriculum development, supervision, and research-led teaching. In addition, he has delivered invited lectures, symposia presentations, and masterclasses, reinforcing his role in knowledge exchange between industry and academia.

Filmmaker

Hunter's achievements as a film producer and director have been recognised nationally and internationally. He co-wrote and produced the feature film *Grow Your Own* (2009), starring Olivia Colman, in collaboration with the BBC, Warp, and Pathé. More recently, he directed the feature film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), starring Bill Nighy, which premiered at the BFI London Film Festival and was released in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. The film attracted significant critical attention, with positive reviews from The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph, The LA Times, Hollywood Reporter, Washington Post, and The New Yorker.

His work as a producer of short films has achieved over two hundred international festival screenings and more than thirty-five awards, with further recognition from the Royal Television Society. His short film *Unloveable* (1998), exploring popular music culture through a fictionalised narrative centred on fandom, was exhibited at Manchester Art Gallery for two years. His election as a full BAFTA member reflects his established international profile, while his role as a jury member at the Cheltenham International Film Festival provides opportunities for critical engagement with contemporary film practice, enriching both his scholarship and pedagogy.

Musician

In parallel with his film career, Hunter is the bass player in the internationally recognised Liverpool band The Farm. With the group he has recorded and toured internationally, securing multiple hit singles and albums, including number one records in the UK, Europe, and the USA. The band has signed contracts with major labels including Sony, Sire, BMG, and Virgin EMI.

Hunter's compositional work includes co-writing *Comfort* (1994), selected by Martin Scorsese for inclusion in the feature film *Naked in New York* (1993). The Farm's music has been widely used in film and television, attesting to its cultural reach. His involvement in politically committed musical practice is notable, particularly through touring with Mick Jones (The Clash) and Pete Wylie in the Justice Tonight Band in support of the Hillsborough Justice

Campaign. This culminated in The Justice Collective's *He Ain't Heavy* (He's My Brother) (2012), featuring Sir Paul McCartney and achieving a UK Christmas number one.

Hunter has also composed extensively for radio and film, including all music for the BBC Radio 4 drama series *The Believers* (2010). His work as a producer has received airplay across BBC national and regional radio, BBC 6 Music, and commercial platforms. As a mentor, he has supported emerging artists, most recently guiding the Liverpool band Keyside to a record deal with Modern Sky Records, leading to national radio play and festival appearances.

Designer

Hunter's career originated in graphic design. He gained a BA in Graphic Design and an MA in Multimedia Design from Liverpool Art School, Liverpool John Moores University. He worked with Malcolm Garrett's design studio Assorted Images in London, producing record sleeves and branding for leading bands and labels. His work for The Farm, including the album *Spartacus* (1991), remains an important contribution to British music design. His sleeve for *Love See No Colour* (1991) was recognised by the Association of Photographers 9th Awards. He recently completed all designs for The Farm's *Let The Music (Take Control)* (2024) album cover and all the single artwork that followed.

Beyond the music industry, Hunter's design practice has extended to corporate identities and visual culture projects. His Polaroid photography for Frank Cottrell Boyce's novella *The Unforgotten Coat* (2012) won the Guardian Children's Literature Prize and the Deutsche Jugendliteraturpreis. His design work has been exhibited internationally, including the Lost Horizon VR Festival (2020). More recently, he designed the titles and branding for *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) and has continued to develop visual identities for music releases.

Academic

In higher education, Hunter is Senior Fellow in Filmmaking and Associate Director of the Institute for Creative Enterprise at Edge Hill University. In this role he contributes to interdisciplinary research connecting the creative economy with cultural institutions. He has designed and delivered postgraduate programmes, supervised research students, and acted as external examiner for Film Production at Lincoln University and previously at the University of Central Lancashire. He also served on the validation panel for Falmouth University's MA in Feature Film Production, commencing in 2025.

Hunter has been widely recognised for innovation in teaching and learning. He designed the Kickstart filmmaking project, producing short films selected for over seventy international festivals and awarded the UK Government's Innovative Employment Support for Young People Award. Between 2022–2023, he delivered Liverpool City Region digital filmmaking courses and three BFI Film Academy programmes at FACT Liverpool, integrating professional practice with widening participation. These projects included a music video for Keyside, later nominated for a Learning on Screen Award.

His leadership in practice-based teaching was acknowledged through a nomination for the Times Higher Education Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Arts. His projects exemplify the integration of professional-level production with inclusive pedagogy, bridging the gap between higher education and the cultural industries.

Summary

Carl James Hunter is an internationally recognised interdisciplinary practitioner whose career spans film, music, design, and pedagogy. His work demonstrates the ways in which professional creative practice contributes to cultural production while also informing academic research and teaching. Through sustained engagement across disciplines, he has established a distinctive profile as an artist-academic whose contributions to filmmaking, design, music, and higher education are both nationally and internationally significant.

Carl Hunter
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Introduction and Research Context

The research towards PhD by Published Work presented an opportunity to compile, document, contextualise, and critically analyse my original contribution to knowledge in my field. Through my practice-led research and sustained critical reflection, I have explored new ideas, challenged existing assumptions, and generated novel insights. For instance, I have investigated the use of silence in film in innovative ways and have critically challenged conventional assumptions of British cinema by examining the interplay between form and context in my work. I have further developed these insights by engaging with Henri Bergson's theory of *La Durée*, which addresses the nature of time and consciousness. This engagement has deepened my understanding of its connection to my cinematic aesthetic, particularly through the use of long takes and a static camera, enhancing the viewer's experience of temporal perception.

This research has been especially valuable in advancing my understanding of filmmaking practice and its theoretical underpinnings. By intertwining my experiences as a filmmaker with scholarly inquiry and stylistic experimentation, I have produced work that challenges established narratives around film and storytelling. At the same time, it offers perspectives on identity, memory, time, process, research, and cultural representation. In doing so, this research contributes both to academic discourse and to the broader practice of contemporary cinema. For example, this research engages with Andrei Tarkovsky's long-take philosophy to explore time and memory, Gregory Crewdson's photographic tableaux to inform visual composition, Polaroid aesthetics to evoke nostalgia, Scrabble as a linguistic and symbolic device in storytelling, employing a non-traditional approach to film music over conventional film score composing by collaborating with independent singer songwriter, Edwyn Collins, to integrate music as a structural and emotional narrative layer.

Autoethnographic filmmaking has emerged as an informative and introspective mode of storytelling, it combines my personal experiences as a filmmaker with stylistic innovations as demonstrated in my directorial work. This thesis has critically examined a selection of my works situated at the intersection of autoethnographic filmmaking and stylistic practice, exploring how I employ visual and narrative techniques to challenge traditional conventions and to highlight alternative modes of filmic representation.

The use of autoethnographic filmmaking and style represent a dynamic and transformative approach to storytelling. By blending personal narratives, filmmaking experience and scholarly research with innovative visual and narrative techniques, autoethnographic films offer unique perspectives, challenge dominant narratives, and encourage inclusive representation. The research towards PhD by Published Work offers the opportunity for further exploration of the relationship between autoethnographic filmmaking and style, highlighting the potential for stylistic innovations to deepen the understanding of subjective experiences and contribute to the ongoing evolution of visual culture. The thesis aims to provide an additional original contribution to knowledge in the field.

This thesis positions autoethnography as a rigorous and critically reflexive methodology that both acknowledges and extends the debates outlined in the literature. Responding to critiques that autoethnography is overly evocative or self-indulgent, my research recognises filmmaking as a political and ethical act shaped by standpoint and experience. In this regard, Anderson (2006) is quite right to point out that there has long been a very close symbiosis between ethnographers and their subject matter, and that it is quite wrong to attribute to a generation of ethnographic researchers the degree of scientific detachment that some commentators imply. Rather than treating personal narrative as an end in itself, this project mobilises autoethnography as a practice-led mode of inquiry into class, perception, and representation within contemporary British cinema.

Drawing on Ellis's defence of evocative autoethnography, in which 'the meaning is in the experience... the meaning comes in writing the story about the experience' (Ellis, 2009a, p. 376), the thesis demonstrates how creative practice can function simultaneously as data, analysis, and theoretical intervention. At the same time, it engages with Anderson's (2006a) proposal for analytic autoethnography by embedding reflexivity within broader cultural and cinematic frameworks rather than isolating the self as the sole object of study.

Originality arises through the integration of autoethnography with adaptation theory and filmmaking practice, transforming lived experience into a methodological tool for interrogating dominant narratives of British social realism. In this way, the research advances autoethnography beyond personal testimony toward a collective, culturally situated, and critically productive form of knowledge generation.

This practice-led research is underpinned by questions of how time, class, and identity can be articulated cinematically through an autoethnographic engagement with Liverpool, rather than through abstract notions of Britishness. Central to the enquiry is how lived, subjective time, shaped by memory, duration, and repetition, can be rendered through film form. Liverpool operates not merely as a setting but as a temporal and social character carrying histories of labour, migration, and resilience. In *More Than Time* (2020), the deserted city becomes a landscape of collective memory during lockdown; in, *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), the bus journey structures lived experience of class and mobility; and in *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) stylised interiors and static compositions articulate emotional stasis and working-class domestic ritual in deliberate contrast to the trope of cluttered, grim realist interiors that dominate British film and television representations of working-class life. Through personal history, the films interrogate how place shapes perception, rhythm, and belonging.

My deep-rooted connection to Liverpool, particularly through my upbringing in a council house in Bootle, a working-class borough on the city's edge, profoundly informs my filmmaking strategies. This background has given me an intimate understanding of community, struggle, and resilience, enabling me to contest the frequent misrepresentation of working-class life in cinema and television. My education at Liverpool Art School further enriched my artistic sensibilities, immersing me in the city's vibrant intersections of art, culture, and music. Liverpool's cultural and historical significance as a global hub of exchange continues to shape my creative practice and forms a central strand of my cinematic identity. Remaining in Liverpool has allowed me to stay connected to the community that informs my work. By drawing on lived experience, I aim to create films that resonate with authenticity and depth, offering a more accurate portrayal of working-class life that is positioned in contrast to dominant cinematic and television representations that rely on reductive stereotypes and tropes, social realism clichés, or narratives of deficit that marginalise complexity and lived experience. My work seeks authenticity by foregrounding subjective, community-informed perspectives rather than externally imposed or commercially driven interpretations of class identity. The depth is created by moving beyond surface-level depictions of social conditions toward an exploration of memory, emotion, time, and everyday experience as they are felt and lived. In this sense, my films aim to generate a deeper understanding than conventional

realist or policy-driven portrayals by integrating autoethnographic insight with stylistic and theoretical inquiry.

Liverpool not only provided me with my education and cultural grounding, but also with opportunities to develop as both a musician and filmmaker; it remains embedded in my creative DNA.

My personal upbringing provides essential geopolitical and cultural context for this research. I grew up in Bootle, a working-class borough on the periphery of Liverpool, an area shaped by deindustrialisation, austerity, and long-standing structural inequality. Growing up within this environment afforded me an embodied understanding of class, precarity, and collective resilience that cannot be acquired through observation alone. These lived experiences fundamentally inform my creative and critical perspective as a filmmaker. They also position this thesis as both an artistic inquiry and a reflexive intervention into a film and television industry in which working-class directors remain significantly underrepresented. The scarcity of such voices raises critical questions about access, cultural gatekeeping, and the limiting of the creative talent pool. When filmmaking is dominated by privilege, perspectives, the range of stories, aesthetics, and political concerns represented on screen become correspondingly limited. This thesis therefore offers insight into my own directorial thinking as a practitioner shaped by class, place, and community, while also interrogating the broader structural conditions that constrain working-class participation in filmmaking. By foregrounding personal experience as a legitimate form of knowledge, this thesis argues that expanding access for working-class filmmakers is not merely an issue of representation, but one of artistic innovation, cultural accuracy, and the future vitality of cinematic voice

Liverpool is situated on the north west coast of Britain, and is akin to an early manifestation of the internet, its role as a major port through which information and culture flowed in from diverse corners of the world, underwent subtle adaptations, and was then disseminated outward. Liverpool, in this analogy, functions as a dynamic hub of exchange and connectivity, like a primitive form of the internet. This characterisation of Liverpool as an early internet-like network underscores the city's historical significance as a nexus of global interactions and cultural cross-pollination.

Remaining in Liverpool has enabled me to stay connected to the community that informs my art. By drawing on the lived experiences of its people, I aim to create films that contribute to

a more accurate representation of working-class life in the cinematic and television landscape. Liverpool educated me, put me in a successful band and developed me as a filmmaker. Liverpool is very much in my cultural DNA.

By incorporating my subjectivity into the filmmaking process, my autoethnographic films offer distinct stylistic approaches that shape the narrative and contribute to a deeper understanding of personal, cultural, and social phenomena. The thesis has examined and critically reflected on two areas of filmmaking seen through the lens of the director i.e. myself, Carl Hunter, and critiques the three, films as case studies to underpin the discussion. The first area of filmmaking explores poetic documentary making, and the second area explores drama, both long form and short form. The thesis has been underpinned by a methodology of autoethnographic filmmaking, elucidating its theoretical foundations and the principles of autoethnography. Autoethnographic films intertwine personal experiences with sociocultural analysis, allowing the filmmaker to become an active participant in the storytelling process using visual language as voice. This engagement with subjectivity influences the style and aesthetics of the film, offering a departure from traditional notions of objectivity and inviting viewers to explore alternative perspectives.

This research adopts autoethnography as a critically reflexive methodology rather than a purely expressive mode of practice. The thesis draws explicitly on debates surrounding evocative and analytic autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006a; Denzin, 2006), positioning filmmaking as both a form of lived inquiry and a site of theoretical production. As Denzin argues, 'ethnography is not an innocent practice' (2006, p. 422); Denzin's notion of interpretative autoethnography offers insight into the ways in which personal memories, feelings, and epiphanies can be unearthed from objects and documents in order to restage lived experience. Invested in transforming the autoethnographic project into a critical and performative practice that begins with biography but extends out to 'culture, discourse, history and ideology,' his notion of interpretative autoethnography offers a productive framework for understanding how my films mobilise personal memories, emotions, and epiphanic moments through objects, images, and sound in order to re-stage lived experience as cinematic inquiry. For Norman Denzin, autoethnography begins with biography but must extend outward positioning the self as a methodological lens rather than a private subject. This approach directly informs my use of photographs, voicemail messages, urban spaces, and everyday routines in films such as *More Than Time* (2020) and *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours*

(2017), where personal encounters with Liverpool are transformed into critical reflections on memory, class, mobility, and temporality. Rather than presenting autobiography as confessional narrative, the films construct meaning through the arrangement of visual and sonic fragments that situate individual experience within wider social and historical contexts. In this way, my filmmaking practice enacts Denzin's model of autoethnography as a performative and interpretative methodology, using cinematic form to translate subjective experience into culturally legible and theoretically engaged knowledge. Denzin situates his method in relation to philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's term universal singular. Paraphrasing Sartre, Denzin explains:

No individual is just an individual; each person is a universal singular, summed up and for this reason universalized by his or her historical epoch, each person in turn reproducing him or herself in its singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by universalizing singularity in his or her projects, the person requires simultaneous examination from both ends.
(Denzin, 2013).

Accordingly, this research treats film practice as a political, ethical, and interpretive act shaped by standpoint, class, and experience. The theoretical foundations of this methodology are operationalised through three practice-based case studies: *More Than Time* (2020), *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), and *Sometimes Always Never* (2019). Each film functions as an autoethnographic investigation into time, class, and perception within contemporary British cinema. *More Than Time* (2020) explores memory and collective loss through still photography and voice, aligning with Ellis's assertion that 'the meaning is in the experience... the meaning comes in writing the story about the experience' (Ellis, 2009a, p. 376). *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017) employs adaptation and observational strategies to interrogate mobility, labour, and everyday ritual, embedding reflexivity within wider social and cultural frameworks rather than isolating the self as sole object of study. *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) extends this inquiry into narrative fiction, using stylised performance and domestic space to challenge dominant social-realist representations of working-class life. Together, these films demonstrate how autoethnographic practice can operate as data, analysis, and theoretical intervention. By integrating personal experience with film theory, adaptation theory, and debates on representation, the research advances autoethnography beyond autobiographical testimony toward a culturally situated and critically productive form of knowledge generation. In this way, originality emerges not only from lived experience but from the methodological

transformation of that experience into cinematic inquiry within the context of British film practice.

Across the portfolio, a shared aesthetic and thematic logic emerges through an emphasis on composition, tempo, and the symbolic charge of everyday objects. The works are unified by an intertextual dialogue with photography, music, and poetic documentary, treating each film frame as a curated artefact akin to a record sleeve or diorama. Static compositions and measured pacing foreground lived time and contemplative duration, evident in *More Than Time* (2020) through still photographic tableaux of Liverpool, and in *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) through stylised domestic interiors structured as visual memory spaces. In *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), the bus becomes a moving archive of identity and class. Intertextual references, from Polaroid photography and Edward Hopper's paintings to Scrabble's lexicon and urban landscapes, reinforce my exploration of human connection, absence, and selfhood, establishing a cohesive, contemplative signature across my screen practice research.

The choice to collaborate with Scottish independent singer-songwriter Edwyn Collins as composer reflects a deliberate, non-traditional approach to film music, engaging with my personal history as a member of an independent band. This musical knowledge informs my directorial practice, privileging alternative music culture over conventional scoring, evidencing how prior creative experience mediates contemporary filmmaking choices. In theoretical terms, this aligns with scholarship on intermediality and auteurism, wherein a director's embodied knowledge and cultural capital shape the cinematic expression. Across the portfolio, these stylistic strategies, composition, pace, objects, and intertextual musical references, articulate sustained preoccupations with time, memory, and identity, unifying the works as a research-informed creative whole

The thesis reflects on the critically acclaimed feature film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019). This critical reflection includes practice-led research methodologies, narrative techniques, stylistic innovation, processes, and the use of visual scrapbooks as an immersive experience and communication device. The research also engages in a process of critical self-reflection exploring and analysing the films listed below, examining the sociocultural factors that shape represented identities, beliefs, and perspectives. This examination is complemented by a critical analysis of the cultural, historical, philosophical and social contexts that inform these experiences.

The research, employs various strategies to contextualise my practice-led research and films within the broader academic discourse. I conducted an extensive literature review to identify key theoretical frameworks and concepts that are relevant to the framing of my published works. This situates my films within the existing body of knowledge to establish and reinforce the intellectual foundation for my work. I reference relevant film theories and methodologies to critically analyse and interpret my own films.

Short films have emerged as a significant form of audiovisual storytelling within the academic context. Their ability to condense complex ideas, challenge traditional academic conventions, and engage diverse audiences makes them a valuable medium for knowledge dissemination and critical inquiry. As academic researchers and practitioners continue to explore the potential of short films, they contribute to the expansion and diversification of academic discourse. Therefore, it is important to examine the significance of the short film form and the context in which they exist, and how they inform both the filmmaker and audience.

The theory of process in filmmaking is informed by scholarship that conceptualises film production as an integrated system of creative, technical, and collaborative practices. In his paper 'Theorizing Production/Producing Theory (Or, Why Filmmaking Really Could Count as Scholarship)', Anthropologist and filmmaker, John L. Jackson Jr. argues that filmmaking should be recognised as a legitimate form of scholarly knowledge production because it generates theory through practice rather than merely illustrating pre-existing concepts. He contends that the processes of filming, editing, and collaboration constitute critical modes of inquiry that can reveal social, cultural, and experiential insights inaccessible through conventional written scholarship alone. He states:

It is easy for academic research (including and especially research on mass media) to fall into the trap of reifying traditional divisions between 'theory' and 'practice', between criticism/analysis and craft, even as we concomitantly champion the idea that 'practice' is always constituted by implicit or explicit theories of political, social and cultural reality.
(Jackson, 2014).

The theory of process in filmmaking emphasises the importance of understanding and analysing the various stages and elements involved in the creation of a film. It delves into the intricate processes of pre-production, production, and post-production, highlighting the significance of each phase in shaping the final product. This theory recognises that filmmaking

is a collaborative art form, requiring the coordination and expertise of multiple individuals and departments. It emphasises the need for careful planning, effective communication, and meticulous execution to achieve the desired artistic vision. By studying the process of my filmmaking, other scholars and practitioners will be able to gain insights into the technical, creative, research methodologies, and logistical aspects of the work, enabling them to analyse and appreciate films from a particular informed perspective.

By drawing on established film theories, this thesis articulates the artistic choices and intentions behind my films while critically examining their socio-cultural implications. This inquiry is further developed through sustained academic engagement, including participation in conferences, symposia, and workshops where the films are presented and discussed with scholars and practitioners. These encounters provide critical feedback that informs the ongoing refinement of both the creative work and its theoretical contextualisation.

Through an integrated process of literature review, theoretical analysis, and scholarly exchange, the research situates the films within a rigorous academic framework. The thesis demonstrates how analysis of process operates not merely as documentation of production but as a critical methodology through which filmmaking generates, tests, and evaluates new knowledge in contemporary film practice.

This thesis is structured around three case studies, each film selected for its distinct contribution to contemporary cinema and its alignment with my research aims. These films exemplify my use of autoethnographic methodologies, narrative experimentation, and stylistic innovation, and together they demonstrate how practice-led inquiry can both generate and test new knowledge within film studies.

Chapter 1: *More Than Time* (2020) is an eight-minute film that employs a poetic documentary approach that aligns closely with my research methodologies in a practice by publication doctoral thesis. This film utilises static photographs to construct a dynamic narrative, serving as a poignant exploration of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on memory and place. Its recognition at 22 international film festivals and the acquisition of four awards underscores its artistic and conceptual significance internationally.

Set against the backdrop of a lockdown in Liverpool, the film integrates anonymous messages regarding missing and memory from an answering machine. These ethereal voices overlay still

images of an eerily deserted city, transforming the absence of people into a contemplative space where memory permeates the urban landscape. My innovative use of an iPhone to capture this paused environment reflects a methodological commitment to accessibility and immediacy in visual storytelling.

Informed by Roland Barthes' theory of punctum from *Camera Lucida* (1973), the film seeks to evoke emotional and subjective responses through specific photographic details. This theoretical framework aligns with my own research, which interrogates how visual media can articulate personal and collective grief. By employing voice as an anchorage, the film provides contextual grounding that enhances viewers' interpretative engagement with the visual experience.

More Than Time (2020) serves not merely as a reflection on the constraints of the pandemic but as a tribute to a moment in time, highlighting the potential of film to evoke nostalgia and emotional resonance. This aligns with my practice-led methodologies, which emphasise the transformative power of visual narratives in exploring themes of loss, memory, and identity. Through its poetic lens, the film advances a critical dialogue on the intersection of personal experience and collective memory, making it a relevant case study within my doctoral research.

