Inventing the British nano budget comedy film, through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style

by
David Sigston Thompson

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Abstract

Britain has an extensive comic tradition in the arts from theatre in Shakespearean times, through to contemporary situation comedies on television and streaming platforms. Although in the history of cinema, British comedy has been present it is not as prevalent and varied. Indeed, the dominant types of story and genres are relatively restricted to a few areas in British cinema; e.g. social realism, period drama and Working Title style comedy are dominant UK outputs. In America, many successful careers were born out of DIY, nano budget, American indie comedy films and filmmakers (e.g. Richard Linklater, Robert Rodriguez, Wes Anderson) which have diverse strands in many story areas. Historically deriving from New York and Austin, Texas, American indie film comedies are not necessarily laugh out loud but retain meaningful, resonant, and heartfelt stories identifiable across the world; Slacker (1990), Clerks (1994), The Brothers McMullen (1995), The Puffy Chair (2005), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007). Such films have a liberal cool approach and may include stories of people who refuse the status quo, but are not necessarily raging against it. This study explores how to invent a different type of British comedy, through the lens of American indie film. The results were identifiable qualities transferable into a British context, and a methodology developed that could be used in future with different story types and genres. The wider implications of this are the broadening of approaches to British filmmaking, without using conventional styles to comedy more commonly found in British cinema. The guidelines produced also enable the transferring of the sub genre of indie film comedy, into another country or cultural context.

My methods were to employ a literature review based on my research questions, case studies of examples followed by a series of practice film experiments. This was then cascaded into a series of guidelines which were then tested in screenplay and example scenes form. The literature review was divided into the below research questions for systematic investigation. This then set the platform to explore case studies and practice film experiments that played with new form and style, informing how to make a British Indie film comedy. This enabled the formation of guidelines to take into the final practice of feature film screenplay and example scenes. The literature review was critical in underpinning and exploring what information existed on the subject. The two foremost texts were Michael Z. Newman's 'Indie: An American Film Culture' (2011) and John Berra's 'Declarations of Independence' (2008), which uncovered the genesis and philosophical underpinnings of an indie film in practice and the context as to how it developed. Others were critical too, such as Ted Hope's 'Hope for Film' (2014) which revealed many insights about the indie industry, but the above two texts straddled the two areas underpinning the approach in practice.

The case studies of films enabled a development of that practice described, by observing the different ways three different case studies films engaged with the principles of the literature review. From the literature review, four key interim findings were moulded from these works. The interim findings of indie comedy were; the counter culture alternative to national cinema; contains a buoyancy and life affirming quality with existential themes; gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity; is idiosyncratic, weird and different in some way. These were exciting to discover, if not completely practical at this stage to implement. But adequate to take into practice experiments where I could explore and test to discover further.

The three practice film experiments escalated from personal voice exploration to filmed scenes of comedy drama, rigorously reflected on each time, to deeply draw out the intension of the process: guidelines of how to make a British indie film comedy. This testing process was mainly unsuccessful but therefore informed what not to do, than successfully conveying what to actually do, to inform a British indie film comedy approach. That lack of success uncovered a roadmap of additional details beneath the interim findings and laid the platform to produce more detailed solid guidelines to take into my final practice, of a feature film screenplay and example scenes.

The resulting final screenplay and example scenes produced the dynamism I was working towards. Applying these rigorously produced guidelines to the creative ideas process of a screenplay and then filming some selected scenes managed to birth a new indie approach which was invigorating to experience and observe and circle back to my original research question, aims and objectives. The original contribution to knowledge to this field are therefore a refined set of guidelines to make a British indie film comedy, and a structure to deploy on further genres and styles of filmmaking to transfer into a British context, but also which could be adapted to any country, or different cultural context.

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Thesis Structure Plan

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1. Prologue

In in order to prepare for this study I presented ideas at both the Screenwriting Research Network (SRN) and the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) conferences. The abstracts for which are available in Appendix II. From those experiences it became clear that the use of the word 'indie' was a potentially confusing phrase which required clarification.

PhD title word usage definition: 'indie'

This study is inspired by American indie film comedies, which were part of the emergence of a genre known as American indie film, an off shoot of American independent film, chronologically defined as the era of the mini-majors from 1989 - 2010. When this thesis uses the word 'indie', it specifically means American indie film of this period, not a shortened version independent film. Indie is a genre defined all on its own (Newman, 2011, p1). Characteristics of American indie film comedy include; an added connotation of fashionable cool, free economic distinctions (e.g. it could be attached to a studio thus making it not independent), with more importance placed on displaying overtones of social identity (Newman, 2011, p.4).

PhD title word usage definition: 'nano'

According to film data analyst Stephen Follows (2014), 'low budget' is defined as between £350,000 and £1.38 million and 'micro budget' £100,000 - £350,000. There is no recognised or acknowledged unit of measurement below these figures and yet there is a plethora of filmmaking in this even lower category. Over the last three decades, with the advancement of digital and more easily accessible equipment, there is a category of film below the line of micro budget, where filmmakers have made predominantly self-funded projects ranging from as little as a few pounds up to the £100,000 mark.

Below 'micro', metrically the next unit of measurement is 'nano'. Thus, we can define 'nano budget' films as below the threshold of micro budget:

£0 - £100,000	Nano Budget
£100,000 - £350,000	Micro budget
£350,000 - £1,380,000	Low Budget

Nano budget films are essentially self-funded films, which may have raised some small capital to contribute to an otherwise self-funded project. Filmmakers then utilise low-cost production methods and rely on networks within the film community to keep the budget minimal. Actors often serve in crew roles; DIY methods of production are employed creating an all together different mode of production to micro and low budget films. In the period of the mini majors, 1989 - 2010, there were numerous of these produced in America, some of which were comedies and/or classed as comedies: Slacker (1990), El Mariachi (1992), Clerks (1994), The Brothers McMullen (1995), Mutual Appreciation (2005), The Puffy Chair (2005), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007). Yet despite this raft of comedy filmmaking in America, contrastingly, and despite the UK's long tradition of comedy (Hunter, I.Q. and Porter, 2012., p.1) none of note were self-funded DIY comedies coming from the UK. Also contrasting for example, with the culture of amateur dramatics and fringe theatre in the UK. Those considered low budget in this indie period such as Trainspotting (1996), The Full Monty (1997) or Shooting Fish (1997), almost always had some kind of large government grant support, as well as multiples in the millions as budget. Yet Brits will happily while away their hours, slaving away at theatres up and down the country for amateur dramatics societies, and comedy acts. This is the gap I wish to explore in my study as the original contribution to knowledge: creating the British indie film, nano budget comedy.

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2. How to read this thesis

This thesis follows a methodical and systematic action research format of investigating my own practice. Beginning with Research Question, Aims and Objectives, Methodology and Literature review. The Literature review is written and divided in the headings of my Research Question, Aims and Objectives in order to be systematic. It incorporates throughout but then ends with contextual summaries of American and British cinema. Following this, there is further analysis through three case studies both in written and accompanying video essay form, to watch examples visually that I am referring to in text. From this long analysis piece, there is then a section summarising the findings from these works thus far; Interim Findings.

It is the practice then that progresses the Interim Findings with three film experiments and reflections to explore and test these discoveries. This section is then reinforced and further informed to produce guidelines in practice, for making a British indie film comedy. These are then tested again in practice with feature length screenplay and example scenes. I conclude with overall findings and possibilities moving forward.

In principle, once the methodological and literature review groundwork has been laid, the thesis moves into practice and reflection working hand in hand. The written case studies are accompanied by video, each experiment by in depth reflection and analysis, to then produce guidelines of production which are then tested and reflected upon. A rigorous, in-depth process that can be replicated for other formats, with practice at its heart.

Some of the practice was restricted by Covid-19, for example Experiment 1, which gave limitations to filmmaking possibilities, which does need to be taken into consideration, but nonetheless the footage and resulting editing, fits and chimes with the overall process.