More Than Time (2020)

<https://directors.uk.com/news/more-than-time-carl-hunter>

Chapter 2: *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) serves as a ninety-minute feature film case study within my practice by Published Work, doctoral research, employing methodologies aligned with its thematic and stylistic approach. The film serves as a linguistic playground, where an abundance of evocative language exists, yet effective communication remains frustratingly out of reach, akin to the challenges faced by the Mellor family. Central to my exploration is the theme of communication breakdown, exemplified by Alan Mellor's (portrayed by Bill Nighy) profound grief stemming from the loss of both his wife and son, Michael, who vanished a decade ago following a disagreement over a word in a family game of Scrabble.

The *Los Angeles Times*' exceptional review of the ninety-minute film summarised the plot:

In *Sometimes Always Never*, a witty, idiosyncratic British film written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by Carl Hunter, Bill Nighy plays Alan Mellor, a widowed tailor

chasing the shadow of a son who stormed out of a family Scrabble game years earlier and was never heard from again.
(Crust, 2020).

The stylised, idiosyncratic, and surreal qualities of the film mirror my own research methodologies, particularly during the preproduction phase. I investigate various linguistic elements and their implications for communication, resulting in the creation of a cinematic environment rich with beautiful words that paradoxically underscore the Mellor family's inability to connect. This exploration highlights my focus on the intricacies of language and its impact on interpersonal relationships.

The narrative structure and visual choices of the film reflect my commitment to unconventional storytelling techniques. By utilising scrapbooks, I document and examine visual ideas that inform my creative process. This method allows for experimentation, ultimately leading to the film's striking visuals and surreal atmosphere, which embody the complexities of the themes I seek to convey.

The stylistic inspiration, influenced by Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda, particularly his use of long shots and static cinematography, aligns with my research focus on the relationship between visual aesthetics and narrative investigation. Static shots create diorama compositions while highlighting emotional stillness and isolation. This aligns with my aim to explore how such visual strategies evoke contemplative engagement with the characters' internal struggles.

The use of scrapbooks in the film mirrors my research methodology. Scrapbooks serve as a means of documenting and exploring visual ideas, allowing for experimentation and the development of unique visual styles. The stylised visuals and surreal elements in the film can be attributed to the utilisation of visual diaries, which also aligns with my research approach of employing visual documentation to inform the creative process.

While *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) undeniably possesses a distinct British identity through its writer, director, and cast, it transcends its national context, evoking a sense of universality akin to the works of international filmmakers like Aki Kaurismäki. Kaurismäki's belief in crafting optimistic narratives amidst a pessimistic worldview resonates with my thematic approach, reinforcing my exploration of hope and disconnection within the human experience. This film explores the importance of cinema as a medium through which British narratives are articulated and disseminated, influencing both domestic and international perceptions of

British culture. In this thesis, the term "Britishness on screen" encompasses prevalent, clichéd portrayals of the working class, often characterised by anti-working-class propaganda.

Representations of British working-class life in popular film and television have frequently relied on stylised and sensationalised modes that privilege drama, dysfunction, or comedic pathos over social and emotional complexity. Programmes such as *Shameless* (UK, 2004–2013) construct exaggerated portrayals of unruly and morally compromised families, while *The Full Monty* (1997) transforms economic hardship and masculine crisis into a commercially palatable, feel-good narrative. Similarly, *Rise of the Footsoldier* (2007) frames working-class communities through a spectacle of crime and violence. In contrast, the films examined in this thesis deliberately resist these dominant tropes. By foregrounding nuance, interiority, and lived experience, my practice seeks to articulate forms of Britishness grounded in memory, place, and everyday ritual, offering an alternative cinematic language that challenges reductive and commodified representations of working-class identity. *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) endeavours to subvert these entrenched cinematic tropes by employing a distinctive juxtaposition of content and form.

My collaboration with production designers and cinematographers aims to create a three-dimensional environment reflective of American photographer Gregory Crewdson's aesthetic, enriching the film's visual language. This integration of distinctive production aesthetics underscores the alignment of my research methodologies with the film's artistic vision, reinforcing the intricate relationship between form and content in my practice.

Chapter 3: *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017) is an eight-minute film that addresses adaptation theory, the processes and implications of transforming one medium into another, particularly how thematic and narrative elements are reinterpreted to suit different forms of expression. Lyrics from The Beatles' song *A Day In The Life* (1967) served as an inspiration for the short film *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017).

In the summer of 2017, I engaged with a project that involved a reinterpretation of tracks from The Beatles' iconic album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). This endeavour culminated in the short film *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), which I directed and was written by Frank Cottrell Boyce, with the intention of exploring contemporary issues through a lens inspired by Paul McCartney's reflections on youthful experiences in Liverpool. The film presents a narrative centred on a young carer, Ellie (played by Paisely Reid), who is employed to look after an elderly man, Arthur (played by Tom O'Connor), suffering from dementia. Ellie's

daily routine, characterised by her reliance on public transport, serves as a metaphor for her cyclical entrapment, juxtaposed against her client's perceived freedom despite his physical confinement.

The film's aesthetic choices, shot in black and white with intercut colour photographs, draw inspiration from the work of urban American photographer Saul Leiter. This stylistic approach allows me to reimagine the stark urban landscape as vibrant and impressionistic, transforming the mundane into the extraordinary. Through this visual strategy, I emphasise the poetic nature of imagination and highlight the potential for beauty in ordinary surroundings, effectively bridging the transition from the monochrome reality of 1960s Britain to the vibrant realm of psychedelia.

In shaping *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), I was influenced by Tom Wood's photography, particularly his series *All Zones Off Peak* (1998) and *Bus Odyssey* (2001). Wood's adeptness at capturing social realism within the public transport environment provides a foundational framework for my film. The bus acts as a narrative vessel that encapsulates both the physical and emotional journeys of its passengers. By employing non-actors to portray bus commuters, I reinforce the film's realism and immediacy, paralleling Wood's emphasis on authenticity in everyday life.

This methodological approach aligns with the aims of my practice by Published Work, as it foregrounds a commitment to social authenticity while simultaneously exploring thematic concerns of mobility, freedom, and the human condition. The integration of candid portrayals of bus passengers enriches the narrative and serves as a critical commentary on contemporary societal dynamics. Through this film, I aim to contribute to an ongoing dialogue about the intersection of art, social realism, and the lived experiences of individuals navigating the complexities of urban life.

The three films collectively reflect my exploration of memory, communication, and societal themes through innovative visual storytelling, making them integral to my doctoral research.

A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4xl_Xeowdo

Literature Review and Methodology

Idiosyncratic filmmaking and poetic documentary are two distinct approaches that have emerged within the realm of cinema. These filmmaking styles push the boundaries of traditional documentary conventions, offering a unique perspective on reality through unconventional storytelling techniques. This literature review explores the concepts and characteristics of idiosyncratic filmmaking and poetic documentary, highlighting key works and critical perspectives in the field.

Idiosyncratic filmmaking refers to a highly personal and subjective approach to cinema, where the director's individual artistic vision takes centre stage. This style often incorporates experimental techniques, unconventional narratives, and a distinct authorial voice. As film theorist Laura Mulvey (2009) summarises, 'idiosyncratic filmmakers often create their own unique visual and narrative grammar, defying traditional norms and inviting audiences to experience cinema in new and unexpected ways' (Mulvey, 2009). This directorial approach aligns with the practice of other idiosyncratic filmmakers who merge narrative storytelling with poetic imagery. This method allows for a more layered exploration of the human condition than conventional narrative cinema, which typically prioritises linear plot development and explicit psychological motivation. Rather than directing the spectator toward a singular interpretation, idiosyncratic filmmaking foregrounds visual metaphor, stillness, and ambiguity, cultivating affective resonance and enabling themes of alienation, connection, and the beauty of the mundane to emerge with greater subtlety and depth. The deliberate pacing and minimalistic dialogue serve to emphasize the visual storytelling, allowing the audience to savour moments of stillness and introspection that might otherwise be overlooked in more conventional narratives.

Distinguished examples of idiosyncratic filmmakers include Wes Anderson, Mark Jenkin, Terence Davies, Nia DaCosta, Andrei Tarkovsky, Agnès Varda, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Hirokazu Kore-eda, and Aki Kaurismäki. The lens through which Kaurismäki observes Finland is poetic. His lack of camera moves and long takes bring a contemplative and painterly approach to his films. His stylistic decisions recall the aesthetics of European poetic realism and art cinema, privileging stillness, duration, and the quiet observation of everyday life, encouraging the action to take place in front of the camera. He merges narrative storytelling with poetic imagery, creating a contemplative cinematic experience, that collectively evoke a profound

sense of existential reflection and an appreciation for the beauty in the mundane aspects of Finnish life. As film theorist Andrew Nestigen (2004) observes, Kaurismäki's attitude is that of 'a cinephile connoisseur who takes his viewers by the hand and shows them through the realm of filmmaking, 'Remember this! Cinema once had more to offer than talking heads' (Nestigen, 2004)

Kaurismäki's films offer a unique blend of melancholy and hope, exploring the human condition with a touch of irony and wit. The optimism in his storytelling is transferred to the screen using a poetic approach and minimalist storytelling. He often uses sparse dialogue and understated performances to convey emotions and tell his stories. As Sanna Pedan (2017) states, 'Kaurismäki's minimalist style and use of long takes create a sense of stillness and contemplation, allowing the audience to reflect on the characters' emotions and the underlying social issues' (Pendán, 2017).

In the cinematic history of representing Liverpool and working-class life, Terence Davies occupies a unique and influential position. His films, such as *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992), provide lyrical, deeply personal portraits of post-war Liverpool, capturing the textures of domestic life, the intimacy of family, and the constraints imposed by social and cultural environments. Davies' meticulous attention to memory, atmosphere, and emotional nuance resonates with my own focus on memory, identity, and social representation. His use of music, voiceover, and carefully composed imagery to evoke subjective experience has informed my understanding of the expressive potential of cinematic form, particularly in relation to portraying the complexities of working-class communities. Like Davies, I am attentive to the interplay between personal memory and broader social context, exploring how films can convey both intimate and collective experiences.

Where our approaches converge is in the poetic rendering of place and the subtle interplay of silence and sound, stillness and movement, to evoke emotional resonance. However, my research expands these concerns through autoethnographic methodologies and stylistic experimentation, incorporating long takes, static composition, and innovative documentary and narrative techniques to foreground subjectivity and lived experience. While Davies' work is distinctly British in its temporal and cultural framing, my practice engages with international filmmakers, such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Aki Kaurismäki, and the photographic influences of Gregory Crewdson and Saul Leiter, to explore formal and thematic possibilities beyond the

British realist tradition. This dialogue with non-British aesthetics allows me to interrogate universal themes of communication, memory, and human connection while maintaining the specificity of Liverpool as a site of cultural and historical significance. In doing so, my work situates itself within a global cinematic discourse, acknowledging Davies' foundational contributions while extending the representational and stylistic potential of films rooted in working-class life.

My filmmaking practice can be productively compared to that of film director, Mark Jenkin particularly in, *Bait* (2019) *Enys Men* (2022) through a shared engagement with strong regional identity, the use of stylised analogue aesthetics, and a poetic approach to representing British working-class culture. While Jenkin's work is rooted in Cornwall, my own films emerge from Merseyside and Northern England, with both practices employing heightened cinematic form to reframe local experience through texture, memory, and cultural specificity. He states in *The Observer*:

My film work is always about hireth, he says. It's a Cornish word, roughly translated as a longing for home. It could mean a house, but it could mean a person. It could mean a time, right? It could just be a feeling. Anything can be hireth.
(Gold, 2026).

As a musician, my approach to filmmaking is profoundly informed by principles of musical composition, collaboration, and melody. I perceive significant parallels between the two disciplines, particularly in the ways pace, tone, and rhythm shape the audience's experience. Film, like music, relies on the careful juxtaposition of discrete elements to generate meaning. As Michael Koresky observes in Terence Davies (*Contemporary Film Directors* 2014), Davies himself asserts that 'film is closest of all to music. Notes and chords on their own don't mean anything. They only mean something when you juxtapose them with something else' (Koresky, 2014). This perspective resonates with my practice-led research, wherein I conceive cinematic sequences as compositional arrangements, integrating visual, auditory, and narrative motifs in a manner analogous to musical structuring. By approaching film through this lens, I aim to create works in which temporal rhythm, tonal modulation, and thematic harmonies contribute collectively to the emotional and intellectual resonance of the viewer's experience.

This approach enables a critical conversation between local specificity and international cinematic practice, offering a perspective that both honours and diverges from the heritage

established by Davies, contributing new insights into the evolving portrayal of working-class communities on screen.

Jean-Pierre Jeunet is a French filmmaker known for his idiosyncratic and visually stunning films, such as *Amélie* (2001). He is widely recognised for its idiosyncratic formal and aesthetic sensibilities, exemplifying a singular authorial voice within contemporary cinema. His films are distinguished by meticulous attention to visual composition, an imaginative integration of mise-en-scène and colour, and a narrative impulse that foregrounds whimsy and associative logic over conventional realist causality. Jeunet's work invites sustained audience engagement by structuring cinematic worlds that are at once highly stylised and affectively rich, prompting repeated viewings in order to apprehend their layered visual and thematic complexity. Such distinctiveness has positioned him as a director whose practice challenges normative categories of narrative cinema, enabling a hybridised cinematic experience that balances emotional resonance, formal playfulness, and genre elision.

As a professor of cinema and culture observes, Jeunet's approach is characterised by 'the high degree of advance preparation, the emphasis on visual style, [and] the obvious influence of advertising and music video aesthetics,' elements that reflect his 'loose affiliation with the films and filmmakers of the *cinéma du look*', a loosely defined French cinematic movement emerging in the 1980s that privileged style and spectacle as expressive devices (Ezra, 2008). This association underscores how Jeunet's stylistic strategies both resonate with and diverge from broader auteurist practices, situating his films within a lineage of directors for whom visual innovation and idiosyncrasy are central to creative authorship rather than subordinate to traditional narrative imperatives. Like Kaurismäki, distinctive performances by actors play a crucial role in bringing Jeunet's idiosyncratic vision to life. The performances in his films contribute to the overall charm and enchantment that define his unique cinematic style.

Maborosi (1995), directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda, is a critically acclaimed film that showcases the director's idiosyncratic style. The influence of Kore-eda's visual symbolism in *Maborosi* was vital in the preproduction and planning stages of my film, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019). Kore-eda's use of long takes, minimalistic storytelling, and emphasis on visual motifs and symbolism to convey characters' emotions and underlying themes served as a significant source of inspiration. Film scholar Donald Richie (2001) asserts that 'Kore-eda's visual

symbolism adds depth and layers of meaning to the narrative, allowing the audience to interpret the film on multiple levels'. (Richie, 2001)

By incorporating these symbolic elements, Kore-eda enhances the poetic and contemplative nature of the film. Similarly, my film, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), resists using close-ups, a technique also employed by Kore-eda in *Maborosi* (1995). This departure from traditional film grammar breaks away from capturing intimate facial expressions and emotions, creating a sense of distance and detachment. This stylistic choice encourages the audience to focus on the broader context, the environment, and the interactions between characters. This approach also adds a layer of mystery and ambiguity to the storytelling, leaving room for interpretation. By incorporating long takes and avoiding close-ups, both films create a sense of distance and detachment, allowing viewers to observe characters from an objective standpoint. This technique creates a sense of dissonance and enhances the poetic and contemplative nature of the films while also adding depth and layers of meaning to the narratives.

Poetic documentary combines elements of documentary filmmaking with poetic aesthetics, producing an evocative and lyrical portrayal of reality. This approach employs metaphorical imagery, rhythmic editing, and a subjective exploration of its subjects, privileging mood, tone, and affect over linear narrative or factual exposition. As Bill Nichols (2017) observes, the poetic mode of documentary emphasises visual associations and rhythm rather than conventional argument or causal storytelling, while Michael Renov (1993) highlights documentary as an expressive and aesthetic practice that shapes meaning through form, metaphor, and emotional resonance. Within this tradition, filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Joris Ivens, Maya Deren, and Werner Herzog have expanded documentary form through poetic and philosophical inquiry.

Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) stands as a seminal example of poetic documentary and essayistic filmmaking. The film invites the viewer on a philosophical exploration of memory, time, and the nature of human existence through a unique fusion of documentary footage, personal reflection, and fictional elements. Rejecting traditional narrative structures, *Sans Soleil* constructs meaning through associative montage and subjective voice, offering a meditation on the complexities of human experience. As film theorist Laura Rascaroli states, 'Chris Marker's poetic documentaries challenge traditional notions of time, space, and

narrative, inviting viewers into a realm of contemplation and reflection' (Rascaroli, 2009). Marker's work exemplifies how poetic documentary transforms documentary material into a cinema of thought, where reflection and affect take precedence over explanation.

Similarly, Joris Ivens' contribution to poetic documentary demonstrates how everyday phenomena can be rendered lyrical through cinematic form. Throughout his career, Ivens blended documentary realism with poetic and rhythmic storytelling techniques, often engaging social and political themes through a visually expressive lens. His short film *Rain* (1929) captures the impact of rainfall on urban landscapes and human activity, transforming a seemingly mundane subject into a poetic meditation on nature and human presence. Through carefully composed cinematography and rhythmic editing, Ivens foregrounds sensory experience rather than narrative progression. The absence of a conventional storyline allows the film's visual and auditory elements to generate meaning through pattern, movement, and duration, creating an immersive and contemplative viewing experience.

Together, the works of Marker and Ivens illustrate how poetic documentary extends beyond literal representation to cultivate layered, affective meanings. By merging documentary realism with poetic expression, the genre enables a reflective engagement with lived reality, offering viewers an encounter with the world shaped as much by emotion and perception as by observation and record.

The concept of making the mundane seem exotic is evident in my work. It refers to the practice of transforming ordinary or everyday objects, places, or experiences into something extraordinary or unfamiliar. This process involves shifting perspectives, challenging preconceived notions, and uncovering hidden meanings within the seemingly banal. Roland Barthes in his seminal work *Mythologies* (1973) examines how everyday objects and cultural phenomena are imbued with symbolic meanings that shape our understanding of the world. He argues that by deconstructing these myths and revealing their underlying ideologies, we can challenge the dominant narratives and make the familiar appear strange. Barthes states, 'the function of the myth is to empty reality: it is a kind of neutralising system which allows the signified to be forgotten and makes the signifier appear natural'. (Barthes, 1973)

The author Alexandru Vlad (2020) states that 'certain works of art or mundane objects are transformed into other artistic products in a new physical or conceptual form. The rule of

imitation is often described as 'understood as involving not only copying but also creative interpretation' (Vlad, 2020)

This transformative perspective aligns with the principles found in Zen philosophy and Buddhism, particularly as articulated in *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1988) by Eugen Herrigel. Herrigel emphasises the importance of mindfulness and being fully present in the moment, allowing the practitioner to transcend the ordinary and discover beauty in the mundane. By challenging established hierarchies, uncovering hidden meanings, and disrupting dominant narratives, my work, in the context of the work of other filmmakers, scholars, and artists, aims to transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. Whether through deconstructing myths, examining cultural boundaries, or recontextualising everyday objects, my practice of making the mundane seem exotic encourages critical engagement with the world and invites us to see the familiar in new and unexpected ways.

The exploration of temporality in cinematic narratives has attracted significant attention within philosophical discourse, particularly in relation to the works of Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger. My films endeavour to encapsulate the complexity of time as both suspended and transcendent, aligning themselves with Bergsonian notions of duration and Heideggerian concepts of "being-in-the-world." This intricate temporal landscape enriches the narrative, inviting viewers to engage with the fluidity and depth of temporal existence. A pivotal technique employed to achieve this effect is the utilisation of long takes, which serve to evoke a profound sense of time's passage.

In his article, 'La durée': A philosophical idea that explains why time feels so slow.' for *The Independent*, Matyáš Moravec (2020) explains that French philosopher Henri Bergson argued that:

...time has two faces. The first face of time is 'objective time': the time of watches, calendars, and train timetables. The second, la durée ('duration'), is 'lived time,' the time of our inner subjective experience... For Bergson, the 'speed' of la durée is also connected to human agency, which is always influenced by subjective and specific memories of the past and shaped by anticipation of the future.
(Moravec, 2020).

Bergson posits that the 'speed' of la durée is inherently linked to human agency, shaped by individual memories and anticipations. This duality of time underscores the intricate relationship between temporal perception and human consciousness.

Tarkovsky asserts that his cinematic approach aims to convey a palpable sense of time's passage, the loss of time, and the interconnectedness of distinct temporal moments, arguing that cinema is uniquely able to sculpt time through duration and rhythm (Tarkovsky, 1989). This perspective aligns with Bergson's concept of duration, providing a comparative framework through which to understand Tarkovsky's aesthetic choices.

Danato Totaro's examination of Tarkovsky's film aesthetics in their paper, 'Time and the Film Aesthetics of Andrei Tarkovsky' (1992) highlights the insights of scholars such as Erwin Panofsky and Arnold Hauser, who argue that:

...film is the quintessential time-space art because time and space acquire qualities of the other. Through montage time loses its irreversibility, it is spatialized. Through the moving camera space loses its static, homogeneous quality, it is temporalized (as in Cubist painting).
(Totaro, 1992).

Cubist painting deconstructs the traditional representation of time and space by presenting multiple perspectives within a single frame, allowing viewers to experience different moments simultaneously. Similarly, film montage disrupts linear time by juxtaposing disparate temporal moments, creating a dynamic interplay between the two dimensions that mirrors the multifaceted approach of Cubism.

The long take emerges as a fundamental element of Tarkovsky's cinematic language, enabling him to imprint a sense of time within each frame. This notion of imprinting time is central to Tarkovsky's aesthetics, encapsulated in what he terms 'rhythm.' Unlike conventional editing techniques that impose a calculated structure onto the filmic narrative, Tarkovsky's rhythm is born from an intrinsic understanding of time. He refers to this phenomenon as 'time-thrust' or 'time-pressure,' which flows naturally through a shot, allowing the viewer to experience the movement of time in its flux and quality. He states: 'The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and the rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces but by the pressure of the time that runs through them' (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 117). The incorporation of long takes not only enhances the visual storytelling but also serves as a conduit for the life-processes of nature, which Tarkovsky meticulously records in his shots. This approach reinforces the interconnectedness of memory and temporality, inviting the audience to reflect on their own experiences of time and existence. In his book *Sculpting In Time* (1989) For Tarkovsky, the long take enables cinema to capture duration as a lived

experience rather than as a sequence of events. He argues that a film becomes meaningful when it is "faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame" (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 117), thereby allowing the spectator to experience time as a continuous and unfolding presence.

My films aspire to resonate with these philosophical inquiries, offering a contemplative space where the complexities of time and being can be explored and appreciated. Through this artistic endeavour, I aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the nature of temporality and human experience within the cinematic medium.