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3. Introduction

British comedy context

Britain's wide variety of arts and culture has brought the world great diversity. Poetry and prose, rock and classical music, all kinds of genres and forms from stage to screen; comedy and tragedy, drama and documentary. From Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, Romanticism poets, Dickens, Austen, Roald Dahl, George Orwell, music from Gilbert and Sullivan, The Beatles, Bowie, Pink Floyd, One Direction, Adele and Ed Sheeran, the list goes on and on. Working in different forms, formats and styles; experimental, acoustic, electric, reggae, rock, pop, verse, prose, comedy, romance, tragedy, crime dramas and more, with success and renown the world over. More modern day forms of comedy include those such as Monty Python, Blackadder, iconic sketch shows and personalities from the television such as Alan Partridge, Mrs Merton, Ali G, David Brent, Fleabag; an abundance of creative outputs and styles. Yet the possibilities for British cinema seem to have only a few dominant streams, despite this rich history; social realism, period drama and Working Title style comedy are dominant. There are very few of the coming of age stories for example, so prevalent in American cinema. Another example is how New York cinema historically revels in stories about the stage and the lives of actors and artists on Broadway, for example Bullets over Broadway (1994), She's Funny that Way (2014) and Birdman (2014), and many of the films by Woody Allen. Yet the magical London west end, theatreland, despite being the seat and home of theatre since the Shakespearean times, does not. When it has been produced it is in the form of large budget period drama (e.g. Shakespeare in Love [1998]) and not a contemporary film setting.

There is a lack of diversity of examples and outputs in British cinema and comedy is considered something within the fabric of being British (Hunter, I.Q. and Porter, 2012., p.2). Indeed, according to a study by the The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce (2004) in an attempt to understand British perceptions abroad, sense of humour and clever wit were key outcomes and observations. Despite the vast array of sketch shows, fine comedy drama and

tradition, there is little contemporarily conveyed on the silver screen past the likes of Richard Curtis or Simon Pegg, or the slapstick star vehicles from the likes of Sasha Baron Cohen.

American indie film

American indie film and its sub genre indie film comedy, have defined roots in alternative popular culture of the 90s, the style of which, (counter culture national cinema) Newman suggests should be reflective of the soul of national life, in this case British life (Newman, 2014, p.53). There is an argument to suggest that funding structures in America and Britain have affected this stylistic growth, due to American film being commercially funded and British film being state funded. American commercially funded films benefit from vertically integrated studio businesses, who take care of their product from start to finish, marketing, advertising and distribution and more. Government funded films are not vertically integrated and are generally only in charge of the production process, selling the film to distributers who in turn sell to exhibitors, having little control over the process once production is complete. As British films are government funded, they have a tendency to be used for political means to change society in order to give validity to the funding (Yule and Manderson, 2014, p.10-12). Because not vertically integrated, they are then released into the world as if they were a major blockbuster, often in government controlled quotas in British multiplex cinemas, as well as art houses, hoping for some kind of slim recoup of excessive losses (Berra, 2008, p.138). Both Yule and Manderson and John Berra concur that this political motivation, means it encourages downbeat stories about depressing situations, even being used as an exponential mouthpiece for pollical views. On the other hand commercial, vertically integrated indie films which are at some point sold to studios, get hold of a film product with the care that a vertically integrated business can offer, such as targeted marketing, slow roll outs, building the reputation of a film (Berra, 2016, p.138). Vertical integration therefore potentially allows for creative freedom of expression, in a different way to government state funded films. The only vertical integration remit being to make the product accessible to a global audience so they can sell it, within the boundaries of clear storytelling. This encourages filmmakers in a commercial system (i.e. America) to use classical American literary figures, characters familiar with global audiences; outsiders, drifters, loners, criminals, law enforcement officers and aspiring heroes (Berra, 2016, p.161).