Having spent over three decades as a bass player in the indie pop band, *The Farm*, I have come to appreciate the intricate dynamics of collaborative creativity. Within a band, each member contributes distinct musical voices shaped by their individual abilities and the cultural knowledge they have assimilated. This collective endeavour underscores the principle that creative production emerges from interaction rather than individual authorship alone. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi argues in his systems model of creativity, innovation arises through the relationship between the individual, the domain of cultural knowledge, and the social field that validates and shapes creative work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Similarly, psychologist, Keith Sawyer in his book, *Group genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration* he emphasises that collaborative practices, particularly in music and performance, operate through improvisational exchange, where meaning and form are co-constructed in real time (Sawyer, 2007). Such insights have proven invaluable as I transitioned from musician to film director, where the principles of distributed authorship and collective problem-solving remain central to the creative process.

The process of filmmaking mirrors that of producing an album; both require the assembly of like-minded individuals who share a vision. As a director, I have recognised that my role resembles that of an orchestra conductor, necessitating the ability to listen attentively and allocate tasks effectively. This involves harnessing the diverse talents of the cast and crew, ensuring that each contribution aligns with the overarching artistic goal. The successful realisation of a film relies on this collaboration, where varied skill sets coalesce to create a cohesive narrative. My experiences in music have profoundly informed my approach to filmmaking, highlighting the importance of collective creativity in both domains.

In the production of *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), I employed a scrapbook as a repository for images that evoked specific emotions and stylistic elements, integrating this practice into a theoretically informed methodology. This scrapbook was not merely a collection of visuals; it was a dynamic tool that provoked intrigue and stimulated inquiry, guiding the overall aesthetic and tone of the film.

The act of curating images for the scrapbook required extensive research and reflection, aligning with the principles of practice-led research, which emphasises the interrelation between creative practice and theoretical inquiry. In her paper, 'Practice Based Research', Linda Candy states that 'in the visual arts, the emphasis is on creative process and the works that are generated from that process: the artefact plays a vital part in the new understandings about practice that arise' (Candy, 2006). By selecting images that encapsulated the desired mood and style, I was able to engage in a process of visual literacy that informed the narrative structure and thematic depth of the film. This methodological approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of visual language, facilitating a deeper understanding of how imagery can shape audience perception.

Incorporating the scrapbook into meetings and on-set interactions proved invaluable for effective communication with the crew and cast. It ensured a shared understanding of the intended visual language, thereby aligning all stakeholders with my artistic vision. The scrapbook emerged as a pivotal tool in developing a cohesive visual approach, which was particularly essential given the film's stylised and idiosyncratic nature. Through this collaborative method, I was able to establish a common visual vocabulary, enhancing the overall creative process. The scrapbook became a space for both reflection and aspiration, allowing me to navigate the complexities of visual storytelling while envisioning future possibilities. This duality highlights the scrapbook's role in facilitating a dialogue between past influences and future aspirations, informing the filmmaking process.

Photography also played a critical role in this research methodology, serving as both a practical reference tool and a catalyst for imaginative exploration. My appreciation for the aesthetics of Polaroid photography, characterised by its unique reinterpretation of reality and instant nostalgia, significantly influenced my creative vision. The distinctive qualities of Polaroid film informed the visual style of *Sometimes Always Never*, as the photographs I captured of various locations imbued them with a dreamlike and nostalgic essence. This aesthetic approach

prompted me to perceive familiar places through a transformative lens, enhancing the film's thematic resonance.

Polaroid photography within this thesis is understood not solely as image-making but as an engagement with what contemporary photography studies describe as 'photo-objects' photographs that possess material, tactile, and temporal presence as well as visual meaning. This growing branch of scholarship foregrounds the photograph as a physical artefact embedded in everyday practice rather than a purely representational image. Drawing on Edwards' conception of the photograph as a bodily and experiential object, my use of Polaroid photography in pre-production of *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) operates as both visual reference and material prompt. Edwards states that, 'the photograph has always existed, not merely as an image but in relation to the human body, tactile in experienced time, [an] object functioning within everyday practice' (Edwards, 1998, pp.312-329). These photo-objects function as mnemonic devices that activate memory, nostalgia, and duration, shaping the film's aesthetic language and reinforcing my practice-led methodology in which material processes generate conceptual and narrative insight. The research phase of the project involved a deliberate engagement with Polaroid imagery, allowing me to explore its potential to evoke a sense of vintage allure while simultaneously recontextualising contemporary settings. This engagement aligns with academic discourse surrounding practice-led research.

Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean explain that: '

Practice-led research is a conceptual framework that allows a researcher to incorporate their creative practice, creative methods and creative output into the research design and as a part of the research output [...] (It is) an approach that incorporates creative practices into the research process, legitimises the knowledge they reveal and endorses the methodologies, methods and research tools that are characteristic of that discipline.' (Smith, & Dean, 2009).

By integrating these visual methodologies, I was able to create films that not only reflect my artistic vision but also engage with broader conversations about the nature of visual storytelling and the role of imagery in shaping emotional and narrative experiences.

The integration of scrapbook methodologies and Polaroid photography into my filmmaking practice underscores the significance of research as a foundational element in creative endeavours. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of visual language and its impact

on narrative, contributing to the ongoing discourse surrounding practice-led research in the arts.

Photographer Tom Wood's influence is evident in the photographs of *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017) bus passengers, as his acclaimed series *All Zones Off Peak* (1998) and *Bus Odyssey* (2001) offer a framework for capturing the essence of everyday life within public transport. Wood's adeptness at documenting social realism through candid black-and-white photography informs the composition and thematic focus of the portraits of passengers on Ellie's bus journey. Wood's photographs emphasise the shared experiences of individuals as they navigate the urban landscape, transforming the bus into a microcosm of society. In *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017) I have intentionally utilised non-actors to create the roles of bus passengers. This methodological choice reinforces the sense of realism and immediacy in the portrayal of daily commuters. Wood's influence plays a central role in my pre-production methodology, informing the conceptual and practical dimensions of my research process. By analysing his techniques and thematic considerations, and the social dynamics of public transport passengers this methodology blends style with a commitment to social authenticity.

My methodological approach to representing the passengers on the bus in *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017) was influenced by my autoethnographic research as I took regular bus journeys along the route taken by Paul McCartney, which inspired the song's narrative. During these travels, I engaged in a detailed observational study of the bus passengers and the dynamic street views as the vehicle navigated the urban landscape. This immersive experience was instrumental in shaping my casting decisions, as it allowed me to observe human interaction within a specific socio-cultural context.

My observations drew parallels with the work of American photographer Saul Leiter, whose innovative use of condensation on windows transformed his photographic compositions into impressionistic vignettes. The blurred aesthetics created by the condensation on the windows echoed the aesthetic philosophies of Impressionist painters like Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who emphasised capturing fleeting moments and the subjective experience of perception. Leiter's work embodies a methodology of seeing that transcends mere documentation, inviting viewers to engage with the emotional resonance of transient moments.

Incorporating this visual methodology, I aligned my observations with John Berger's critical insights in *Ways of Seeing* (2008). Berger articulates the complex relationship between perception and understanding, suggesting that our knowledge often fails to encapsulate the richness of visual experience. Berger states 'The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight' (Berger 2008). This notion resonated with my bus journeys, where the interplay of condensation, movement, and urban life created a layered perception that transcended straightforward observation. My engagement with Leiter's photography not only enriched my understanding of visual storytelling but also informed my artistic vision, encouraging a deeper connection between the narrative and experience.

The understated performance can be particularly effective in conveying internal conflicts and psychological complexity within a character. As Robert Stam (2000) argues, 'the understated performance in film is a testament to the power of minimalism, allowing for a more introspective and authentic portrayal of a character's inner world' (Stam, 2000). In pre-production rehearsals, I therefore established a guiding formal principle that no close-ups would be employed. This constraint required actors to interrogate their characters' motivations and emotional states in depth, encouraging a reliance on embodied nuance rather than on camera proximity to communicate meaning. Although traditional close-ups are absent, intimacy is generated through the actors' intricate and restrained performances.

In contrast to the dominant conventions of contemporary British cinema, which often privilege expressive dialogue, psychological exposition, and close-up-driven emotional legibility associated with social-realist and television-derived acting traditions, this directing methodology foregrounds interiority and ambiguity. Consistent with Stam's theorisation of minimalism, the resulting performances produce subtler and more layered characterisations, deepening both the aesthetic and psychological complexity of the films. This approach requires a delicate balance between restraint and emotional depth, achieved through sustained collaboration with actors to cultivate a shared understanding of each character's inner world and to realise a more authentic and nuanced mode of screen performance. This directing style requires a delicate balance between restraint and emotional depth.

My approach to directing actors prioritises understated performances that convey internal conflicts and complexities within characters. In the pre-production phase, a fundamental principle was established: the deliberate avoidance of close-ups. This stylistic choice challenges actors to deeply interrogate their characters' motivations, encouraging a reliance on nuanced performance rather than the camera's framing to express emotional depth. Although the absence of traditional close-ups may seem to limit intimacy, this directorial technique achieves this essence through the actors' intricate portrayals, facilitating a more introspective exploration of their characters' thoughts and feelings. This directing style promotes nuanced and layered performances that contribute significantly to the overall aesthetic of the film.

This technique actively avoids result-oriented directing, which typically instructs actors to convey specific emotions, such as 'look happy.' Instead, the focus is placed on guiding actors to perform truthfully and organically by emphasising their characters' motivations, objectives, and reactions. This process-oriented approach empowers actors, allowing them to explore their performances creatively without feeling self-conscious or restricted by prescriptive emotional directions. By providing playable directions (action verbs) that address the 'why' of a scene, my approach encourages actors to discover their performances organically. Attention is paid to non-verbal cues, and I remain open to actors' ideas, promoting a collaborative environment where actors feel a sense of ownership over their performances and characters.

Engaging with various forms of cultural expression such as watching films, visiting art galleries, listening to music, attending theatre performances, and even taking photographs, is not a passive activity but a dynamic and intellectually stimulating endeavour. These experiences can be likened to a rigorous workout for the mind and spirit, encouraging cultural endurance and intellectual acuity. Each encounter with a film, photograph, painting, or musical composition contributes to the enrichment of our personal repository of knowledge and artistic appreciation, akin to a carefully curated mental and spiritual library that we continuously expand and maintain. The act of consuming cultural content serves as a form of research, with every piece of art or creative work contributing to the cultivation of our cultural literacy and aesthetic sensibilities. This internal library of experiences and influences is a valuable resource that we draw upon for inspiration and enlightenment.

My background in the visual arts, particularly in design and photography, significantly informs my strong visual approach to storytelling on screen. This foundation allows me to develop a collaborative working relationship with cinematographers, where I emphasise a distinct, minimalist visual style characterised by static shots and a deliberate absence of camera movement. I engage closely with my cinematographer, working together to establish a unique visual language and aesthetic. I want the cinematographer to see what I see.

To achieve this, I share a wealth of visual references in preproduction and production bringing scrapbooks to the set and taking my cinematographer to watch films and explore photographic exhibitions that have inspired my creative vision. This practice helps us cultivate a shared visual language, which serves as the foundation for our collaborative process throughout filming. I encourage a meditative approach to shooting, prioritising the exploration of pauses within takes rather than adhering to rapid cuts. This method allows for a deeper immersion in each scene. I prefer to view scenes through the monitor rather than adopting a theatrical perspective, which underscores the importance of shot composition alongside performance. For me, the framing of each shot is as crucial as the actors' performances, necessitating that my cinematographer possesses a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic. As our collaborative language and process evolve, we form a cohesive team, allowing my cinematographer to instinctively embody the distinct visual aesthetic we have developed together.

Chapter 1

Films Made from Still Photographs: A Cinematic Exploration of Time and Image

More Than Time (2020)

Director: Carl Hunter

Duration: 8 minutes

<https://directors.uk.com/news/more-than-time-carl-hunter>

This chapter explores the characteristics, significance, and artistic potential of films made from still photographs, highlighting key examples and critical perspectives, with specific reference to the poetic documentary *More Than Time* (2020). Films made from still photographs, also known as photo films or photo montages, offer a unique and insightful approach to storytelling, transforming static images into dynamic narratives. Through editing, sound design, and narration, these films breathe life into the captured moments, bridging the gap between photography and cinema.

More Than Time (2020) is an eight-minute poetic documentary directed by myself, Carl Hunter, that utilises still photographs to transform static images into a dynamic narrative, serving as a poetic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Set during the lockdown in Liverpool, the film incorporates anonymous messages about 'missing and memory' that were left on an answering machine. [Fig.1] These ethereal messages hover above still photographs of an empty Liverpool, creating a space where memory fills the streets of a once vibrant city instead of its inhabitants. This unique period presented an abandoned film set, devoid of people and the accompanying noise they generate. Equipped with an iPhone, I wandered through this paused city, capturing its frozen essence. The COVID-19 pandemic halted the world's movement, turning down the sociocultural volume and creating a cultural power cut in a living cinema. However, upon closer examination, the city is not truly a ghost town. The film's hopeful aspect lies in the city's resemblance to a set awaiting the commencement of a play. [Fig.2]

Drawing inspiration from Roland Barthes' reflections on his own bereavement and attempts to capture his mother's essence through photographs in his book *Camera Lucida* (1973), the film explores the theory of punctum. Punctum refers to a specific detail or element within a photograph that unexpectedly and personally affects the viewer, evoking an emotional or subjective response. In the midst of grieving the loss of people and freedom, I delve into this theory, seeking to evoke a similar emotional and subjective response. Voice is used as

anchorage, providing context and guiding the viewer's interpretation of a visual experience. In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes (2002) asserts that 'the photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see' (Barthes, 2002).

In the realm of cinema, the art of capturing moments and manipulating time is a quintessential aspect of storytelling. The interplay between motion and stillness, reality and illusion, creates a unique tapestry that filmmakers weave to engage and immerse audiences. The essence of cinema lies in its ability to transport viewers to different worlds, evoke emotions, and provoke contemplation on the human experience. In the narrative I present, the city of Liverpool serves as both a backdrop and a character in the story, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fabric of society and culture.

The film's reflection on the transformative effect of the pandemic on Liverpool and the creative response it inspired encapsulates the power of cinema as a medium of expression and introspection. Through the lens of a camera and the medium of digital photography, I navigated the deserted streets of Liverpool, capturing the essence of a city in stasis, waiting to resume its narrative. The juxtaposition of the bustling, vibrant Liverpool with the eerie stillness brought about by the pandemic highlights the temporal nature of human existence and the resilience of creativity in the face of adversity.

In the context of film theory, the film's approach to documenting the impact of the pandemic on Liverpool can be analysed through various theoretical frameworks. One such framework is the concept of 'cinema of the real' or 'documentary realism,' which emphasises the portrayal of reality and the exploration of truth through the medium of film. In this instance, the film constructs a narrative of loss and memory by integrating still photographs, voicemail messages, and layered soundscapes, negotiating the conventions of documentary realism while reframing them through the lens of poetic documentary to foreground subjectivity, temporality, and affective resonance. With reference to debates on cinema's relationship to time and reality, Siegfried Kracauer argues in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960) that photography and film redeem the material world by preserving it from disappearance and decay. André Bazin, however, contests aspects of this position, resisting what he sees as Kracauer's overly pessimistic conception of physical reality as merely "stubborn" matter awaiting redemption. As Angela Della Vacche explains in her analysis of Bazin's film theory, Bazin rejects the idea that photographic freezing of time serves primarily

to rescue a decaying reality, noting that “through photography, the freezing of time does not redeem a ‘stubborn,’ physical reality, hopelessly mired in decay the way Siegfried Kracauer would have it” (Della Vacche, 2012, p. 195). This distinction is crucial to understanding cinema not simply as an archival mechanism, but as a phenomenological encounter with time in which images actively shape perception rather than merely preserving the past.

The film contextualises my response to the pandemic within existing scholarly discussions on cinema, urban culture, and artistic expression. The following integrated version incorporates a literature review into the analysis.

My reflection on the cinematic nature of time and the illusion it creates resonates with phenomenological insights into subjective experience. Drawing from phenomenology, the text portrays the deserted Liverpool as a ‘ghost town,’ reflecting a shift in the personal encounter with the urban environment. This perspective underscores my heightened awareness of the city’s altered state and the subjective interpretation of its temporal and spatial dimensions.

This phenomenological engagement aligns with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s assertion in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) that perception is not a detached act of observation but an embodied, active mode of being in the world. Merleau-Ponty challenges traditional views of perception, whether purely intellectual (rationalism) or purely passive (empiricism) by arguing that we do not observe the world as detached spectators; rather, our body is the ‘vehicle of being in the world,’ through which we experience, interpret, and make sense of our surroundings. He states that, ‘Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 159-160). Within this framework, the deserted city becomes a site of lived experience rather than a neutral object of representation, transforming urban space into what may be understood as a ‘ghost town’ shaped by altered temporal and sensory conditions. This approach emphasises how meaning emerges through the filmmaker’s situated encounter with space, memory, and loss, rather than through objective documentation alone.

Existentialist themes of authenticity and individuality permeate my creative process, as isolation becomes a source of inspiration and introspection. The text hints at an existential journey through solitude, I navigate the disruptions of the pandemic to find meaning and creativity amidst desolation. This existential exploration mirrors the quest for authenticity and self-expression in the face of uncertainty and change.

From an aesthetic standpoint, the film's approach to capturing the stillness and transformation of Liverpool during the lockdown reflects a deep engagement with the philosophy of art and beauty. The text suggests a nuanced aesthetic sensibility that transcends mere representation, echoing the discussions by philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Martin Heidegger on the nature of aesthetic experience and the transformative power of art. Heidegger (1961) discussed the notion of living an 'authentic life' and how art should be unique expressions of authentic life experiences. He referred to this as *Dasein*, a German term meaning 'to be present, to exist.' Heidegger (1961) describes *Dasein* as 'laying bare the horizon for the interpretation of the meaning of being in general' (Heidegger, 1961).

The film's portrayal of time as simultaneously suspended and transcendent aligns with temporal philosophical inquiries into the nature of temporality and human experience. By weaving together past memories, present stillness, and future possibilities, the film evokes Bergsonian notions of duration and time, as well as Heideggerian concepts of "being-in-the-world." This temporal complexity adds layers of depth to the narrative, inviting viewers to contemplate the fluidity and richness of temporal existence in the midst of a pandemic-induced pause. During the pandemic, time felt like it was dragging; why did it feel so slow? This exploration of temporal perception underscores how subjective experience can be articulated not only through theory but also through creative practice, highlighting the capacity of art to render the nuances of lived time tangible and affective.

In the scholarly discourse, artists have discussed the role of aesthetics and creativity in times of isolation, emphasising the transformative potential of art in capturing the essence of solitude and reflection. Louise Bourgeois's large-scale sculptures, often situated in public spaces, reflect on a complex relationship with solitude. Her creative process, rooted in isolation, serves as a fertile ground for inspiration, allowing her to explore profound themes of memory, vulnerability, and the human condition, ultimately transforming private introspection into public dialogue. In the article 'Louise Bourgeois on Finding Inspiration in Solitude', author Alexxa Gotthardt (2019) states: 'After the tremendous effort you put in here, solitude, even prolonged solitude, can only be of very great benefit' (Gotthardt, 2019).

Integrating these scholarly perspectives into the analysis of the film's response to the pandemic in Liverpool provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the narrative's

engagement with philosophical concepts, artistic expression, and urban dynamics. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the interpretation of the film's creative process and deepens the exploration of the pandemic-induced pause as a catalyst for introspection and artistic reinterpretation.

Films made from still photographs utilise a range of techniques to animate and instil meaning into the static images. Still photographs can offer a powerful medium for storytelling, enabling filmmakers to explore historical events, personal narratives, and social issues. They evoke a sense of nostalgia, capturing moments frozen in time and reviving them with narrative, music, and sound design. These films possess the potential to evoke emotions, engage viewers, and spark critical reflections on the passage of time and the human experience.

One notable example of a film made from still photographs is *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker. This seminal work tells the story of a post-apocalyptic future through a sequence of black and white photographs. The film's innovative use of montage, voiceover narration, and sound design creates a haunting and immersive experience. Marker's exploration of memory, time, and love resonates deeply. It is an essay on man's need to remember. Patrick Ffrench (2015) describes Marker's aesthetic and narrative choice by stating that:

...the protagonist's memory is likened to a museum, 'un musée qui est peut-être celui de sa mémoire,' and this museum-effect is doubled by the stillness of the film, whose images are withdrawn from the illusion of continuous motion.
(Ffrench, 2015).

Another significant example is *News from Home* (1977) by Chantal Akerman. This film juxtaposes urban landscapes of New York City with letters from Akerman's mother in Belgium, creating a contemplative exploration of distance, longing, and connection. The combination of still images and spoken words invites viewers to reflect on the relationship between time and space. Auditory layering creates a complex interplay between urban life and familial longing, highlighting themes of absence and feminine subjectivity. One can find a similar approach in the work of Chantal Akerman and especially her film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, which she describes as 'a love film to my mother'. As Cerne asserts, 'what she then goes on to achieve brilliantly in her next film, *News from Home*, is a textual response for the Mother: for her own mother's letters which she rightly recognises are themselves 'love letters' (Cerne 2002, p. 246).

Shooting the film entirely on an iPhone and completing post-production online formed part of a practice-led exploration of how emerging technologies reshape creative process and cinematic expression. This DIY aesthetic, reminiscent of Sean Baker's *Tangerine* (2015), and Joe Swanberg's early films, emphasises the raw, unfiltered nature of the filmmaking process and the importance of authenticity and immediacy in storytelling.

The collaboration with composer Steve Grimes and sound designer Sam Auguste underscores the integral role of sound in shaping the emotional landscape of this film. Sound plays a crucial role in shaping the cinematic experience, contributing significantly to the construction of mood, atmosphere, and narrative meaning. Beyond its function as a supporting element to the image, sound operates as an expressive and interpretive component of film language, influencing how audiences perceive and engage with the screen. In this work, the sound design is employed to create a layered sonic collage composed of echoes, ambient textures, and auditory traces that evoke memory and temporal displacement. These sonic elements extend the visual narrative by suggesting histories, emotions, and experiences that are not always visible within the frame. Through the interplay of sound and image, the film develops a richer sensory environment that encourages audiences to engage with the cinematic space on both an emotional and experiential level. The resulting audiovisual relationship deepens the viewer's immersion, transforming the film into a multisensory encounter in which sound functions not merely as accompaniment but as an integral component of meaning-making and cinematic expression. As noted by film theorist Michel Chion: 'you cannot study a film's sound separately from its image and vice versa. In fact, their combination produces something entirely specific and novel' (Chion, 2016, p. 151).

The film serves as a means to reconnect with the familiar by reminding viewers of the past, which often becomes a refuge when feeling lost. It is not a film about boredom but rather a heartfelt tribute to a place and a time that was momentarily suspended. Through its poetic response, the film captures the essence of the pandemic experience and defrosts it with love.