Nano budget films in the UK

In terms of nano budget filmmaking in Britain, there is some evidence of this taking place outside of the comedy genre. It has generally meant social realism and horror genre films; Small Time (1996), Colin (2008), Down Terrace (2009) or more recently the impressive Bait (2019). Cheaper locations and production values have generally meant negative stories and not comedy in Britain. The roots of this tendency perhaps lie in the great critical success and prestige that social realist films have brought the UK (Yule and Manderson, 2014, p.1). This 'miserabilist', down cast and down ending approach, has then been taken on at a nano budget level as a route to break into the industry. Perhaps the production values to make such stories, i.e. gritty and poverty stricken, are easier to come by. American indie film is defined in a number of texts but most specifically and analytically by Newman in his book Indie: An American Film Culture (2011). Britain uses 'indie' and 'independent' interchangeably and there is a conflict of opinions on definition, as well as a paucity of this type of film in the UK. The purpose and aim of this thesis is to explore what makes a film an indie film and how this can be realised in the UK context.

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4. Research Question, Aims and Objectives

RESEARCH QUESTION

In what ways can American counter cultural indie approaches to film comedy style and aesthetics, contribute to the inventing of the British nano budget comedy film?

AIMS

1. Discover new aesthetic and stylistic approaches to filmmaking that can support filmmakers re-evaluate and/or re-invent their creative relationship to making comedy films in the UK.

2. Articulate a series of creative filmmaking strategies that can help encourage an indie counter cultural comedy filmmaking culture in the UK.

OBJECTIVES

1. Define what American indie film comedy is both stylistically and aesthetically through industry opinion, academia and practice research.

2. Explore the genesis of creating an indie film comedy, with a focus at nano budget level.

3. Experiment with aesthetic response to indie film comedy style in a British context.

4. Using these discoveries, take that learning into a new form, broadening possibilities and inviting diversity for British films and filmmakers by making an indie film comedy at nano budget level, in a British context.

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5. Methodology

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3. Research Methods
4. Methods of Analysis
5. Evaluation and Justification of Methodological Choices
6. Limitations of this study

1. Introduction

This methodology is systematic and structured whilst giving the space for the spontaneity and creativity to arise. Using the theoretical and analytical basis, I engaged in practice-led methods to put making at the centre of creation of knowledge (Smith, 2009, p.42). This was then designed to uncover those creative options and new associations by the solid grounding of research making a bedrock of intense concentration, placed within an open landscape of free range possibility (Smith, 2009, p.47). This practice led approach was supported by a framework of critical reflection and investigating my own practice.

2. Study Design and Research Positionality

This study follows a cyclical process of action, reflection and evaluation, whereby experience based information was built on to inform the final outcomes and outputs, i.e. an action research approach. This cycle was carried out effectively four times; three film experiments with reflections and the final output of feature film script and example scenes with reflection. With three evaluation points; interim findings, guidelines to an indie film and conclusion. The methodology can be copied and is able to be duplicated for different subject matter. A design that a filmmaker can come to and use, to apply different story structures and genres from one context to another.

My own background and therefore research positionality, stems from my experiences as a cinema manager, media freelancer and filmmaker, and then more recently as an education professional. My acknowledged perspective for this research is dually as an industry experienced filmmaker and educationalist, allowing me the personal connection to the issue, to effect change. My experiences have given me strong beliefs regarding how cinema has been affected in the indie film period, and so this could potentially mean I unconsciously interpret or observe with this lens. As a filmmaker who has also actively avoided, as well as observed close at hand, how regional government film schemes potentially do no support all independent voices and styles, my bias is towards scepticism in this respect. To mitigate my bias of my prior professional experience, my methodology is designed to be rigorously systematic and self-reflective, so as not to over complicate with potential diversions or opinions, for what is at its heart a practice-based study. My methodology therefore involves streamlined case studies and experiments which keep the focus to select parameters of investigation. Other creative practice-based research method options could have been a narrative-based approach, perspective-based approach or even a participatory action research approach. However the action research based approach enables me to systematically investigate what within this style that so stirs me. It provides the platform to investigate my practice and explore the foundations of indie film.

3. Research Methods

The methods used to achieve this are literature review where I investigated academic texts and research explorations in the field, expanding into more contextual texts examining historical contexts of American and British film production. This was followed by in depth case studies to examine and extract qualities to take forward into practice. This set the platform to produce film experiments to cyclically explore new form and style to make a British indie film comedy.