The decision to simulate an interview as if it were recorded on an answering machine can be analysed using postmodern film theory, which aims to challenge traditional storytelling techniques and engage the audience in contemplating memory, identity, and the nature of storytelling. One key aspect of postmodernism is intertextuality, which refers to how texts reference and draw upon each other. In this case, the simulated answering machine recording

references a time when answering machines were commonly used, evoking nostalgia and connecting viewers to a specific time and place. This quote from Jean Baudrillard (1994) encapsulates the idea of intertextuality in postmodern cinema: 'The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth, it is the truth which conceals that there is none (Baudrillard, 1994).

The phenomenon of telephone answering machines exemplifies how communication can transform into a 'pseudo-dialogue,' as the caller's message constitutes a monologue that exists within a temporally and spatially stretched exchange between the absent parties. As Dingwall states in *'Telephone Answering Machine Messages: Dialogues or Monologues?'* (1995) states:

...since the owner of the machine and the caller do not interact directly, the message left by the caller can be seen to be, strictly speaking, a type of monologue... Telephone answering machines are a case in point. The hardware itself sets up a kind of exchange between caller and receiver although unlike in face-to-face interactions they are not co-present. The exchange therefore is not immediate, but 'temporally and spatially stretched' extended over time and space... leaving the messages on an answering machine as a kind of pseudo-dialogue.
(Dingwall, 1995).

Simulating an interview as an answering machine recording can be seen as a postmodern approach to storytelling that evokes nostalgia, blurs boundaries, and prompts the audience to question memory, identity, and personal narratives. As Hutcheon (1988) articulates, 'postmodernism is less a new way of making art than a new way of understanding what art is and why people make it' (Hutcheon, 1998). This technique reflects self-reflexivity, another characteristic of postmodern cinema that draws attention to the medium itself. By presenting the interview as messages left for oneself, I challenge traditional linear storytelling and blur the line between reality and fiction. Utilising the creative device of the simulated answering machine recording, I engage the audience in an exploration of memory, identity, and storytelling. This technique challenges traditional narrative structures and encourages viewers to reconsider their understanding of the relationship between past and present, self and other.

The exploration of films made from still photographs, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, reveals profound insights into the nature of time and memory as articulated by Henri Bergson's concept of *la durée*. This notion underscores the distinction between objective time and lived experience, illuminating how the pandemic has altered our perception of temporal reality. The still photographs in *More Than Time* (2020) serve not merely as static images but as vessels of memory, transforming into a dynamic narrative that encapsulates the

emotional weight of isolation and longing during a period of societal stasis. Through this artistic medium, I captured the essence of a city suspended in time, inviting viewers to engage with their own subjective experiences of absence and reflection.

The integration of Roland Barthes' theory of punctum described in *Camera Lucida: Thoughts on Photography*, further enriches this analysis, emphasising the personal and emotional resonance that still images evoke. Barthes' reflections on photography illuminate the intimate connection between the viewer and the captured moment, allowing for a deeper contemplation of identity and memory. The interplay of Bergsonian duration and Barthesian punctum within the framework of poetic documentary not only enhances the understanding of the artistic potential of still photographs but also offers a poignant commentary on the human experience amid the pandemic's transformative impact.

The next chapter explores my directorial vision as I explore the themes of communication and loss in the feature film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019). This film tells the story of the Mellor family, who grapple with the challenges of effective communication while navigating the profound grief over their son Michael, the Mellors' child, and his absence. Through a detailed analysis of key scenes, directorial choices, research methodologies, character dynamics, filmic techniques, and relevant film theory, the thesis examines how Michael's loss profoundly influences the family's interactions and their attempts to connect, particularly through the game of Scrabble. I reflect on my storytelling style and the film's optimistic tone, focusing on the creative process from script to screen. By employing a filmic lens, this chapter illustrates how my vision translates complex emotional landscapes into cinematic storytelling, highlighting the interplay between dialogue and visual composition to reveal the nuances of human relationships.

Chapter 2

From Script to Screen: The Directorial Journey of *Sometimes Always Never* (2019):

A Directorial Analysis.

Sometimes Always Never (2019)

Director: Carl Hunter

Duration: 90 minutes

DVD of the film is attached to this submission.

This chapter offers critical insights into my directorial vision concerning themes of communication and loss in the feature film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) [Fig. 3]. The film centres on the Mellor family, whose struggles with communication are shaped by unresolved grief following the disappearance of Alan Mellor's son, Michael. Through analysis of key scenes, directorial decisions, character relationships, filmic techniques, and relevant film theory, I examine how Michael's absence structures the family's interactions and their attempts at connection through the game of Scrabble. Drawing on principles of adaptation theory, the chapter considers how Frank Cottrell Boyce's short story and screenplay were reinterpreted through cinematic form, highlighting the creative transformation from literary source to screen text. This approach foregrounds the director's role in reshaping narrative, tone, and visual language in order to translate interior states of loss and memory into a distinct filmic expression.

I examine academic discourse surrounding filmmaking practice as a means to gain deeper insights into the art and process of filmmaking itself. By employing practice methodologies, I employ research that explores both the creation and analysis of this film, alongside a methodological framework and research contributions. This exploration provides a rare and personal insight into the intricacies of the directing process, revealing the relationship between theory and practice.

I examine the nuances of storytelling and character development, highlighting my idiosyncratic style and the film's optimistic tone. By discussing the creative process and the journey from script to screen, I provide an informed examination of how *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) intricately explores complex emotional landscapes and interpersonal dynamics. Employing a filmic lens, my analysis illustrates how my vision adeptly translates textual subtleties into cinematic storytelling, utilising visual and auditory elements to enhance

narrative depth. I underscore the interplay between dialogue and visual composition, revealing how the film's stylistic choices articulate the intricacies of human relationships.

The film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) entered production in 2017 under the production company Hurricane Films, based in Liverpool and led by producers Roy Boulter and Sol Papadopoulos. This positioning within the independent film realm, understood here not simply as 'independent of Hollywood' but as part of a specifically British tradition of autonomous, low-budget practice, allowed *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) a significant degree of creative freedom despite financial constraints. As Knudsen observes in *Dependency and Independence in British Independent Film* (2014), British independent cinema has historically negotiated tenuous support structures shaped by policy, regional practice, and cultural identity, rather than industrial scale or commercial imperatives. Within this context, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) exemplifies an ethos of experimentation that challenges conventional visual grammar and affirms independent filmmaking in the UK as a site of artistic risk and critical inquiry. This notion is encapsulated in a quote by Orson Welles, who stated, 'the absence of limitations is the enemy of art, (Jaglom, 1992).

The inquiry into whether British cinema possesses a unique visual aesthetic invites an exploration of 'Britishness,' which is inherently complex and multifaceted. This discourse involves examining various thematic and stylistic elements that define non British filmmakers. Notably, my intention was to incorporate visual styles reminiscent of auteurs such as Hiroshi Kore-eda and Aki Kaurismäki, who employed intimate character exploration, deadpan humour, long takes, and quaint nostalgia. The film highlights the interplay between distinct cultural identities and artistic influences. While *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) may evoke a sense of Britishness due to the cast, locations, writer, and director, it simultaneously transcends geographical boundaries, suggesting that British cinema can reflect influences reminiscent of the auteurs mentioned and ultimately contribute to its rich and diverse visual lexicon. This raises the question of the concept of 'Britishness'. The answer lies in the profound connection between cinema and national identity, particularly within the British context. The representation of British culture, values, and experiences in film plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the nation's identity. As Alan Lovell (2001) asserts, 'It often seems as if the cinema is the key tool for the construction of British national identity' (Lovell, 2001). This statement underscores the importance of cinema as a medium through which British narratives are articulated and disseminated, influencing both domestic and international

perceptions of British culture. Drawing inspiration from the aforementioned auteurs, the film challenges traditional representations, offering an exploration of identity and socio-economic dynamics, thereby contributing to a more complex understanding of Britishness in contemporary cinema.

By examining the representation of Britishness in film, scholars can gain insights into how filmmakers negotiate cultural identity and social issues, as well as how audiences engage with these narratives. The exploration of 'Britishness' in film is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital inquiry into the construction of cultural identity in contemporary society.

Part of my methodology, during the production of *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), I maintained a scrapbook that served as a repository of images evoking specific feelings and stylistic elements and was utilised as a specific theoretically informed methodology. These images were carefully curated to provoke intrigue and stimulate inquiry, guiding the overall aesthetic and tone of the film. Carrying this scrapbook to meetings and on-set interactions enabled effective communication with the crew and cast, ensuring a shared understanding of the intended visual language. The multipurpose method of scrapbooks posed the question: 'Are scrapbooks tools to preserve the past or to daydream about the future?' (Phillips, Miller, McQuarrie, 2014). [Fig.4]

The film's stylised and idiosyncratic nature necessitated a cohesive visual approach, underscoring the importance of aligning all stakeholders to my vision. The scrapbook emerged as a pivotal tool in this alignment, facilitating a shared visual vocabulary among the production team. Through the deliberate selection of images that encapsulated the desired mood and style, the scrapbook served as a conduit for conveying nuanced artistic concepts and encouraging a collaborative creative process.

Photography as a method of communication played a crucial role in the documentation process, serving both as a practical reference tool and a catalyst for imaginative exploration. A profound appreciation for the aesthetics of Polaroid photography, characterised by its unique reinterpretation of reality and instant nostalgia, underscored my creative vision and approach to visual storytelling. During the research phase, the aesthetics of Polaroid film exerted a discernible influence on the visual style of the film. The photographs captured of various locations not only evoked a sense of vintage allure but also imbued them with a

dreamlike and nostalgic essence, prompting me to perceive familiar places through a new and transformative lens. This perspective allowed me to re-engage with familiar locations through a renewed, research-informed lens. These visual and narrative strategies demonstrate my broader inquiry into how cinematic techniques mediate memory, communication, and emotional resonance in contemporary British film. [Fig.5]

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2002), Svetlana Boym makes an apt enigmatic remark about nostalgia's relation to cinema, which resonates with my methodology. She states that:

A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images, of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.
(Boym, 2002).

Collaborating with Frank Cottrell Boyce proved to be an enlightening creative endeavour, marked by the exchange of ideas, photo elicitation, and ekphrasis as a narrative tool. Photo elicitation is a methodological approach that integrates visual stimuli, such as photographs, into research and storytelling processes; this played a pivotal role in the creative exploration and narrative development. The utilisation of research photographs as vehicles for envisioning potential scenes, allowed the film's screenwriter to engage with images of a world yet to be created. This technique stimulates ideas and narratives, functioning as a form of ekphrasis. As Lavinia Hulea (2015) articulates in her journal article, 'Ekphrasis and Reversed Ekphrasis as Adaptation Processes', when adaptations transition from the 'telling mode', to the 'showing mode,'

...the insistence on imagination is assumed to be replaced by the attention given to ocular perception, and the symbolical and conventional signs of literature are superseded by the indexical and iconic visual signs.
(Hulea, 2015).

This resonated with my background as a designer of record sleeves. This convergence of photo elicitation, ekphrasis, and narrative framing enabled me to perceive each scene as a distinct narrative entity deserving of its own visual representation, akin to a song deserving of its single cover. Notably, both Polaroid and Instagram platforms capitalise on near square frames, mirroring the dimensions of record sleeves and underscoring the symbiotic relationship between visual mediums. The process of scrutinising research photographs through the lens of potential record covers allowed me to engage with ekphrasis and photo elicitation as a tool for developing storytelling and directorial inspiration.

In the realm of technological evolution and artistic emulation, the transition from Polaroid to Instagram symbolises the shift from analogue to digital mediums, bridging the gap between past and present. My use of photography draws on Susan Buck-Morss's (1991) analysis of technological advancement, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, in which she notes that:

...the forms taken by the new technologies... imitated precisely the old forms they were destined to overcome. Early photography mimicked painting. The first railroad cars were designed like stagecoaches, and the first electric light bulbs were shaped like gas flames.

(Buck-Morss, 1991).

Employing visual metaphors to convey the emotional narrative of a family ensnared in the past through grief, the deliberate choice of dated production design and back projections [Fig.6] in *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) serves as a poignant reminder of time's arrested progression for the characters. A common belief for Freud was that he 'felt that there had to be a place where what was unacceptable to the conscious mind was repressed and held, and from which the repressed emerged from time to time, in one form or another, back into consciousness' (Jacobs, 2003). Embracing a deliberate sense of visual nostalgia, I utilise Polaroid and Instagram as artistic tools to instil the narrative with a profound sense of temporal stasis and emotional resonance. This intentional fusion of analogue and digital aesthetics reflects the characters' frozen state.

Sometimes Always Never (2019) presents a narrative that unfolds in a linguistic realm characterised by an abundance of eloquent words but a deficiency in effective communication. The film addresses the theme of translating text and visionary pursuit by illustrating how the Mellor family's struggle with eloquent yet ineffective communication serves as a metaphor for their quest for connection and understanding, ultimately reflecting the transformative power of language in navigating personal loss and self-discovery. The Mellor family, central to the storyline, grapples with an inability to converse despite the necessity to do so. The protagonist, Alan Mellor, portrayed by Bill Nighy, finds himself ensnared in grief following the loss of his wife and eldest son, Michael, who vanished a decade earlier after a disagreement revolving around a word played during a game of Scrabble. This irony of discord arising from a game centred on words underscores the pivotal role of language in promoting dialogue and interpersonal connections. The film, an adaptation of Frank Cottrell Boyce's short story *Triple Word Score*, written in 2015 but published in 2018, explores a family of wordsmiths struggling with poor communication skills, utilising Scrabble as a means of finding connection. Despite

the apparent theme of loss, the narrative primarily revolves around a journey of self-discovery and connection, as opposed to merely finding the missing son, Michael. The film tactfully navigates the absence of Michael, which permeates the storyline and consistently draws the family's focus back to him. Through poignant scenes, such as Sue's tender moment with her son Jack, in his bedroom, highlighted later in this chapter, the palpable presence of Michael's absence is vividly portrayed, reinforcing his enduring influence on the family dynamics. The film's tone, optimistic rather than pessimistic, aligns it with the cinematic realms of filmmakers like Bill Forsyth and Aki Kaurismäki. The concept of 'quixotry,' a high scoring word in Scrabble meaning a wild vision, is interwoven into the narrative, symbolising visionary pursuits.

In the morgue scene, a private moment is depicted as Alan accompanies a mortician to a morgue to potentially identify his missing son Michael's body. Actor Bill Nighy delivers a poignant performance in portraying Alan's hesitance to enter the room and potentially conclude his search for his son. I faced a critical decision in how to approach filming this scene, as there was a temptation to visually follow Alan into the room and capture his reaction upon seeing the body. However, the script and emotive arc called for a more sensitive approach that prioritised conveying Alan's emotional state. This scene conveys the interplay of sound, silence, and emotional resonance in filmmaking by utilising silence as a powerful narrative tool to enhance Alan's internal turmoil.

Rather than adopting a conventional, visual approach to this scene and employing 'morgue tropes,' I opted to create a visually evocative scene that focused on the internal turmoil and contemplation of the character. It's here that silence is used as emotional resonance. By framing the shot through a frosted glass window in the door, I introduced ghost-like figures that subtly moved within the frame, reminiscent of a Saul Leiter photograph [Fig.7] This deliberate choice aimed to convey the private and introspective nature of Alan's emotions, symbolising the room as a metaphor for his internal struggles and conflicting thoughts. The viewer is not allowed into the room just as they are not allowed into Alan's feelings.

By withholding the explicit depiction of the body and Alan's immediate reaction, I encouraged audience engagement and interpretation. The intentional gap between the image presented and the viewer's imagination created a sense of drama and tension, inviting viewers to actively participate in constructing the emotional narrative of the scene. This use of silence aligns with classical understandings of perception and imagination, as articulated by Aristotle in his

concept of Phantasia, and aligns with Aristotle's concept of phantasia [φαντασία] which states that this, '... is a bridge between sensation and thought, providing images or 'phantasms' without which there can be no thought' (Aristotle, 2001).

The absence of sound in the depicted scene plays a significant role in creating a perceptible gap between the visual imagery and the audience's cognitive processing, referred to as filmic silence. Filmmakers, such as Godard in *Bande à Part* (1964) and Kubrick in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), have been noted for their adept use of this technique. In this context, the deliberate exclusion of sound serves to amplify the emotional impact of the scene by inviting viewers to react to the absence of aural stimuli, which, in turn, heightens the dramatic tension.

The decision to forgo a diegetic 'atmos' track, a background sound recording of the room underscores my intention to focus on the emotional resonance of the moment rather than creating a sense of tranquillity typically associated with silence in cinema. By maintaining an extended period of silence, I intended to elicit a sense of unease and tension in the audience, mirroring the emotional state of the character Alan, as he contemplates the possibility of identifying his son's body. In this technical context, Alberto Cavalcanti states that, 'Silence can be the loudest of noises, just as black, in a brilliant design, can be the brightest of colours' (Cavalcanti, 1985).

This summarises and underscores the powerful impact of silence as a narrative tool in filmmaking. The strategic use of silence in this scene serves as a prelude to the ensuing sequence, creating a moment of quiet anticipation before the narrative tension escalates, a cinematic technique that primes the audience for the impending emotional crescendo. The use of silence here prepares us for the scene that follows. This silence functions as a prelude, structuring the scene's emotional rhythm in alignment with narrative theory. The calm before the storm.

When preproducing *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), I made a conscious decision to adopt a distinct visual language, aligning with the emotional complexity of the character Alan, who shields his emotions behind a veneer of wit and sarcasm, even from his own son. The cinematographer, Richard Stoddard, collaborated closely with me to develop a filmic style that emphasised distance and restraint, eschewing traditional cinematic techniques such as close-ups in favour of long takes and static shots. This deliberate choice aimed to create a visual

dissonance that mirrored the characters' emotional barriers and invited the audience to maintain a certain level of detachment from the family's narrative. My research seeks to intertwine representations of time and memory, reflecting Tarkovsky's approach to cinematic temporality, thereby informing the methodological framework for my practice-led investigation. Donato Totaro, states in 'Time and the Film Aesthetics of Andrei Tarkovsky':

Time as memory is similar to how Bergson explains duration: the flux of states within consciousness. For Bergson this signifies above all else, indivisibility. Indivisibility can be interpreted cinematically as a long take style that records real time or a simultaneous representation of different points in time.
(Totaro, 1992,pp.25-26).

In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky claims his use of the long take was an attempt at 'faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame' (Tarkovsky, 1989).

A central research inquiry emerged from this creative process, questioning the potential impact of the absence of close-ups on the audience's empathetic engagement with the characters and their journey. The consideration of whether including close-ups would enhance or detract from the viewer's experience prompted a deeper exploration than conventional framings allow, examining how wide shots can sustain empathetic engagement while foregrounding environmental context and spatial relationships. By prioritising the actors' delicate portrayals whilst conceiving the frame as a theatrical stage upon which performance unfolds, the visual aesthetics become inseparable from the spatial dynamics of the actors' movements and interactions. I sought to challenge conventional cinematic expectations and evoke a sense of introspection and contemplation, demonstrating how performance, spatial composition, and visual rhythm collectively shape the audience's emotional and cognitive experience. Referring to the use of wide shots over close-ups in cinema, Alberto Orsi, in his book chapter 'The Close-up', suggests that, 'The director must 'intuit' the state of mind of the spectator and present to him the frame to which he, in that given moment, would point his attention and his gaze' (Orsi, 2007).

Other notable directors that employ a distinct visual approach to filmmaking include Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki. Kaurismäki's films create a stylised world in which his characters inhabit a realm that is hyper-real, transcending conventional notions of reality. Kaurismäki has trademark techniques he employs, such as long takes, static camera, long silences, and

deadpan delivery that is dry and yet full of humanity. I am, drawn to these techniques as they allow a filmmaker to experiment with the grammar of cinema.

In films such as *The Man Without A Past* (2003), Kaurismäki presents narratives that exude a sense of deadpan comedy while exploring themes of memory loss and resilience. The protagonist, a welder who loses his memory after being mugged, finds himself living amongst a community of homeless individuals, echoing the narrative trajectory of Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951). Both films share an optimistic tone, portraying the dignity and humanity of marginalised communities in a visually striking and respectful manner as stated by Henry Bacon: 'Kaurismäki's films are characterised by distinctive 'poetics of displacement' (Bacon, 2003).

The influence of Kaurismäki's films, particularly in their treatment of characters and communities with empathy and respect, resonates deeply with me and inspires my own artistic vision and approach to storytelling. The thematic richness and visual elegance of Kaurismäki's works serve as a source of inspiration, shaping my perspective on capturing the essence of humanity through direction and photography. His works are characterised by a distinct authorial voice and stylistic coherence, positioning him as a prominent auteur within contemporary European art cinema, and as stated in Jaakko Seppälä's, journal article, 'On the Heterogeneity of Cinematography in the Films of Aki Kaurismäki', as belonging to a 'stylistically homogenous group,' and he is 'one of the most important auteurs in today's European art cinema' (Seppälä, 2015).

The film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) embodies a similar sense of optimism throughout the emotional journey of its lead character. Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki is acclaimed for his distinctive synthesis of pessimism and optimism in his cinematic works. Kaurismäki articulates this duality by asserting, 'the more pessimistic I feel about life, the more optimistic the films should be' (Harrison, 2017). This perspective underscores the complexity of human experience as portrayed in his films, suggesting that a nuanced engagement with life's challenges can yield a hopeful narrative.

The visual aesthetic of a film plays a crucial role in conveying emotions, themes, and character development. In the case of the film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), inspiration for the look of the film stemmed from the story's exploration of isolation and grief. I found resonance in

the paintings of Edward Hopper, renowned for his depictions of solitude and detachment, which served as visual metaphors for the protagonist, Alan's, character journey. Hopper's influence on both myself and American photographer Gregory Crewdson, known for his cinematic and atmospheric photographs, further shaped my vision for the film's visual style. Amber Berry's essay, 'An essay on Gregory Crewdson' (2015) states that the photographer's early exposure to the works of Diane Arbus, Walker Evans, and Edward Hopper significantly impacted his artistic sensibilities.

At the age of 10, Crewdson's father took him to see a Diane Arbus exhibit held at MoMa (NYC), to which he was later introduced to Walker Evans and Edward Hopper's work: taking inspiration from Hopper's paintings, Gregory found himself being absorbed and captivated by the isolation and detachment which could be seen in the images
(Berry, 2015).

Crewdson's fascination with Hopper's portrayal of isolation and detachment in his paintings resonated with my vision for *Sometimes Always Never* (2019). This shared admiration for Hopper's thematic exploration of solitude and his evocative visual language laid the foundation for the film's aesthetic direction. Crewdson creates tableaux, more precisely 'tableaux vivants', French words for 'living pictures', static scenes containing one or more actors or models.