• Literature review

To prepare for my PhD, I undertook interviews with industry professionals and conducted thematic analysis to explore understanding of independent filmmaking and whether indie was a term understood in a British context. The predominant finding from this was that it was not understood or distinguishable, in a British context. This helped to shape my research questions aims and objectives. I then used my research question aims and objectives to structure my literature review. I subsequently uncovered a body of literature post 2007, which had reflected on a period of filmmaking, predominantly from 1989 - 2010 which can be considered American indie as opposed to independent. This discovery led to guiding how I looked at films in the UK and why they had

developed in a certain way. This led to analysing the contexts of British independent cinema production and American independent cinema production. Using texts on independent cinema I tracked the history and ethos behind how independent cinema developed and how indie developed as sub genre of production and style.

• Case Studies and Case Studies Video Essay

I analysed three films of different categories. One, a mid-budget blockbuster and iconic film of this genre, Little Miss Sunshine (2004). The second a DIY nano budget winner of the John Cassavetes award In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007). The third a British film that could be considered close to an American indie film, Ayoade's Submarine (2010). This was coupled with video essay, mirroring the findings on film, comparing American indie film comedies stylistic and aesthetic traits, narrative, technique and ethos to inspire a new style of modern day, upbeat nano budget British indie film comedy.

• Film Experiments

I used three film experiments designed to put in to practice my interim findings and feed into my feature film script and filmed examples. The purpose of the experiments in formative stages was to use a practice-led approach and cyclical self exploration of practice, in line with action research, as well as 'discover procedures at variance with accepted procedures' (Smith, 2009, p.42), to step outside of the normal practices. The first experiment therefore was heavily personally focused, to investigate my own voice and work. The second to create some kind of character and narrative to explore emerging out of that personal work, combined with the interim findings. The third was to refine and progress, further explore and take through the action research process the idea in depth, to lay the platform for the guidelines to an indie film comedy.

• Screenplay writing and Example scenes

As the fourth cyclical action research element, the screenplay and example scenes were developed to understand how the guidelines would work in practice. Using my interim findings, guidelines for an indie film comedy and reflections on my practice, I wrote a feature film length screenplay and filmed example scenes designed to unearth a different, new practice of filmmaking.

4. Methods of Analysis

• Interim findings

The interim findings drew together an evaluation of the literature review, and case studies to summarise four key areas to take forward into the three film experiments. These four key areas were reached by combining ideas and themes, of the foremost areas to take into practice. So although the literature review and case studies were detailed and analytical, they were then transformed into what practice-based information that could be extracted, to take forward in to the practice based part of the research.

• Reflections

After each of the three experiments, an in depth and rigorous reflection was completed to analyse the results of the practice. These results and ideas were then cascaded and carried forward into the next experiment. The reflections were based around the cyclical process of action research, that following the action, reflection and evaluation followed to extract all the information from the practice.

• Guidelines

The Guidelines were then formed as sixteen areas to guide the writing of the feature film script and example scenes. The Guidelines were formed out of re-reviewing the literature review, case studies and interim findings. I combined subject areas as much as possible in order to be efficient and concise. The practice was then reviewed and analysed to contribute further. Finally the finished guidelines were presented in thematic order, for flow an ease of use when using to write the feature film script and example scenes. The feature film example was scalable and made so that production and completion can be assured, filmed and produced with nano budget values.

• Research outputs

Using the interim findings, guidelines for an indie film comedy and reflections on my practice, I use reflective analysis to analyse the finished screenplay and filmed outputs. The study was then concluded with analysis and reflections for the future.

5. Evaluation and Justification of Methodological Choices

The rationale for this approach was to use a strategic and systematic way to uncover, in a variety of ways, something which has no definitive equivalent in a UK context; the British indie film comedy. Whilst keeping a tight structure, I wanted that structure to be as liberating as possible to allow for maximum exploration and discovery. The action research style approach enables me to be both systematic and creative.