My conscious consideration of medium specificity, a concept rooted in film theory, guided the creative decision-making process to extend Gregory Crewdson's photographic aesthetic into the dynamic realm of cinema. Medium specificity posits that each artistic medium has inherent characteristics and capabilities that shape the creation and reception of artistic works. In the case of film, the interplay of visual imagery, movement, performance, and sound contributes to the unique cinematic experience that distinguishes it from other art forms. In his PhD thesis, 'Remember the medium!: film, medium specificity, and response-dependence', Clotilde Torregrossa states in their abstract that:

Medium specificity is a theory, or rather a cluster of arguments, in aesthetics that rests on the idea that media are the physical material that makes up artworks, and that this material contains specific and unique features capable of differentiating media from one another, and determining the aesthetic potential and goals of each medium
(Torregrossa, 2020).

By acknowledging medium specificity, I aimed to transcend the two-dimensional confines of Crewdson's photographic compositions and translate his evocative aesthetic into a multi-

sensory cinematic world. Drawing upon film theory concerned with medium specificity and embodied spectatorship (Bazin; Sobchack; Deleuze, 1960), I sought to harness the expressive possibilities of movement, performance, and sound as primary narrative agents, enriching the film's affective texture and amplifying its emotional resonance beyond dialogue or plot alone. Film theorist David Bordwell, in his article *Widescreen Aesthetics and Mis en Scene Criticism*, suggests that:

Bazin's general theory needs no repeating here, but recall how general theory a theory it is. Essays like 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', 'The Myth of Total Cinema', 'An Aesthetic of Reality', construct an elaborate ontology, epistemology, and aesthetic of the film medium. Because cinema is fundamentally a photographic process. (Bordwell, 1985).

This strategic approach not only honoured Crewdson's visual language but also leveraged the unique affordances of cinema to deepen the thematic exploration and amplify the emotional depth of the narrative. By embracing medium specificity and leveraging film theory, I translated Crewdson's static photographic aesthetic into a dynamic and multi-dimensional cinematic experience, enriching the film's visual and narrative tapestry with movement, performance, and sound.

During the preproduction phase of the film, I, along with cinematographer Richard Stoddart and production designer Tim Dickle, attended a Gregory Crewdson exhibition at The Photographers' Gallery in London to see *Cathedral of Pines* (2017). The intention was to draw inspiration from Crewdson's work, particularly his use of visual language, colour palette, and lighting, to inform the film's overall look and feel. By immersing ourselves in Crewdson's photographs, we aimed to cultivate a shared understanding of the desired visual aesthetic for *Sometimes Always Never* (2019).

The collaborative experience of exploring Crewdson's exhibition allowed the cinematographer, production designer, and myself to engage in meaningful discussions about the emotional impact of his photographs. We delved into the ways in which Crewdson's compositions and lighting choices elicited specific feelings and moods, sparking ideas for translating these elements into the film's cinematography and production design. The concept of creating dioramas influenced by Crewdson's work, where the film's characters would interact within carefully constructed sets, emerged as a creative possibility. In a 2001 interview, Crewdson explained the origins of his obsession with setting:

I was just very interested in museum dioramas, actually, and I've always been interested in wanting to construct the world in photographs... one of the things we can get from photography is this establishment of a world.
(Lopez, 2001).

My familiarity with the concept of 'medium specificity' underscored the importance of utilising the unique visual language of photography in translating Crewdson's aesthetic into the cinematic realm. This alignment in visual storytelling allowed for a creative integration of narrative themes, character psychology, and emotional resonance through the film's visual composition.

The opening scene of the film features Bill Nighy gazing out to sea from the Crosby coastline, evoking the image of the Pied Piper beckoning viewers to embark on a cinematic journey [Fig.8] This visual juxtaposition effectively establishes the narrative and entices audience expectations. Nighy's presence in this vast and contemplative landscape serves as an invitation to explore the diverse influences that have shaped his sensibilities. This coastal setting is shared with Anthony Gormley's renowned installation art project, *Another Place* (2005), comprising one hundred cast-iron figures positioned facing the sea. In this context, the question arises: is Alan, the protagonist, embodying a sense of being a weathered replica of his former self, a mere imitation of the original Alan? The motif of imitation. The iconic image of Nighy on the beach, seen with his back to the viewer, is prominently featured on the film's poster, reflecting a visual aesthetic that draws inspiration from artists like René Magritte and the evocative poster design of the film *Being There* (1979). An interesting parallel emerges in the choice of Alan's surname, Mellor, derived from John Mellor, also known as Joe Strummer, who transitioned from his band The 101ers to The Clash. This subtle intertextual reference adds a layer of complexity to Alan's character, suggesting a connection to themes of transformation and reinvention. There are one hundred Anthony Gormley statues on Crosby beach, does Alan's statue like presence suggest he now is the 101er, echoing Strummer's transition from Hippie to Punk?

The look of a film is a vital component of its overall aesthetic, shaped by cinematography, production design, lighting, colour palette, camera angles, and performance. Film theorists such as Bordwell and Thompson argue that these formal elements operate together as part of a film's overall style and contribute significantly to the construction of meaning and spectators' emotional engagement with the cinematic experience (Bordwell and Thompson, 2019). Cinematography, encompassing shot composition and movement, influences perception and

audience engagement, while production design establishes the film's world through sets and costumes. Lighting manipulates mood and focus, the colour palette can symbolise themes and affect, and strategic camera angles enhance narrative depth. Taken together, these visual components function as an interdependent system of expressive resources, producing a cohesive and immersive cinematic experience.. Nicolas Roeg, in his book *The World Is Ever Changing*, argues that 'The movie either works or it doesn't , you have to think of it as a whole. I don't think you can have a great movie where the art direction doesn't work , it belongs to it' (Roeg, 2013).

Wes Anderson's distinctive visual aesthetic is often characterised by a meticulous attention to detail and a unique compositional style that has led to his recognition as a prominent auteur in contemporary cinema. In her analysis, Donna Kornhaber (2017) describes Anderson as a collector of visual elements, with his cinematic frames 'often described as having a diorama or museum-gallery aspect (Kornhaber, 2017). This characterisation underscores the curated nature of his storytelling, where each frame is deliberately constructed to evoke a sense of artifice and whimsy.

In the film *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), I sought to emulate this dioramic approach, particularly in the realms of production design and cinematography. Anderson's influence is palpable in the way the visual composition draws the viewer's attention to the intricate details within the frame, creating a layered narrative experience. This diorama approach can be seen in the film's production design and cinematography and echoes the work of the photographer Gregory Crewdson. [Fig.9]

By incorporating elements of Anderson's aesthetic, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) engages with a visual language that invites audiences to experience the film as curated tableaux, encouraging them to explore the subtleties within each carefully constructed scene. This approach challenges the viewers to perceive the film through a lens that values artistic composition and visual storytelling, akin to the practices of both Anderson and Crewdson.

The culmination of this cinematic journey manifested in the premiere of *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) at the BFI London Film Festival (2018), where it garnered critical acclaim. Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* lauded the film for its captivating English essence, evocative storytelling, and masterful direction by debutant filmmaker Carl Hunter. The intricate narrative

rhythm, unexpected plot twists, and stellar performances, notably by Bill Nighy, were highlighted for their subtle portrayal of emotional depth beneath outward demeanour. As Peter Bradshaw (2018) notes in *The Guardian*:

...there's a beguiling Englishness to this elegant, offbeat comedy-drama, terrifically written by Frank Cottrell-Boyce and directed by feature debutant Carl Hunter. It has a wonderful syncopation in its writerly rhythm and narrative surprises. The film positively twinkles with insouciance, and is performed with aplomb, particularly by Bill Nighy who brings a droll sprightliness and deadpan wit to the lead role but shows how these mannerisms mask emotional pain. (Bradshaw, 2018).

The Mellor family highlights a group characterised by an inherent struggle with effective communication, serving as a vehicle for character dynamics and thematic exploration of familial reconnection and the emotional repercussions of loss. Language serves as the adhesive that binds conversations together, acting as the fundamental glue of communication. Consequently, the absence of this essential adhesive results in a breakdown of discourse. This portrayal reflects a broader societal notion where games often emphasise winning as the sole acceptable outcome, overshadowing the intrinsic values of collaboration and active participation within familial dynamics.

It was a directorial decision for the film to reveal a thematic focus on rediscovery and reconciliation. Rather than being centred on the search for Michael, the missing son, the film pivots towards Alan's journey of reconnecting with Peter, his other estranged son who resides in close proximity. This directorial shift underscores the film's underlying narrative of familial reconnection and the intricacies of relationships beyond physical absence.

Despite Michael's absence, his presence looms large within the narrative of the film, establishing a distinct visual prominence through his conspicuous nonappearance. The family's interactions are intricately moulded by this absence, with various scenes allowing for adjustments in navigating his lingering influence. In a poignant exchange between Sue (played by Alice Lowe) and her son Jack (played by Louis Healy) within the confines of his bedroom, Sue reflects on the return of Peter (played by Sam Riley) and Alan (played by Bill Nighy) from the morgue, potentially after identifying a body belonging to Michael. This moment prompts contemplation on the complexities of what constitutes the best outcome in such a situation, questioning the emotional repercussions of potential discoveries regarding Michael's well-being and his perceived detachment from familial ties. The direction of the dialogue delves

into the impact of reported sightings of Michael on family members, highlighting the enduring impact of his absence on their lives.

Sue (Alice Lowe) says (from the script):

I think he's relieved. I mean... well it's hard to know what's for the best isn't it? Obviously, the best would be if they found him and he was alive and well and having a lovely life. Or would it? That'd be hard wouldn't it? To find out that he's been happy all this time but just, you know, shunning you. Letting you go through all this. Like the sightings. You know people contact your grandad, and say they've seen Michael (Boyce, 2017, p.25).

Preceding the aforementioned poignant scene, Alan engages in a game of Scrabble with guests Margret (played by Jenny Agutter) and Arthur (played by Tim McInnerny) at a Bed and Breakfast establishment. The guests, on route to the morgue for the potential identification of a deceased individual who may be their son, find themselves unwitting participants in Alan's strategic gameplay. This incident prompts a reaction from Peter (Sam Riley), who expresses dismay at Alan's competitive tactics in securing £200 from Arthur. Following a contemplative walk and a heartfelt conversation with his son, Alan rationalises his manipulation during the game by drawing a parallel between the outcome and the identities of Michael and the guests' son.

Alan (Bill Nighy) says (from the script):

When you put it like that... It started off as a game. Then after I found out I seemed to... I got the feeling that... if I let him beat me, it would be our Michael. And if I won it would be their lad. I know it's mad.. (Boyce, 2017, p.19).

This justification underscores the symbolic significance of Michael as a tangible and influential figure within Alan's psyche and the overarching narrative.

This chapter has elucidated the intricate relationship between time and film, particularly through the lens of Henri Bergson's concept of 'la durée' and Andrei Tarkovsky's understanding of the long take. By employing extended takes, my film endeavours to capture the essence of time as it flows beyond the confines of the frame. This approach encourages a deeper engagement with the viewer's experience of duration than plot-driven montage, foregrounding temporality itself as a primary expressive and phenomenological dimension of the cinematic image, aligning with Tarkovsky's reflections in *Sculpting in Time*, which advocate for transcending mere visual representation to render the passage of time palpable. Such a

strategy produces an emotional engagement that is anchored in the viewer's subjective experience of duration. Central to Tarkovsky's filmmaking is the concept of time, which he explores through temporal means rather than relying on a structured storyline as a "spatio-temporal regulator." As film scholar, Nariman Skakov suggests in 'Tarkovsky's Films', an article published in *Times Literary Supplement*:

Tarkovsky immerses viewers in an experiential exploration of time, transforming it from a background element into a profound thematic focus. This approach encourages audiences to reflect on their own experiences of time while navigating the emotional landscapes of his films, ultimately deepening the connection between viewer and narrative. (Skakov, 2012).

A critical inquiry has emerged regarding the absence of close-ups in my film and its implications for audience empathy. This deliberate choice challenges conventional cinematic techniques that typically seek to elicit immediate emotional responses, thereby suggesting a more contemplative engagement with the characters and their journeys. The absence of sound in the morgue sequence aligns with the concept of filmic silence, wherein the absence of sound creates a perceptible gap between visual imagery and cognitive processing. Drawing from Aristotle's notion of *Phantasia*, this silence invites viewers to delve more deeply into their interpretations and emotional responses, amplifying the scene's impact.

The scrapbook, utilised as a methodological tool, has functioned not only as a repository for artistic concepts but also as a catalyst for collaboration, shaping the film's cohesive visual identity. This collaborative environment has been essential in generating ideas and stimulating creativity, enabling the exploration of nuanced themes that might otherwise remain unexamined. Furthermore, the integration of photographs through ekphrasis has provided a rich tapestry for narrative development, showcasing the potential of visual imagery to inspire storytelling and evoke complex emotional landscapes.

By recognising the principle of medium specificity, I sought to move beyond the two-dimensional limitations inherent in Gregory Crewdson's photographic compositions, translating his evocative aesthetic into a multi-sensory cinematic experience that enables a richer exploration of narrative and emotional depth. The engagement with temporal dynamics further clarifies how photography captures a single suspended moment that invites contemplation of context, whereas cinema manipulates time through editing, pacing, and long takes to transform stillness into duration. This shift encourages a more active mode of

spectatorship than static photographic viewing, requiring audiences to interpret temporal progression, emotional change, and narrative continuity as part of the viewing experience.

In addressing the notion of 'Britishness' within the cinematic landscape, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) contributes to an ongoing discourse about national identity and its representation in cinema. While the film evokes a sense of Britishness through its cast, locations, and creative team, it simultaneously transcends geographical boundaries, suggesting that British cinema can juxtapose form and content and reflect diverse influences reminiscent of auteurs such as Hiroshi Kore-eda and Aki Kaurismäki.

The autoethnographic dimension of my methodology emerges through the integration of personal reflection with formal cinematic analysis: my memories, aesthetic preferences, and sensory experiences, shaped by music, visual art, and performance, inform both conceptual and practical decisions. The scrapbook, photo elicitation, and ekphrasis processes exemplify this approach, functioning as conduits through which personal insight informs collaborative filmmaking while simultaneously generating research knowledge. By interrogating the spaces where autobiography intersects with fiction, and where lived experience informs visual storytelling, this practice foregrounds the situatedness of the director as both creator and researcher.

In reflecting on *Sometimes Always Never* (2019), the autoethnographic lens illuminates how my personal and cultural positionality informs narrative choices, the visual language of the film, and the handling of temporal and emotional rhythms. It demonstrates that directing is not simply a technical or aesthetic practice but a profoundly embodied and contextually situated act, where memory, identity, and cultural background shape both creative expression and theoretical insight. By embedding myself in the creative process and critically engaging with my own practice, this chapter positions the film as a living example of autoethnography in contemporary filmmaking, highlighting the productive dialogue between personal history, cinematic craft, and research methodology.

This chapter demonstrates how my practice-led, autoethnographic approach bridges personal experience and scholarly inquiry, revealing the interplay between lived reality, creative decision-making, and cinematic form. By situating my directing practice within the context of my working-class Liverpool upbringing, art-school education, and musical background, the

chapter underscores how personal history shapes both aesthetic choices and interpretive priorities. My experiences growing up in a culturally rich but economically constrained environment instilled a sensitivity to human emotion, interpersonal nuance, and narrative rhythm, all of which are reflected in the film's intimate exploration of grief, memory, and communication.

The next chapter addresses adaptation theory, the processes and implications of transforming one medium into another, a song into a film, and how the transition from auditory to visual storytelling necessitates a reimagining of the lyrics' subtext. It builds on my methodologies and engagement with popular culture.

Chapter 3

Adaptation Theory and the Transformation of Song into Narrative Film

A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)

Director: Carl Hunter.

Duration: 8 minutes.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4xl_Xeowdo

This chapter critically synthesises the themes and methodologies explored in preceding sections, advancing my understanding of adaptation theory through the lens of cinematic expression. By transforming a song into a film, I employed a short-form filmmaking approach that mirrors the brevity of a seven-inch single, emphasising how both mediums encapsulate cultural narratives within familiar formats. This structural similarity highlights the inherent connections between music and film.

While songs often convey fleeting moments or emotions, the cinematic form allows for a more profound exploration of character backstories, motivations, and relationships, thereby enriching the narrative. This expansion enhances thematic depth, inviting viewers to engage with the material on a more substantive level and reshaping their understanding of the original song. The film thus operates as a bridge, connecting the ephemeral quality of music with the expansive possibilities of visual storytelling.

Adaptation studies has traditionally been shaped by a literary bias that privileges the novel as a primary source text and evaluates adaptations according to notions of fidelity and authorial intent. As Whelehan (1999) argues:

The field of adaptations in the past has been dominated by scholars working primarily from an 'English Lit' perspective who may be inclined to privilege the original literary text above its adaptations, thus favouring the slow individualized process of reading/interpretation above the 'immediate' short-term and often shared pleasures of visual spectatorship (Whelehan, 1999 p. 17).

This hierarchy implicitly positions film adaptation as secondary to literature, reinforcing distinctions between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms. The adaptation of popular music into film productively disrupts this model. Whereas novels are typically condensed for cinematic

translation, songs require expansion, transforming brief lyrical fragments into sustained narrative and visual structures.

This methodological inversion directly informs my research questions concerning how meaning mutates across media and how adaptation can function as a mode of knowledge production rather than mere translation. Drawing on Huq's (2006) critique of the marginalisation of popular music within academic discourse, this chapter treats the song as source as a legitimate site of cultural and theoretical inquiry. By adapting a Beatles lyric into cinematic form, the project reframes adaptation as a practice-led investigation into authorship, memory, class, and perception.

Consequently, the chapter positions adaptation not as a question of fidelity but as a process of amplification, reculturalisation, and reinterpretation, aligning with my broader methodological aim to challenge hierarchies of value within British cinematic storytelling and to expand the expressive possibilities of contemporary film practice.

The visual aesthetic of the film vividly juxtaposes black-and-white cinematography with colour photographs inspired by Saul Leiter, enables a deeper exploration of perception and reality, than mere plot-driven representation permits, emphasising the emotional resonance and interpretive agency of the viewer. This stylistic choice is reminiscent of the artistic experimentation characteristic of the 1960s, a period marked by significant social change and cultural upheaval. As the protagonist gazes through the steamed-up windows of the bus, her perception shifts, transforming the mundane into the exotic. This phenomenon echoes the Situationist movement, particularly Guy Debord's concepts in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), including the *dérive* (drift), which frames the urban environment as a living artwork to be explored and reimagined; such an approach encourages viewers to perceive everyday spaces and objects as sites of wonder and narrative potential, emphasising the poetic and contemplative nature of the imagination and allowing the protagonist's journey to unfold as a form of artistic exploration, while simultaneously inviting reflection on how familiar environments are aestheticised, reconfigured, and reinterpreted within cinematic representation.

The decision to shoot in black and white evokes a 'kitchen sink' aesthetic typical of 1960s British cinema, grounding the film's narrative in a historical context that resonates with themes

of social realism. This visual choice metaphorically signifies the transition from the perceived monochrome reality of 1960s Britain to a more vibrant and psychedelic experience, reflecting the cultural transformations of the era. Through this lens, the film becomes a commentary on the shifting dynamics of perception and reality, inviting viewers to reconsider their understanding of both the past and the present.

The protagonist's evolving perception of her urban environment, articulated through her distinctive accent and dialogue, challenges existing stereotypes seen in British cinema as discussed in the previous chapter, while contributing to a nuanced discourse on class and intelligence. This aspect of the film develops arguments regarding identity and representation, highlighting the complexity of social dynamics and the interplay between individual experience and broader societal narratives. By presenting a multi-dimensional character who defies conventional expectations, the film encourages viewers to engage critically with issues of class, identity, and the narratives constructed around them.

Despite its intent to highlight social inequality, British social realism often reinforces reductive depictions of working-class life, particularly through gritty portrayals of council estates, criminality, and violence. Films such as *Eden Lake* (2008), *The Face* (1997), and TV series like *Shameless* (2004–2013) frequently emphasise 'hard men,' hooliganism, and chaotic domestic spaces, creating a familiar shorthand for working-class existence. While claiming to depict reality, these narratives are largely produced, directed, and critiqued by middle and upper class creators, whose socio-economic distance shapes how working-class life is imagined. This results in romanticised or exaggerated representations of the working-class. Ken Loach, lauded for social realist cinema, exemplifies this tension: even well-intentioned depictions risk framing poverty and hardship as definitive, normalising a narrow vision of working-class life and reinforcing stigma, a phenomenon that contributes to the fetishisation of the working-class in British cinema. By presenting a multi-dimensional characters that defie conventional expectations, the film encourages viewers to engage critically with issues of class, identity, and the narratives we construct around them.

The genesis of the film's concept is rooted in intertextuality, particularly through the characterisation of the protagonist, the young carer, who was initially inspired by Leopold Bloom from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This reference to Bloom, a modern Odysseus navigating the complexities of urban life, underscores the film's thematic exploration of journeys, both

physical and existential. The protagonist's daily bus rides symbolise her cyclical existence, resonating with the idea of a quest for meaning, akin to Bloom's *Odyssey*.

This investigation into the motif of the journey led to a deeper inquiry into the origins of the narrative, bringing me to Homer, the 'blind bard.' This connection raises profound questions about perception and representation in art, particularly in the realm of film, where sight is a primary mode of engagement. The notion of creating a film through the lens of blindness introduces a unique challenge that aligns with André Bazin's theory of realism, which emphasises the importance of capturing reality as it is perceived. In this context, my engagement with blind photographers such as Eugen Bavacar, Gerardo Nigenda, Rosita McKenzie, and Peter Eckert, through their works, featured in 'Seeing in the Dark: Blind Photographers Talk About Their Work' (*The Observer*, 2019) provided insights into the ways in which visual storytelling can transcend traditional sight-based aesthetics.

By examining the methodologies of these photographers, I explored how narratives can be constructed through sound, texture, and emotion, thus broadening the parameters of cinematic representation. By engaging the audience through non-visual cues, soundscapes, the cadence of movement, and the emotional resonance of gestures, the film mirrors the blind photographers' strategies for conveying complex narratives without relying solely on conventional sight. This invites viewers to encounter British reality in an intimate, idiosyncratic, and emotionally complex way, encouraging reflection on urban life, identity, and class. In doing so, the film demonstrates that cinematic representation can move beyond visual spectacle and narrative shorthand, incorporating multi-sensory, empathetic, and phenomenologically rich experiences that expand the expressive potential of British cinema. This line of inquiry challenges viewers to reconsider their own perceptions of reality, as they engage with a film that reflects the complexities of vision and experience.

In the realm of filmmaking, the evolution of ideas is commonplace; in this instance, the line of inquiry significantly redirected the visual interpretation, moving beyond my original line of enquiry towards a more authored vision for the adaptation.

This chapter addresses adaptation theory, the processes and implications of transforming one medium into another, particularly how thematic and narrative elements are reinterpreted to

suit different forms of expression. The selected lyric from The Beatles' song *A Day In The Life* (1967) served as an inspiration for the short film, *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017):

Found my coat and grabbed my hat,
Made the bus in seconds flat,
Found my way upstairs and had a smoke,
And somebody spoke and I went into a dream
(Lennon & McCartney, 1967).

These lyrics allowed for an exploration of a memory by Paul McCartney, who, as a schoolboy, would take the same bus from his Liverpool home in Speke to The Liverpool Institute High School for Boys. The transition from auditory to visual storytelling necessitates a reimagining of the lyrics' subtext. For instance, the evocative imagery and emotional tone of the lyrics have been translated into visual metaphors and plot development. Adaptation theory posits that the audience's reception of the adapted work is intrinsically linked to their familiarity with the original source material.

Drawing on adaptation theory as a methodological framework, this chapter approaches Frank Cottrell Boyce's short story and screenplay not as fixed source texts but as generative materials for practice-based inquiry. Linda Hutcheon's assertion that adaptation is 'repetition without replication' (Hutcheon, 2006) provides a framework for understanding the film not as a direct translation of a literary source but as a reconfiguration of narrative, tone, and emotional meaning through specifically filmic means. This perspective positions adaptation as an active research method, whereby creative decisions become a mode of critical investigation into how stories of loss, communication, and memory can be rearticulated through cinematic form.

Stam's conception of adaptation as an intertextual and dialogic process (Stam, 2000) further informs this methodology by situating the film within a network of artistic influences that extend beyond literature to include photography, music, and European art cinema. The adaptation process therefore operates not simply as translation from page to screen but as a negotiation between personal experience, cultural reference, and filmic convention. Through this approach, the director's vision emerges as a reflective practice that integrates theory and creative action, enabling the exploration of interior emotional states through specifically cinematic resources such as duration, framing, sound, and silence.

Methodologically, adaptation becomes a means of interrogating how meaning is produced across media and how subjective experience can be transformed into visual and auditory form. This aligns with a practice-led research model in which filmmaking itself constitutes a form of knowledge production, allowing theoretical concepts of adaptation to be tested, embodied, and revised through the creative process.

This interplay between expectation and innovation engages with reinterpreting established narratives, film theorist Robert Stam suggests:

One way to look at adaptation is to see it as a matter of a source novel hypotext's being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretisation, actualisation, critique, extrapolation, analogisation, popularisation, and reculturalisation. The source novel, in this sense, can be seen as a situated utterance produced in one medium and in one historical context, then transformed into another equally situated utterance that is produced in a different context and in a different medium (Stam, 2000).

The following analysis demonstrates how these operations are activated methodologically within the film's practice-based adaptation of a song into cinema. In methodological terms, *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* enacts adaptation as a form of practice-led research through the operations of selection, amplification, concretisation, and reculturalisation identified by Stam (2000). Rather than treating the song as a script to be illustrated, the adaptation process became an investigative method through which creative decisions functioned as analytical tools. The selection of the bus journey from the song isolates a moment of transit and reflection, which is then amplified into a sustained narrative structure centred on Ellie's lived experience as a young carer.

Through concretisation, the abstract Lennon and McCartney lyric 'I went into a dream' is translated into filmic strategies of sound design, photographic imagery, and temporal manipulation that externalise subjective perception. These choices operate as experiments in how interior states can be rendered cinematically. Reculturalisation further situates the adaptation within a contemporary socio-economic framework, relocating McCartney's autobiographical memory of 1960s Liverpool into the present conditions of zero-hours labour and dementia care.

This methodological approach positions adaptation not as a derivative act but as a critical and creative process of knowledge production. By operationalising Stam's categories within

filmmaking practice, the project tests how narrative meaning mutates across media, historical contexts, and sensory modes, demonstrating adaptation as both a theoretical framework and an embodied research strategy.

In the summer of 2017, a group of thirteen international artists were commissioned to reinterpret tracks from The Beatles' iconic album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). One of the resulting projects was a short film titled *A Day in the Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by myself, Carl Hunter. The film does not provide a literal representation of the original song but draws inspiration from a quote by Paul McCartney, who said, 'It was about me remembering what it was like to run up the road to catch the bus to school, having a smoke and going into school' (Badman, 2007).

The protagonist of the film is a young carer, Ellie, played by Paisley Reid, who is responsible for an elderly man, Arthur, an elderly man with dementia played by Tom O'Connor. Her employment is governed by a zero-hours contract, which exploits her time and finances. As a result, she finds it more cost-effective to orbit Liverpool on a bus per day rather than returning home or sitting in a café. The bus and her journey serve as metaphors for the cyclic situation she finds herself in. Ironically, although she has the ability to travel, her low-paid job prevents her from doing so. On the other hand, her elderly client, who suffers from dementia, believes he is still working on pilot ships in Liverpool and experiences a sense of freedom despite being housebound. She is young and trapped; he is house-bound but free as a bird.

The film is shot in black and white and incorporates intercutting with colour photographs taken from the protagonist's perspective while on the bus. These images draw inspiration from the abstract urban photography of Saul Leiter, an American photographer. By reimagining the bleak urban landscape as vibrant, impressionistic vignettes, the film transforms reality into fantasy. This approach emphasises the poetic and contemplative nature of the imagination, revealing how beauty can be found in the mundane and ordinary physical surroundings, which can be transformed into extraordinary poetic moments and metaphorically signifies the transition of the perceived monochrome 1960s Britain to Psychedelia. [Fig.10]

The cinematic choice to shoot in black and white serves multiple purposes, both thematically and stylistically. The monochrome palette acts as an evocative metaphor for the protagonist's life, emphasising the starkness and constraints of her existence as a young carer under a zero-

hours contract. This aesthetic choice not only visually underscores the emotional and psychological limitations she faces but also highlights the cyclical nature of her daily journeys. As she traverses the city of Liverpool on a bus, her life is depicted in shades of grey, symbolising the monotony and bleakness of her circumstances.

Shooting in black and white suggests a 1960s aesthetic that underpins the film's narrative. This era is often associated with significant social change and artistic experimentation. Referencing this period allows the film to situate itself within a broader cultural context, enabling contemporary audiences to reflect on ongoing issues of labour exploitation and the societal structures that confine individuals.

In the film, the protagonist's journey on the bus serves as a metaphorical lens through which she reinterprets her surroundings, viewing the ordinary streets of Liverpool as a vibrant canvas for artistic expression, being fully present in the moment, allowing the practitioner to transcend the ordinary and discover beauty in the mundane. Similarly, the protagonist learns to see the world through the eyes of a creative individual, transforming her low-paid existence into a journey of artistic discovery. As Herrigel states: 'You will see with other eyes and measure with other measures (Herrigel, 1988).

As she gazes through the steamed-up windows of the bus, the protagonist's perception shifts, turning the bland into the exotic. This aligns with Guy Debord's concept of the *dérive*, wherein the urban environment is approached as a dynamic, experiential artwork to be navigated and interpreted. The streets of Liverpool, through her eyes, become a living art gallery, reminiscent of the aesthetic experimentation that emerged from the Paris riots of 1968. In a parallel to the revolutionary spirit of that era, the protagonist's reimagining of her environment serves as a subtle form of resistance against the constraints imposed by her zero-hours contract and societal expectations.

Ellie's bus journeys through Liverpool enact a cinematic *dérive*, transforming her routine traversal of urban space into a lived, perceptual exploration that mirrors the Situationists' call to experience the everyday as art. This phenomenon resonates with Guy Debord's critique of capitalist spectacle in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967/1994) and the collective writings of the Situationist International, which emphasised the transformative potential of everyday life. The concept of the *dérive*, or drift, frames the urban environment as a mutable space to be

explored and reimagined, encouraging spontaneous engagement with the city's sensory and social textures. In this framework, the commonplace streets, buildings, and public spaces become sites of aesthetic and political significance. As the Situationist slogan asserts, 'Beauty is in the street' (Debord & Vaneigem, 1967), moments of wonder and creative intervention can emerge within the routines of daily life, challenging the alienation and passivity imposed by capitalist structures. Through this lens, the film interrogates how perception, imagination, and socio-economic context intersect within ordinary environments, positioning Ellie's journey as both a personal and methodological exploration of urban experience. Drawing from Zen Buddhist principles, the protagonist discovers that beauty exists in the present moment, a concept that resonates with the idea of mindfulness. This connection to Zen philosophy invites viewers to reflect on their own perceptions and encourages an active engagement with the aesthetics of daily life.

The film becomes a meditation on the relationship between art, perception, and socio-economic realities. By portraying the protagonist's journey as an artistic exploration, I invite audiences to reconsider the significance of their everyday environments. The protagonist's transformation of the banal into the beautiful not only challenges her own circumstances but also serves as a broader commentary on the potential for artistic expression in the face of adversity.

This section discusses the significance and importance of the opening scene in a film, and establishing audience expectations, focusing on how directors engage with the contextual tuning of this. It will analyse how these are addressed through the techniques of shooting and editing the opening sequence. The discussion will elucidate the visual, auditory, and narrative signals employed to establish genre conventions and to cultivate the appropriate mood for the story. It will underscore the dynamic interplay between these elements and the audience's pre-existing knowledge and anticipations.

In the opening sequence of the film, we are introduced to Arthur's (Tom O'Connor) garden, which serves as a poignant representation of his working-class roots and the thematic undercurrents of the narrative. Arthur, an elderly man grappling with dementia, embodies a character caught between the present and the echoes of his past. The garden, with its urban setting, reflects the simplicity and the complexities of his life, establishing the film's emotional and aesthetic landscape.

The audience is presented with a reflection of his washing in the patio windows, [Fig. 11] emphasising the connection between Arthur's current existence and his memories. This use of reflection operates as a semiotic device, suggesting the duality of Arthur's life, his present juxtaposed with the remnants of his past. The monochromatic palette suggests a world that is fading, perhaps irretrievable, evoking a profound sense of nostalgia that resonates with Arthur's experience and invites us to reflect on the nature of memory itself. Neurologist D.T. Stuss states that: 'Mental time travel' is argued to be a unique and defining component of human experience" (Wheeler, Stuss, & Tulving, 1997).

From a semiotic perspective, the use of sheets hung on a line is a visual metaphor, resembling the sails of ships, and a nostalgic idea of sailing, evoking Arthur's past as a pilot on the River Mersey. As the sheets flutter in the breeze, the original diegetic sound is replaced by the creaking of a ship's mast, an auditory sign that deepens the connection between Arthur's present state of mind and his maritime history. This auditory shift emphasises the film's overarching narrative anchored to the sea, suggesting that Arthur's memories are intricately tied to the maritime life he once led. The combination of visual and auditory stimuli suggests how his identity is intertwined with the sea.

As the film cuts indoors, it captures a wind vane gently swaying, reinforcing the maritime theme. [Fig.12] This element is a signifier of navigation and direction, paralleling Arthur's own navigational struggles battling dementia. In the film's opening sequence, we are presented with a series of static images resembling black-and-white photographs, which serve as visual metaphors for the protagonist Arthur's psychological state, and the temporal relation that exists between the photograph, the photographed object, and the spectator, referred to by Roland Barthes as the 'Studium and Punctum.' (Barthes, R. 1964) claims: What does the photograph transmit? By definition, the scene itself, the literal reality'. Barthes argues that the photographic image operates differently from linguistic systems, in that it does not "transform" meaning but records a real referent; the scene is mechanically registered rather than humanly constructed (Barthes, 1977).

Following this, the subsequent images of partly obscured clocks signify the passage of time, while the ticking sound reinforces this notion, creating an auditory-visual connection. This introduces a critical theme of time, which is intricately tied to Henri Bergson's theory

distinguishing between 'objective time' and 'lived time.' Bergson posits that: 'objective time is quantifiable, represented by watches and calendars, while la durée, or "duration," refers to the subjective experience of time, how it is felt and lived' (Bergson, 1910).

This duality helps illuminate Arthur's experience with dementia, as he navigates the rigid structure of objective time while simultaneously grappling with the fluidity of his lived experiences. These images underscore the intricate relationship between memory, identity, and the passage of time, contemplating the complexities of Arthur's existence.

The auditory landscape of the film reinforces its thematic explorations with the inclusion of the shipping forecast. This historical broadcast, first aired in 1895, has become woven into the fabric of British culture. Its rhythmic, poetic cadence serves as a lullaby, a comforting reminder of safety and guidance in the maritime world. The forecast's soothing quality resonates with the concept of *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* (ASMR) where sound 'is a pleasurable, tingling sensation induced by exposure to specific audio-visual triggers, producing feelings of relaxation and euphoria' (Roberts, Beath, & Boag, 2020). Here, the auditory elements of the film not only serve to evoke Arthur's memories but also create a meditative space for him and connect his past to an imagined present.

The film cuts to a composition featuring Arthur, seated in a chair, his gaze penetrating the camera lens, evoking a sense of introspection as he appears immersed in reverie, reflecting on his past as a ship's pilot. [Fig.13] This visual draws parallels to the iconic photographic portraits of Cecil Beaton, known for his ability to capture the essence of celebrity. In this context, Arthur, portrayed by Tom O'Connor, a famous Liverpool comedian and once a household name, becomes a subject of both fiction and documentary within the filmic narrative. My mimicry of photographer Beaton's stylistic approach not only highlights the fascination with celebrity culture but also serves to blur the boundaries between the constructed nature of cinematic storytelling and the authenticity of documentary representation. This interplay invites the audience to reconsider the nature of celebrity. The film cuts to Ellie, the protagonist, who is depicted in profile on a bus, symbolising her own journey. Ellie's position suggests that she is not only physically on a journey but also embarking on an emotional and psychological exploration of her own life and her connection to Arthur and his past.

Ellie looks out of the bus window, her head framed within the confines of the glass. [Fig.14] The rapid movement of the world outside mirrors the dynamic nature of cinema, evoking the sensation of a film unspooling on a television screen. This visual composition inspired by photographer Tom Wood's bus photographs, underscores her contemplation and highlights the intersection of reality and cinematic perception. As a voiceover, she says,

It takes Mercury eighty-eight days to get around the sun, so a year is eighty-eight days but it takes one hundred and seventy-six days to turn on its axis so a day is one hundred and seventy-six days or two Mercury years, imagine that, every day takes two years, imagine what you could get done. And Venus? Venus spins backwards, so your day goes backwards, that could be handy couldn't it? I've got two hours between my carer's sessions, two Garston hours, that is.
(Boyce, 2017).

Ellie's Liverpool accent and her articulate dialogue subvert prevalent stereotypes such as The Gallagher family in *Shameless* (2004 – 2013) thereby challenging prejudices surrounding class and intelligence. Her knowledge of cosmology, juxtaposed with her socio-economic background, presents a nuanced representation of working-class individuals as capable of profound thought and insight. This portrayal aligns with contemporary discussions on representation in film, suggesting that characters from working-class backgrounds possess depth and complexity traditionally reserved for more privileged narratives. By giving Ellie a voice that is both intelligent and relatable, the film challenges preconceived notions about class and education.

The film transitions to dark, ominous clouds, as Ellie references Venus's retrograde rotation; the clouds reverse their movement across the sky, an occurrence unattainable in the natural world but rendered possible through the medium of filmmaking. This manipulation of time and space exemplifies the capacity of cinema to construct fantastical realities and embody the dreamlike quality of human thought. Such artistic choices align with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's opinion that: 'Cinema is a form of imagination that allows us to explore the boundaries of reality' (Deleuze, 1986).

The auditory landscape accompanying Ellie in this scene is characterised by the pulsating sound of a theremin, an instrument evocative of 1950s science fiction films and emblematic of the future. As one of the earliest electronic instruments, the theremin occupies a unique space within avant-garde music. This sonic choice serves as a significant channel through which viewers attempt to derive meaning from the film. Its electronic tonalities transform into

melodies that echo the groundbreaking score composed by Louis and Bebe Barron for *Forbidden Planet* (1956). Traditionally, a film score complements the visual narrative; however, the dissonance produced by the theremin challenges our expectations, altering the cinematic experience, where sound suggests that technology can reshape societal paradigms.

In the context of semiotics, the use of sound recordings from celestial bodies, such as the roar of Jupiter and lightning on Saturn, downloaded from NASA's *Jet Propulsion Laboratory*, functions as a rich signifier that transcends mere auditory experience, embodying the complexities of cosmic exploration. These sonic textures create a polyphonic narrative, aligning with the semiotic concept of the sign, where the sound serves as a signifier for the vastness and mystery of space. This departure from traditional melodic scoring to a collage of found audio parallels the experimental ethos of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), where audio collage suggests that diverse sounds signify cultural and artistic innovation.

The thematic parallels between Ellie's journey and the cultural transformations of the 1960s, as articulated by The Beatles, underscore the film's examination of the potential for societal change. This context enhances the film's portrayal of Ellie as a symbol of a society looking for transition. By situating Ellie within this cultural landscape, I invite viewers to consider the ways in which individual narratives reflect and contribute to collective ideas.

The Beatles' music, noted for their innovative use of avant-garde techniques and electronic sounds, mirrors a broader cultural movement toward experimentation and progress. During the summer of 1966, Paul McCartney actively sought inspiration from modernist composers, such as John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, integrating these influences into his own songwriting. In an article in, 'What do The Beatles have in common with avant-garde composer Luciano Berio? An article that appeared in the *Seattle Symphony*', it states that The Beatles:

share many common musical influences. Stockhausen's early electronic works, and *Gesang der Jünglinge* in particular, influenced Lennon, McCartney, and Berio alike. The piece, created in 1955–56, integrated electronic sounds with recordings of the human voice. According to an account of Lennon's life by his friend Pete Shotton, Lennon too had become infatuated with Stockhausen's music by May of 1968, just prior to creating 'Revolution 9.' It's worth noting at this point that the Beatles even included a picture of Stockhausen on the cover of their 1967 album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Seattle Symphony, 2016).

Ellie serves as a metaphor for the societal landscape of the 1960s, the era that The Beatles addressed in their music. Their innovative sound and lyrical themes resonated with a

generation poised for change, articulating aspirations for an alternative future. The film positions Ellie not merely as an individual character but as a reflection of the broader cultural and social shifts indicative of that transformative period. The film's experimental score not only alludes to The Beatles' own evolution in embracing avant-garde techniques but also highlights a broader artistic movement that integrated electronics and unconventional methods of music creation, influenced by the legacies of composers such as John Cage, Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Edgard Varèse.

The cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), [Fig.15] designed by pop artists Peter Blake and Jann Haworth, features, The Beatles' alter ego and imaginary band, *Sgt. Pepper* and embodies the experimental and avant-garde ethos that permeates the album, functioning as a visual extension of its innovative sonic landscape. Through the lens of adaptation theory, the cover can be understood as a reinterpretation of cultural references and artistic influences, much like the album's music recontextualises various genres and styles. The collage features a diverse array of cultural figures, including the avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose impact on The Beatles, particularly through Paul McCartney, highlights the interconnectedness of visual and auditory artistic expressions. By integrating Stockhausen into the visual narrative, the cover not only acknowledges the band's artistic inspirations but also reflects their broader exploration of sound and consciousness, bridging the auditory and the visual. The collage's psychedelic aesthetic, aligns with the principles of both assemblage art and the countercultural movement of the 1960s. This departure from traditional documentary, band photography illustrates a broader artistic shift, wherein the distinctions between high art and popular culture are increasingly blurred and echoed on the album's music recontextualises of various genres and styles. This aligns with my discourse on audience expectation as discussed earlier.

In addition to its visual and narrative innovations, the film's unconventional use of sound particularly the dissonance generated by the theremin alongside NASA's cosmic recordings serves as a profound signifier of technological influence on societal paradigms. This sonic experimentation aligns with previously established semiotic frameworks, illustrating how sound transcends traditional auditory experiences to evoke a deeper emotional and intellectual response. The incorporation of NASA's recordings of Jupiter not only underscores the narrative's cosmic dimensions but also suggests that the protagonist, Ellie, seeks

inspiration beyond her immediate surroundings in Liverpool, gazing toward the universe for broader existential meaning.

This chapter not only builds on the foundational concepts of time, semiotics, and philosophy in filmmaking laid out in earlier research but also invites ongoing inquiry into the ways adaptation and transformation can enrich our engagement with both film and broader societal narratives. Through this lens, we are encouraged to reconsider the interplay of visual and auditory elements as they shape our collective consciousness and understanding of the human experience.

Conclusion

This thesis and the published work cited within establish an original and significant contribution to the field of autoethnographic filmmaking and film studies through a rigorous examination of stylistic innovations and narrative approaches, by intertwining my personal experiences as a filmmaker with scholarly insights. This research has challenged existing assumptions regarding contemporary British film and storytelling, particularly the ways in which working-class experiences and urban environments are represented. By interrogating prevailing narrative conventions, visual aesthetics, and auditory strategies within British cinema, the study exposes how habitual storytelling frameworks often simplify, stereotype, or fetishise social realities. The thesis demonstrates that through multi-sensory, phenomenologically informed approaches, drawing on personal experience, intertextual references, and experimental techniques, cinematic narratives can offer more nuanced, emotionally resonant, and socially reflective portrayals. In this way, the research not only critiques dominant assumptions within the contemporary British filmmaking context but also proposes alternative methodologies for representation, challenging both creators and audiences to reconsider how stories of class, identity, and urban life are constructed and understood. The exploration of film as a medium for introspection and societal engagement resonates with contemporary audiences, enhancing the relevance and impact of this work within the broader discourse of film studies and cultural theory.

This rare exploration by a film director details the creative process often underrepresented in academic discourse, particularly the stages of idea generation, research, script adaptation, and collaboration with key artistic contributors. I provide a comprehensive analysis of directorial practice, examining how I cultivated ideas and conducted research through historical and theoretical frameworks. I investigate the nuanced process of adapting scripts for the screen and the collaborative dynamics between directors and essential personnel, including actors, composers, and production designers, illustrating how these relationships shaped the final product. By documenting and analysing these processes, this study contributes original insights to the field, enhancing understanding of the complexities of filmmaking and offering a resource for future research.

The originality of this research lies in the films and the methodological framework, which foreground my subjectivity while engaging with established theoretical paradigms. By employing Henri Bergson's concept of *la durée* and Roland Barthes' theory of *punctum*, this thesis provides insights into how time, memory, and visual representation coalesce in the

filmmaking process. The emotional resonance of still photographs in *More Than Time* (2020) and the use of long takes in *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) exemplify the transformative potential of autoethnographic filmmaking, challenging traditional narrative structures and inviting audiences to engage with their own experiences.

The examination of adaptation theory, particularly the transformation of a song into a film in *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), underscores the significance of cross-disciplinary exploration in expanding cinematic expression. By positioning the film as a bridge between the ephemeral quality of music and the expansive possibilities of visual storytelling, this research illuminates the connections between diverse artistic mediums, enhances thematic depth, and encourages critical re-evaluation of narrative construction across contexts.

The rigour of this research is evident in its systematic approach to critical self-reflection and analysis of the films produced. Each chapter engages with sociocultural factors that shape represented identities, beliefs, and perspectives, encouraging a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in autoethnographic filmmaking. The methodological use of the scrapbook as a creative tool highlights the collaborative nature of filmmaking, emphasising visual references and dialogue in generating innovative ideas. This commitment to rigour situates the work within a broader academic context, reinforcing its scholarly merit and contribution to knowledge.

The significance of this research extends beyond theoretical contributions; it engages with contemporary issues surrounding representation and identity in film. By addressing the notion of 'Britishness' and its complexities in the cinematic landscape, this thesis contributes to ongoing discourse about national identity and cultural diversity. The films' ability to evoke a sense of place while transcending geographical boundaries reflects a critical engagement with the pluralistic nature of contemporary British identity, making this work relevant to current debates within the field.

The thematic exploration of perception and reality through visual and auditory innovations investigates the power of cinema as a medium for social commentary. In *A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours* (2017), the juxtaposition of black-and-white cinematography with colour photographs serves as a metaphorical exploration of historical and contemporary realities, prompting viewers to reflect on their own perceptions. This stylistic choice, alongside unconventional use of sound, enriches the narrative experience and encourages active engagement with the film, enhancing its impact as a medium of expression.

This thesis towards a PhD by Published Work, makes an original contribution to autoethnographic filmmaking, highlighting the importance of stylistic innovations and personal filmmaking narratives in enriching understanding of cultural identity and representation. Through rigorous analysis and engagement with established theoretical frameworks, this research illuminates the transformative potential of film as a medium for introspection and societal engagement. The findings demonstrate the relevance and originality of my work within ongoing discourse on film studies, cultural representation, and contemporary identity. This thesis affirms the capacity of autoethnographic filmmaking to challenge dominant narratives and encourage inclusive representation, enhancing collective understanding of the human experience. The rigorous analysis of these themes demonstrated the scholarly breadth of this work, addresses the criteria of originality, significance, and rigour as outlined by the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It is hoped that the insights presented herein will inspire further inquiry and exploration, paving the way for future innovations in both practice and scholarship.

This conclusion reframes the preceding discussion explicitly as an autoethnographic approach to filmmaking by demonstrating how the analysis has consistently emerged from the intersection of lived experience, creative practice, and critical reflection. Rather than treating autoethnography as an addendum, the chapter positions it as the structuring logic through which time, loss, relationships, and cultural identity have been explored: the films are not only objects of study but also records of embodied perception shaped by memory, class, and place. The examination of stylistic decisions, such as the use of still photography, long takes, sound design, and spatial composition, is grounded in my own situated experience of Liverpool, Art School, and working-class identity, transforming personal history into a mode of cultural analysis. In this sense, the discussion exemplifies autoethnography as a methodological process in which subjective encounter becomes a lens for interrogating wider social narratives and representational conventions within British cinema. The chapter demonstrates how filmmaking operates simultaneously as creative practice, reflective inquiry, and theoretical contribution, showing that the exploration of temporality, visual representation, and emotional experience is inseparable from my position within the cultural world being depicted. Through this integration of self, theory, and film form, the conclusion affirms autoethnographic filmmaking not as an afterthought, but as the central means by which the research generates knowledge about identity, memory, and representation.

Afterword

Completing this thesis has significantly shaped my philosophical approach as a filmmaker by providing a structured framework for critical self-reflection and analysis of my directorial practice. Engaging deeply with autoethnographic methodologies allowed me to examine my personal experiences and their intersection with broader cultural narratives, encouraging a deeper understanding of my artistic identity. This thesis towards a PhD by Published Work, has provided me with a space for critical reflection on my work, while also offering a significant and original contribution to the scholarly research on autoethnographic filmmaking, stylistic innovations, and the power of cinema as a medium for social commentary and cultural exploration.

Current work, *All's Well That Ends* (2025) a documentary about Poet, Paul Birtill and a love letter to literature titled *Literary Echoes* (2025) a film comprised of eighteen one minute films inspired by literature. *All's Well That Ends* (2025) has been recognised at sixteen international film festivals, winning four award and *Literary Echoes* has been recognised at five international film festivals, winning four awards. I also hold a development deal with screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce through Universal Music Group for a drama series titled *Playlist: The Transformative Potential of Adapting Songs into Film*. In parallel, I am developing a feature film written by Frank Cottrell Boyce for Monumental Pictures and ITV.

Recent work also includes, *Walton*, a poetic documentary, produced by Hat Trick Productions, it offers a different exploration of Walton, Liverpool, a community historically marked by economic deprivation yet rich in resilience and creativity. Through a poetic lens, it challenges the prevailing narratives that often depict working-class life solely through the prism of hardship. By highlighting the innovative ways in which residents contribute to their community, through art, mutual aid, and grassroots initiatives, the film seeks to illuminate the vibrancy and agency of this often, overlooked population. Central to this project is the invitation extended to young people to create micro-films that capture their own perspectives, thereby transforming them from passive subjects into active storytellers. This participatory approach not only empowers youth but also encourages a deeper sense of ownership over their narratives. Additionally, the film draws inspiration from Robert Tressell's *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, linking the community's historical struggles to contemporary efforts for social change, with Tressell's final resting place in Walton Cemetery serving as a poignant reminder of this legacy.

I am currently in development on an ITV drama series about the relationship between Ringo's mum Elsie and the Beatles fan club secretary, Frida Kelly. Frida was a seventeen year old girl from Dublin when she met Elsie in 1962 at her home in the Dingle Liverpool. From that moment the two became the greatest of friends until Elsie's death in 1987. This is the story of two how two working-class women loved an ordinary life while living in the eye of a global social and cultural storm. This is about the women in the Beatles lives an often untold story. This is drama can be a practice as research project that fits Social history and Popular Culture.

I hold a development deal with screen writer Frank Cottrell Boyce with Universal Music Group and Route 24, for a drama series titled Playlist: The Transformative Potential of Adapting Songs into Film.

Other activities include working with Professor Colin Fallows towards performance and recording with the Colin Fallows Ensemble, an electric guitar group dedicated to performing multi-layered soundworks rich with microtones, generating numerous overtones through bespoke tuning in resonant performance spaces.

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Carl Hunter: Published Works, Films, Books, Exhibitions and Radio.

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Radio

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Illustrator

Hunter, C., & Heney, C. (2014). *Menlove Treasure*, Illustrator and animation. Online.

Carl Hunter: Film Screenings and Dissemination.

Feature Films

Sometimes Always Never (2019)

Hurricane Films

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jun/16/sometimes-always-never-review-bill-nighy-frank-cottrell-boyce>

Directed by Carl Hunter

Written by Frank Cottrell Boyce.

Soundtrack by Edwyn Collins

Starring: Bill Nighy, Jenny Agutter, Sam Riley, Tim McInerney, Alice Lowe, Alexei Sayle.

Released in UK, Ireland, USA, Australia, New Zealand.

Distributed by Parkland.

Festival Screenings with Q&As

BFI London Film Festival

Mini British Film Festival Australia

Cinequest San Jose

Oakville Film Festival Toronto

Belfast Film Festival

Cheltenham Film Festival

NYC Independent Film Festival New York

Keswick Film Festival

Halifax FIN Atlantic Canada

Sudbury Cinéfest Canada

Vancouver VIFF Canada

Leiden Film Festival Netherlands

Masterclass Oakville Online film festival Toronto.

University Screenings and Q&As

Worcester University

Birmingham University

Edge Hill University

Leeds Art University

University of Central Lancashire

Lincoln University

Reviewed

The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph, LA Times, New York Times, New Yorker, Washington Post, Variety and Hollywood Reporter and many more.

Grow Your Own. (2009)

BBC Films/Warp Films/Pathe

Producer and Co Writer with Frank Cottrell Boyce)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfilms/films/grow-your-own>

Starring : Eddie Marsan, Benedict Wong, Omid Djalili, Alan Williams, Olivia Coleman, Diveen Henry, Phil Jackson, John Henshaw, Sara Hadland.

Distributed nationally by Pathe.

Screened on BBC 2 three times.

Short Films

Beholder (2022)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Awards

Milan Gold Awards best Documentary Short

Festival Screenings

Oakville Film Festival 12th Edition

Liverpool Indie Awards // LIA

Bolton International Film Festival

Paris Film Awards

Stockholm Short Festival

Portland Moviemakers Award

Florence Indie Film Festival

Paris Lady MovieMakers Festival

London International Filmmakers Festival

Hong Kong Indie Film Festival

Niagara Falls International Short Festival

Vienna Indie Short Film Festival

Vancouver International Movie Awards

Palermo International Film Festival

Monte Carlo Movie Awards

Rotterdam Independent Film Festival

Brussels World Film Festival

Vancouver Independent MovieMaker Awards

New York Movie Awards

Tiger (2024)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Awards

Milan Gold Awards Best Student Short

International Cosmopolitan Film Festival of Tokyo Best Student Short

ITALY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Best Student Short

Florence Film Awards Best Experimental Film

Florida Shorts Best Short Horror

Milan Gold Awards Best Experimental Film

Festival Screenings

Greece Film Festival Awards

Golden Reel Awards

BRAZIL INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Swiss International Film Festival

Toronto Lift-Off Film Festival

Berlin Indie Awards

Nashville Independent Filmmakers Festival

Hawaii International

10 Film Awards

Hong Kong Indie Film Festival
Dublin International Film10 Awards
San Francisco Arthouse Short Festival

Umbra (2024)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan
Awards
Paris Film Awards Best Student Film
Hamburg Indie Film Festival Best Female Short
New York Indie ShortFest Best Horror Short
Florence Film Awards Best Student Film

Festival Screenings

London International Filmmakers Festival
Oslo Independent Film Festival
Hong Kong Indie Film Festival
Tokyo ShortFest
Hawaii International Film Awards
Berlin Indie Awards
Rome International Short Festival
Rotterdam Independent Film Festival
Chicago Filmmaker Awards
Votkinsk Festival of Children's and Youth Cinema «VTK Start Fest»

Kitty's Laundrette (2024)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan
Awards
Edinburgh Film Awards Best Student Director (Female)
Paris Film Awards Best Student Film
London Movie Awards Best Indie Short Film (low budget)

Festival Screenings

CEBERG Film Awards
Northampton Film Festival (UK)
Oakville Film Festival 12th Edition
Rio de Janeiro World Film Festival
Vancouver Independent MovieMaker Awards
Praque Underground Film Festival
Dublin Movie Awards
London International Filmmakers Festival
Berlin Shorts Award

A Day In The Life (2017)

Directed by Carl Hunter. Written By Frank Cottrell Boyce.
Distributed by Hurricane Films
Starring: Paisley Reid and Tom O'connor.

Won 1st prize at London Labour Film Festival
Official selection Liverpool Short Film Festival
13 artists globally were approached to reimagine a track from the Beatles Sgt Pepper Album.

The film was picked up by The Beatles and housed on their website and twitter account. The first time The Beatles have sanctioned a 3rd party project.

A Winter's Tale (2016)

Directed by Carl Hunter

Written By Frank Cottrell Boyce (based on William Shakespear's The Winter's Tale).

Distributed by The British Council

Starring: Joesph Mawle and Maya Whatton.

Kiss Of Frost (2013)

Written and Directed by Carl Hunter

Starring: John Donnelly and Gary Bird.

Accelerate (2010)

Directed by Carl Hunter, Written By Frank Cottrell Boyce.

Keswick Film Festival Comma

Festival Manchester Abandon

Normal Devices Liverpool

The Allotment (2009)

Directed by Carl Hunter

Distributed by BBC Films

Starring: Rodney Bewes, Mark Gattiss, Miranda Hart, Pearce Quigley.

Pilot film for BBC Films. This transitioned into the BBC Films feature Grow Your Own.

Go Buddy Go (2009)

Producer Carl Hunter

Distributed by Northwest Vision.

Birthday Boy (2009)

Directed by Carl Hunter

Distributed by First Light

Nominated for Best Comedy at First Light Awards

Starring Lenny Wood.

Unloveable (1998)

Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor, written by Jonathan Bernstein

Starring: John Donnelly, Megan Orr and Mike Joyce.

Distributed by MIDA

Festival Screenings

Edinburgh Film Festival - competition

Kino Film Festival - competition

Cork Film Festival - competition

Kodak Film Festival London - competition

Sao Paulo Film Festival – competition

The film was acquired by the Manchester art gallery and was on display for 12 months.

The film has been shown as the short before War Zone

and Julian Temple's The Filth and the Fury.

The film toured Australia as part of a 'Best of British' package.
Smiths On Screen conference.

Channel 4 Ultra Short Film Project (2014)

Producer / mentor generating 10 second films in Liverpool and Keswick.
Ran Workshop with 1st time film makers for Channel 4 at Keswick Film Festival.

Documentaries

Walton (2025)

Director Carl Hunter
Producer Jaynie Millar
Hat Trick Production

All's Well That Ends (2025)

Director Carl Hunter
Producer Martin McQuillan
Institute for Creative Enterprise

Awards

Rome International Short Festival
Paris Film Awards
New York Movie Awards
London Movie Awards

Festival Screenings

Doc Only Copehagen
London International Filmmakers Festival
Cork Indie Film Awards
Nashville Independent Filmmakers Festival
San Diego International Film Awards
Paris International Short Festival
Rio de Janeiro World Film Festival
Melbourne Independent Film Festival
Santa Monica International Filmmaker Awards
New York Indie ShortFest
Milan Filmmaker Awards
Rotterdam Independent Film Festival
Tokyo ShortFest
2026 ARFF Berlin // International Film Festival
East Village New York Film Festival

Literary Echoes (2025)

Director Carl Hunter

Producer Martin McQuillan

Institute for Creative Enterprise

Awards

Milan Gold Awards

Golden Diana Awards

Palm Beach Shorts

Simply Shorts London

Festival Screenings

Screened: Unity Theatre Liverpool

Manchester Lift-Off Film Festival

Folkestone Film Festival

Austin International Art Festival

Palermo International Film Festival

Edinburgh Film Awards

Kitty and Her Accordion (2025)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Awards

London Movie Awards Best Short Documentary

Paris Film Awards Best Short Documentary

Festival screenings

East Village New York Film Festival

Hebden Bridge Film Festival

Hamburg Indie Film Festival

Northern Exposure

San Francisco Women Film Festival

Berlin Indie Awards

Tokyo Women Film Festival

Philadelphia International Filmmaker Awards

Hamburg Indie Film Festival

Algorithm Party (2025)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Festival screenings

Northampton Film Festival (UK)

37 Girona Film Festival

Mannheim Arts and Film Festival

Sydney Film Week

Lausanne International Film Festival

Cheese Mummy (2024)

Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Awards

Hong Kong Indie Film Festival Best women empowerment short

Italy international film festival Best short documentary

San Jose Independent Film Festival Best First Time Director

Festival Screenings

Brazil international film festival

Sydney Cinematic Horizons Film Festival

Silver screen film festival

The Women's Independent Film & Television Festival

Berlin Indie Awards

Nashville Independent Filmmakers Festival

FilmHaus

Edinburgh Film Awards

Paris Lady MovieMakers Festival

Rome International Short Festival

YETI FilmFest

Vancouver Independent MovieMaker Awards

New York International Women Festival

Rise Like A Phoenix (2023)

Directed By Carl Hunter

Awards

Calgary Indie Film Awards Best LGBTQ Film

Venice Under the Stars – International Film Festival Best LGBTQ

Festival Screenings

Los Angeles Lift-Off Film Festival

Oakville Film Festival 12th Edition

Sydney Cinematic Horizons Film Festival

Silver screen film festival

Art in motion film festival

Director Talents Movie Awards

Panorama International Indie Film Festival

LGBTQ+ Toronto & Los Angeles Film Festival

Cinequest Film Festival

Omovies film festival

Bendigo Queer Film Festival

Norwich Queer International Festival of Film

East London LGBTQ+ Film Festival

Darkland

PlanetCinema

F A R O Concurso de Cinema Mediterrâneo e Mundial

FilmHaus

C l i m a x

Cork Indie Film Awards

Rotterdam Independent Film Festival

Sacramento Independent Film Festival
Edinburgh Film Awards
Cal Film Festival
Modern Music Cities: A Eurovision Legacy Conference Liverpool.

Home (2023)

Directed by Philip McGuinness
Producer Carl Hunter and Martin McQuillan

Awards

International Gold Awards Best Super Short Film

Festival Screenings

Milan Gold Awards
Florence Film Awards
London Movie Awards
Rome International Short Festival
Hong Kong Indie Film Festival
Melbourne Independent Film Festival
New Orleans International Film Awards
Munich Short Film Awards
Madrid Arthouse Film Festival
Hawaii International Film Awards
Dallas Shorts
Tokyo Shorts
Florida Shorts
International Cosmopolitan Film Festival of Tokyo
Santa Cruz Independent Film Fest
San Francisco Arthouse Short Festival
Paris International Short Festival
Calgary Independent Film Festival
Berlin Shorts Award
Dubai Independent Film Festival

Stillness Rings (2020)

Directed by Carl Hunter and Clare Heney
Producer Martin McQuillan

Awards

Hong Kong Indie Film Festival Best covid film
International Art Film Festival Best Experimental Film

Festival Screenings

Niagra Falls International Film Festival
Venice Indie Film Festival
Hottomela International Film Festival Hong Kong Indie Film Festival
London Indie Film Festival
Montreal Arthouse Film Festival Dallas Movie Awards Festival
International Art Film Festival Milan Arthouse Film Awards
Sicily Art Cinema Festival

Berlin Shorts Awards
New York Movie Awards
Stockholm Short Festival
London International Filmmakers Festival
Florence Indie Film Festival
Niagara Falls International Short Festival
Palermo International Film Festival
Milan Filmmaker Awards
Berlin Shorts Award
Dallas Movie Awards Festival
Monte Carlo Movie Awards
Delivered a post screening Q&A with the poet, Jacqueline Saphra at the Gravity Festival 2021.

More Than Time (2020)

Directed by Carl Hunter
Producer Martin McQuillan

Awards

Nominated for a Jury award at the 2021 Oakville International Film Festival, Toronto.
Winner International Cosmopolitan film festival Tokyo.

Festival Screenings

San Francisco Indie Short Film Festival
Hollywood Short Film Festival
Rome Movie Awards
Alt Fest
Sunday Shorts Film Festival Portugal
Birmingham Film And Television Festival
British Documentary Festival
Cheltenham International Film Festival
Lift Off Manchester
Amsterdam World International Film Festival
Cinequest Film And VR Festival San Jose
South Film And Arts Academy
Paris International Short Festival
Blow Up Festival Chicago
Hollywood Tiber Film Awards
Independent Shorts Awards
Los Angeles Film Awards
Florence Film Awards
Mobile Film Festival Macedonia.
Scrittura E Immagine Short Film Festival Italy

The Art School Dance Goes On Forever (2015)

Directed by Carl Hunter and Clare Heney
Mick Jones (The Clash) documentary, A short film about Mick's Rock 'n' Roll Library exhibition at the Venice Biennale.

<https://www.xsnoize.com/mick-jones-of-the-clash-opens-the-rock-and-roll-public-library/>
Screened online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ5BXAURLg0>

What Matters (2014)

Directed by Carl Hunter and Clare Heney
Distributed by World Merit Day
Screened The BT Conference Centre

Putting Down Roots (2005)

3x episodes for Channel 4.
Directed by Carl Hunter
Screened: Channel 4
The Guardian Pick of The Day

In The Club (2003)

Episode 1, The Cavern
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

In The Club (2003)

Episode 2, Wigan Casino
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

In The Club (2003)

Episode 3, Erics
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

In The Club (2003)

Episode 4, Cream
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Northern Exposure (1997)

Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Cover Stories (2000)

Episode 1, The 70's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Cover Stories (2000)

Episode 2, The 80's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Cover Stories (2000)

Episode 3, The 90's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Cover Stories (2000)

Episode 4, The early 2000's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Tales From The River Bank (1997)

Episode 1, The 60's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Tales From The River Bank (2000)

Episode 2, The 70's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Tales From The River Bank (2000)

Episode 3, The 80's's part 1.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Tales From The River Bank (2000)

Episode 4, The 80's's part 2.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Tales From The River Bank (2000)

Episode 5, The 90's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

God Is (1998)

Directed by Carl Hunter
Distributed by Northwest Vision

The Raid (1997)

Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Distributed by Northwest Vision

Festival Screenings
Cork Film Festival
The Limerick film festival

The World of the End (1996)
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

The Life of Wylie (1996)
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Granada Television

Mersey Moments (1995)
Episode 1, Seeing The Beatles
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Channel 4

Mersey Moments (1995)
Episode 2, The Dock Strike shirt worn by Robbie Fowler.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Channel 4

Mersey Moments (1995)
Episode 3, Memories of Racism in the 1950's.
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Channel 4

Cottage Cheese (1995)
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Channel 4.

Bloodsports For All (1995)
Directed by Carl Hunter, Peter Naylor
Screened: Channel 4.

Illustrations

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Fig 1
Carl Hunter
More Than Time (2020)
Duration 8 minutes
The Institute for Creative Enterprise

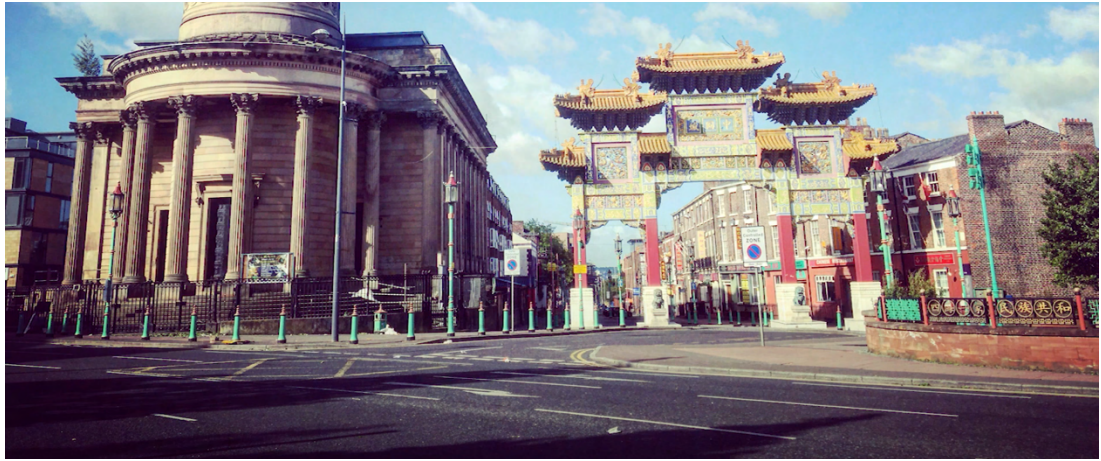


Fig 2.
Carl Hunter
More Than Time (2020)
Duration 8 minutes
The Institute for Creative Enterprise
Photograph of empty Liverpool streets.



Fig 3.
 Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
 Theatrical poster
 Duration 90 minutes
 Distributed by Parkland
 Goldfinch Studios and Hurricane Films

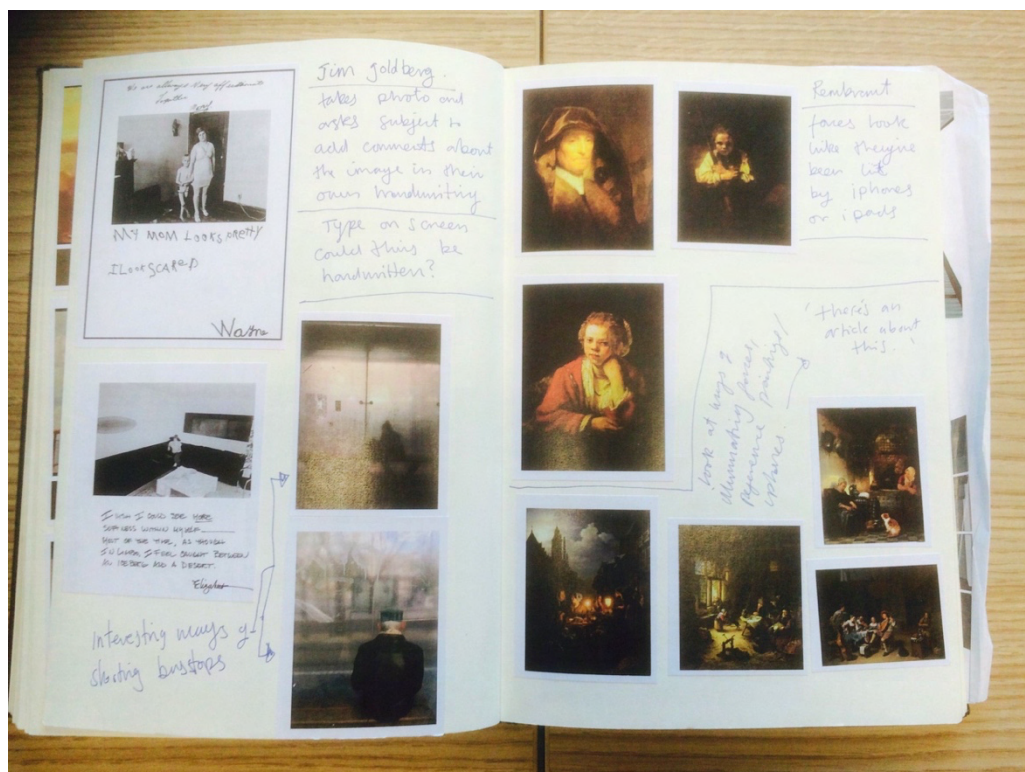
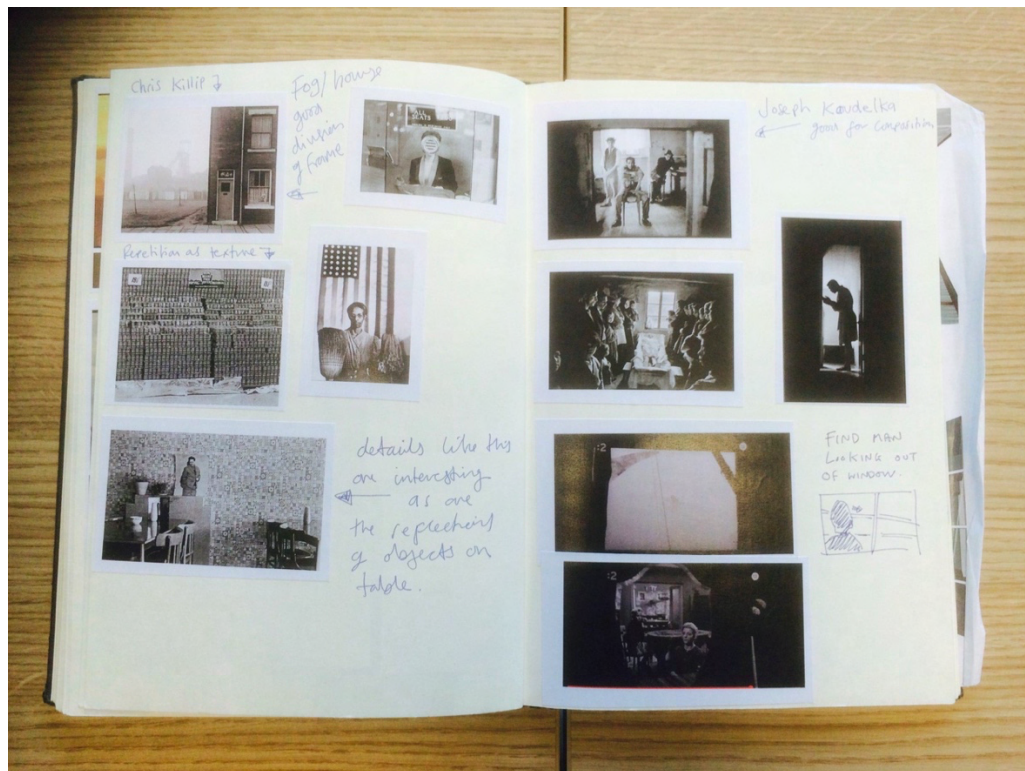


Fig 4.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Research Pages from scrapbook.
Private Collection



Fig 4.
 Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
 Research Pages from scrapbook.
 Private Collection

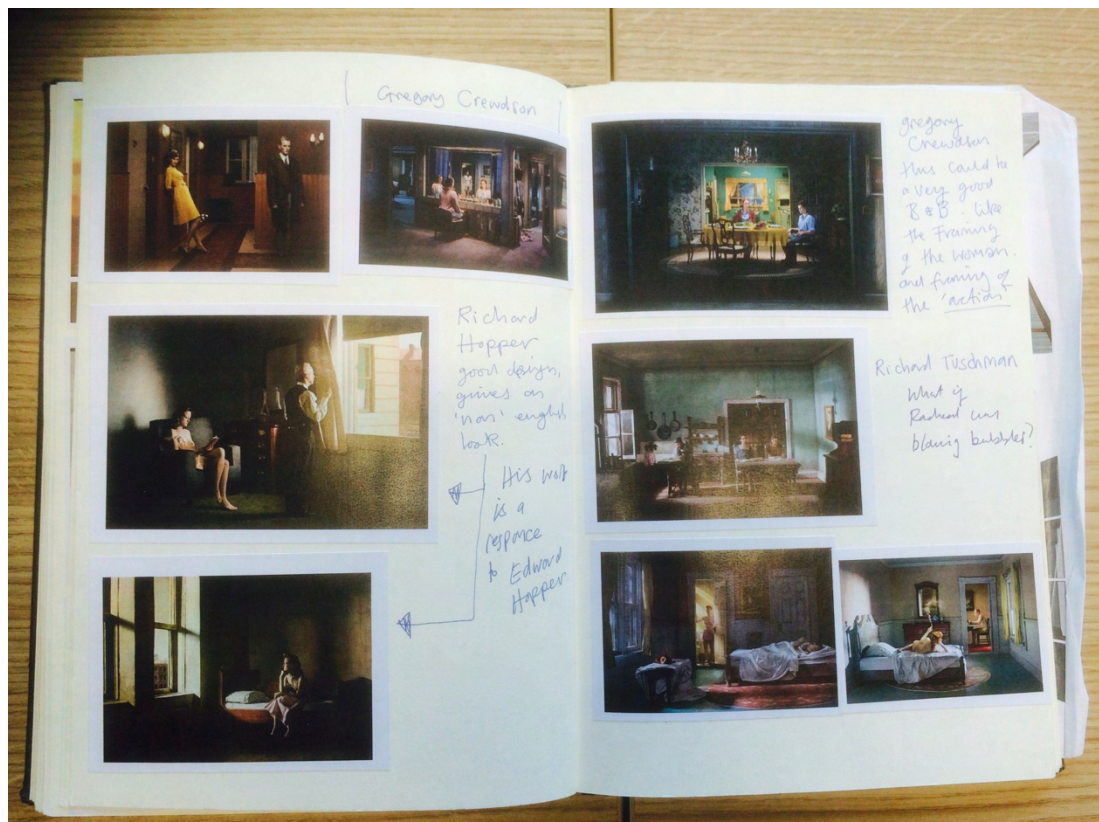


Fig 4.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Research Pages from scrapbook.
Private Collection





Fig 5.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Research Polaroids
Private Collection



Fig 5.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Research Polaroids
Private Collection



Fig 6.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Back projections from car scenes
Duration 90 minutes
Distributed by Parkland
Goldfinch Studios and Hurricane Films

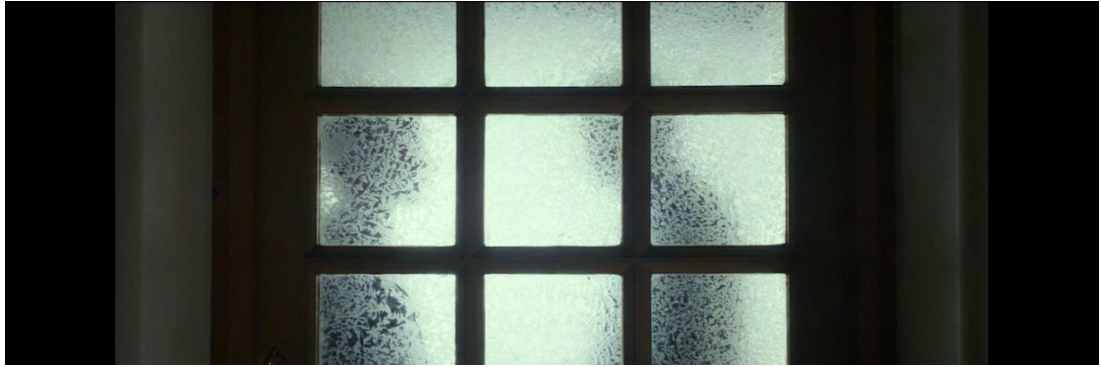


Fig 7.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Duration 90 minutes
Top Photo: Still from morgue scene.

Bottom photographs: Saul Leiter.
Distributed by Parkland
Goldfinch Studios and Hurricane Films
<https://www.howardgreenberg.com/exhibitions/125-saul-leiter/>



Fig 8.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Duration 90 minutes
Bill Nighy in opening scene.
Distributed by Parkland
Goldfinch Studios and Hurricane Films



Fig 9.
Carl Hunter
Some Times Always Never (2019)
Duration 90 minutes
Top photo: Still from *Some Times Always Never* (2019)

Bottom Photograph: Gregory Crewdson. Untitled (Sunday Roast)
https://dmaeducatorblog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/crewdson_untitled-sunday-roast-winter.jpg
Distributed by Parkland
Goldfinch Studios and Hurricane Films



Fig 10.
Carl Hunter
A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)
Duration 8 minutes
Example of an image inspired by Saul Leiter.
Culture Liverpool
Culture Liverpool, Hurricane Films



Fig 11.
Carl Hunter
A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)
Duration 8 minutes
Opening scene
Culture Liverpool, Hurricane Films



Fig 12.
Carl Hunter
A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)
Duration 8 minutes
Weather Vane
Culture Liverpool, Hurricane Films



Fig 13
Carl Hunter
A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)
Duration 8 minutes
Arthur (Tom O'Connor) scene inspired by Cecil Beaton.
Culture Liverpool, Hurricane Films



Fig 14
Carl Hunter
A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)
Duration 8 minutes.
Top photo: Ellie (Paisley Reid) on the bus.

Bottom photo: King Street (tear stained) Wallasey 1978. Tom Wood
Culture Liverpool, Hurricane Films.
<https://www.creativereview.co.uk/tom-wood-101-pictures-merseyside/>

Fig 15.

Carl Hunter

A Day In The Life: 24 Zero Hours (2017)

Duration 8 minutes.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band cover 1967. Designed by Peter Blake and Jann Haworth
Parlophone. Distributed by EMI.

<https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/whos-who-on-the-beatles-sgt-peppers-lonely-hearts-club-band-album-cover/>

Appendix 1: Film Poster for *Sometimes Always Never* (2019)

Film Posters and the Narrative Image

By leveraging my multidisciplinary background and employing my skills as a graphic designer and art director, I designed an iconic narrative image for the film poster that encapsulates the film's thematic essence. It's here that I offer an analysis of the film's poster.

A film poster constitutes a critical component of the promotional and marketing strategy for an impending cinematic release. It serves to encapsulate the film's core themes and aesthetic, effectively communicating its narrative essence to potential audiences. The utilisation of film posters extends across various platforms, including theatrical displays, DVD covers, online promotion, and advertising campaigns. To achieve effective promotion, designers are tasked with the challenge of creating posters that not only visually engage but also remain relevant to the film's content and genre. This necessitates a nuanced understanding of visual rhetoric, genre conventions, and audience expectations, ensuring that the poster functions as both an artistic representation and a persuasive tool that entices viewers to engage with the film. Notable designers include Saul Bass, Mitchell Hooks, Burt Kleegeer, and Eileen Steinbach.

Bill Nighy's posture, facing away from the viewer in the poster, invites a complex semiotic interpretation. His silhouette evokes a sense of mystery and introspection, suggesting that he embodies not merely a character but a symbolic figure inviting the audience to embark on a journey of exploration and self-discovery. This positioning aligns him with archetypal figures, like the Pied Piper, who beckons followers into uncharted territory. The viewer's gaze becomes a metaphorical invitation to engage with the narrative of his quest, emphasising the themes of exploration and enlightenment.

The visual composition of the poster is reminiscent of René Magritte's painting *Son of Man* (1946), where the figure is obscured by a floating apple, and of the poster for the film *Being There* (1979). In all these artworks, the subject's identity is concealed, fostering a sense of intrigue. Nighy's overcoat, coupled with the umbrella, connote a quintessentially British object; this juxtaposes the poster's broader, perhaps more cosmopolitan, aesthetic. This duality suggests a tension between local identity and global influences. In their paper on the research on the application of cultural symbol digitization in movie poster design, Liu Chunyuan states that 'symbols can tell viewers information about characters; they can also reveal information about the genre of the film' (Chunyuan & Li, 2021).

The umbrella also carries connotations of protection and self-preservation, evocative of Claes Oldenburg's *Crusoe's Umbrella* (1979), which serves as a metaphor for safeguarding oneself in an unpredictable world. By holding the umbrella, Nighy not only signifies physical protection against the elements but also embodies a shield against the complexities of life, reflecting the character's psychological state as he faces the vast sea. Saussure explains in *The Objects of Affection: Semiotics and Consumer Culture* that 'signs can be divided into two main parts, being the signifier (the sound or image) and signified (the concept)' (Berger, J. 2010).

His orientation towards the coastline further enriches the semiotic reading. The sea, a historical conduit for the exchange of ideas, philosophies, and cultures, symbolises the fluidity of human experience. Liverpool, with its storied maritime history, serves as a backdrop where diverse narratives converge, and this coastline has witnessed the arrival and departure of myriad influences, shaping local culture through interaction and discourse. Nighy's gaze toward the horizon embodies the perpetual quest for understanding and connection, emphasising the character's role as an intermediary between the past and the future.

The use of icon Scrabble tiles in the film's typography serves as a significant semiotic device, linking the visual representation to the cultural connotations of the iconic word game. This typographic choice not only signifies the centrality of Scrabble within the film's narrative but also evokes themes of language, play, and strategy. By embedding the game into the visual identity, the typography reinforces the game's role as a pivotal storytelling mechanism.

Appendix 2: Press Reviews for *Sometimes Always Never* (2019)

A comprehensive compilation of press reviews for the film, *Sometimes Always Never* (2019) which serve as a form of peer review.

Press: UK, USA and New Zealand and Australia

Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/287433185>

Mark Kermode

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4ESJb3Od44>

Rotten Tomatoes, 93 reviews.

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sometimes_always_never/reviews?type=top_critics

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jun/16/sometimes-always-never-review-bill-nighy-frank-cottrell-boyce>

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/oct/12/sometimes-always-never-review-bill-nighy-london-film-festival>

The Up Coming London Film Festival

<https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2018/10/12/london-film-festival-2018-sometimes-always-never-review/>

Screen Daily

<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/sometimes-always-never-london-review/5133589.article>

Empire

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/sometimes-always-never-review/>

Financial Times

<https://www.ft.com/content/53aa601a-8d19-11e9-a1c1-51bf8f989972>

The Standard

<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/film/sometimes-always-never-review-a-comedy-double-score-for-bill-nighy-a4167461.html>

Dmovies

<https://dmovies.org/2019/06/09/sometimes-always-never/>

Phacemag

<https://www.phacemag.com/review---sometimes-always-never.html>

Clash Music

<https://www.clashmusic.com/news/edwyn-collins-contributes-to-new-soundtrack-project>

Flickering Myth

<https://www.flickeringmyth.com/2018/10/trailer-for-sometimes-always-never-starring-bill-nighy-and-sam-riley/>

Cineuropa

<https://www.cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/362346/>

Letterboxed

<https://letterboxd.com/film/sometimes-always-never/>

Blazing Minds

<https://blazingminds.co.uk/new-trailer-sometimes-always-never/>

Film Dude

<https://www.filmdude.com.au/review/sometimes-always-never>

Hero Magazine

<http://hero-magazine.com/article/135360/sam-riley/>

Wire

<http://www.jwire.com.au/sometimes-always-never-a-film-review-by-roz-tarszisz/>

Slant Magazine

<https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/sometimes-always-never-review/>

Film Link

<https://www.filmink.com.au/reviews/sometimes-always-never/>

New Movies

<https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/movies/new-movies/sometimes-always-never-an-unexpected-offbeat-delight/news-story/c0556acbba7554827b43da587f4aac44>

John McDonald

<https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/2019/sometimes-always-never/>

The Blurb

<http://theblurb.com.au/wp/sometimes-always-never-movie-review/>

City News

<https://citynews.com.au/2019/movie-review-sometimes-always-never-pg/>

The Telegraph

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/sometimes-always-never-review-oddball-gem-scrabble-sadness-english/>

Critical Popcorn

<https://criticalpopcorn.com/2019/06/02/sometimes-always-never-review-dir-carl-hunter-2019/>

Radio 3 Essential Classics

BBC Radio 3 'Essential Classics' - interview with Tim McInnerny (around 1 hr 50 mins in):
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00061hj>

We Review

<https://theweereview.com/review/sometimes-always-never/>

Mail Online - Seven Unmissable Events:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/event/article-7136749/From-Fleetwood-Mac-Downton-Abbey-concert-Bill-Nighy-cinemas-7-Unmissable-Events.html>

Movies On Weekends

<https://moviesonweekends.com/2019/06/13/sometimes-always-never-review/>

New Zealand Herald

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/movie-review-sometimes-always-never/LXQIKU2BBSTZNFTWVQNI5ED6ZY/>

Chicago Crusader

<https://chicagocrusader.com/sometimes-always-never-is-touching-film-about-sustaining-within-loss/>

Reel News Daily

<http://reelnewsdaily.com/2020/06/09/review-sometimes-always-never-is-as-charming-as-its-leading-man-bill-nighy/>

Unseen Films

<http://www.unseenfilms.net/2020/06/sometimes-always-never-2020.html>

IMDB Pick-up of The Wrap

<https://www.imdb.com/news/ni62914410>

Maddwolf

<https://maddwolf.com/new-in-theaters/word-for-word/-sthash.ezT8XpmS.dpbs>

Military Press

<http://www.militarypress.com/sometimes-always-never-is-silent-family-grief/>

Patch (imperial beach, ca)

<https://patch.com/california/imperialbeach/sometimes-always-never-silent-family-grief>

The Wrap

<https://www.thewrap.com/sometimes-always-never-film-review-bill-nighy-helps-lift-scatter-brained-family-drama/>

Common Sense Media

<https://www.common Sense Media.org/movie-reviews/sometimes-always-never>

Easy Reader News

<https://easyreadernews.com/sometimes-always-never-almost-movie/>

Indiewire

<https://www.indiewire.com/criticism/movies/sometimes-always-never-review-bill-nighy-1202236583/>

The Only Critic

<https://www.theonlycritic.com/post/review-bill-nighy-s-charm-elevates-cheeky-sometimes-always-never>

Metro (Philadelphia)

<https://metrophiladelphia.com/bill-nighy-on-playing-the-role-he-always-wanted-in-sometimes-always-never/>

Berkeleyside

<https://www.berkeleyside.com/2020/06/11/small-screen-berkeley-sometimes-always-never-the-black-panthers-and-too-late-for-tears>

Boston Globe

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/11/arts/tailor-made-role-bill-nighy-sometimes-always-never/>

DISAPPOINTMENT MEDIA: June 11, 2020: Camden Ferrell's 3 out of 5-rating review ran with artwork

<https://www.disappointmentmedia.com/reviews/sometimes-always-never-a-flawed-but-sweet-scrabble-drama>

IMDB: Pick-up of The Playlist

<https://www.imdb.com/news/ni62916673>

The Playlist

<https://theplaylist.net/sometimes-always-never-review-20200611/>

Screenrant

<https://screenrant.com/bill-nighys-best-movies-rotten-tomatoes/>

Showbiz Cheatsheet

<https://www.cheatsheet.com/news/sometimes-always-never-movie-review-sam-riley-and-bill-nighy-play-the-waiting-game.html/>

Deadline Hollywood

<https://deadline.com/2020/06/sometimes-always-never-for-they-know-not-what-they-do-specialty-streaming-preview-1202957181/>

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/new-movies-to-stream-this-week-in-my-blood-it-runs-you-dont-know-me-and-more/2020/06/10/02488452-a6a6-11ea-b619-3f9133bbb482_story.html

Buzzfeed

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/whitneyjefferson/new-movies-released-june-12-2020>

Cinezine Kane

<https://cinezinekane.com/2020/06/12/fathers-sons-scrabble-sometimes-always-never/>

Columbus Underground

<https://www.columbusunderground.com/some-great-home-viewing-this-week-ge1>

Combustible Celluloid

https://www.combustiblecelluloid.com/2020/sometimes_always_never.shtml

Deadline

<https://deadline.com/2020/06/sometimes-always-never-for-they-know-not-what-they-do-specialty-streaming-preview-1202957181/>

Discdish.com

<http://www.discdish.com/2020/06/12/film-review-sometimes-always-never/>

Film-Forward

<https://film-forward.com/dvdon-demand/sometimes-always-never>

Kpcc "Film Week

<https://www.scpr.org/programs/airtalk/2020/06/12/65713/filmweek-the-king-of-staten-island-da-5-bloods-art/>

THE MN MOVIE MAN: June 11, 2020: Joe Botten's 5 out of 10-rating review ran with poster.

<https://joethemnmovieman.com/2020/06/11/soalne/>

Movies With Abe

<http://www.movieswithabe.com/2020/06/movie-with-abe-sometimes-always-never.html>

Boston Herald

<https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/06/12/sometimes-always-never-must-see-quirky-brit-fun/>

Flick Filosopher

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