Early in the study I found copying characters or styles from the American context didn't work. I discovered that rather than involving copying aesthetic traits, the depth of the study enabled guidelines to be created getting to the very foundation of the types of story, in order to transfer those foundations into a British context. This prompted me to conclude that the systematic nature of the study could be duplicated in whatever genre or style a filmmaker wanted to explore. There was evidence that it was possible to transfer story style and genre from one context to another, once the physical underpinnings, modes of production and analysis of examples were generated subsequent to practice. I discovered that producing the final work through guidelines meant a creative process was focused and possible, to transfer indie film practices between one context (American) and another (British).

6. Limitations of this study

Besides the three broad areas of British export of social realism, period drama and working title style comedy, clearly there are films in the UK which have approached American indie film comedy, in style and substance, and indeed include coming of age themes. For example, Submarine (2010) and Son of Rambo (2007)'s aesthetic and style pertain to something different in a British context. Simon Bird's Days of the Bagnold Summer (2019) or Bend it Like Beckham (2002), take forward a different approach, yet these kinds of films are infrequent and not of the prevalence of period drama and social realism, in British cinema. Britain too does have examples of DIY nano budget methods, for example recently Mark Jenkin (Bait [2019]) or Will Sharpe and the modest success of Black Pond (2011), made for just £25k, which interestingly has led to sustained filmmaking, having come through this self-made route. As with many British examples, some aesthetic traits have been borrowed from American indie film, yet as I outline in this study, I argue potentially remain entrenched in a British approach, heavily influenced by miserabilism and associated traits. Whilst films and filmmakers of this type touch upon a different aesthetic and style, this study is about delving deeper and systematically investigating.

I acknowledge the potential difficulty with interpretation of these ideas, and so consequently the ideas within it are kept as streamlined as possible, with the focus being to discover a different aesthetic approach. As this study is fraught with potential misinterpretation, my case studies only outline examples that can be used as a specific example, for reflection in to practice. I could have examined all British films and all American indie films. As this is practice based and prone to complication, instead I chose to keep everything as streamlined as possible, choosing three deep case studies, three experiments and precise film outputs.

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6. Literature Review

Contents

1. Introduction

This literature review acts as a scoping exercise for practice and is structured around my Research Question and Objectives. I address examples of commercial texts in the field alongside academic texts. I summarise what they teach, before delineating the positives and negatives, beneficial to my research, as well as extending into the broader aims of and application in a practice context. The intention is to be systematic (research question and objectives), whilst laying some context of British and American independent production and modes of production in each country, that can be applied in practice. This is an active exploration of identifiable application of themes, debates and gaps to put into practice. For example, I explore why certain styles of film have existed, and why there is a general bleak outlook/miserabilist style in low budget British film, contrasting with areas more free and upbeat style in low budget American indie film comedy. The Literature review also refers to semi structured interviews conducted prior to my study start, with industry professionals in Appendix I, aimed at exploring the subject of independent film, financing and style, as well as

whether they understood a definition of the term 'indie' and/or 'indie film comedy'. The final section then contextualises the basis of the study, within the history of independent production in America and Britain.

Whilst my approach is not tied to one theoretical framework per se, this study is essentially an applied research or action research project in structure, designed to be duplicated for different subject matter. The literature review is therefore practice focused to contribute and support me scrutinizing my own practice, identify problems and collect information, to then take action to improve practice through the experiments and final deliverables (screenplay and example scenes). This approach can then enable a filmmaker in future, to transfer styles of story or genre from one context to another. The following literature review is the critical underpinning to provide structure to experimenting in practice, and uncover what makes this work transferable in a British context. There are references made to box office figures, however to it is to be acknowledged that film accounting may not be the most reliable source of data. That said the select number of web sources are all we have to discuss these related commercial themes. I am taking the efficacy of these figures in good faith and acknowledge they may appear differently elsewhere.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION: **In what ways can American counter cultural indie approaches to film comedy style and aesthetics contribute to the inventing of the British nano budget comedy film?**

Following the credit crunch and subsequent demise of the mini-majors (i.e. the end of the 'indie' period categorised in academia), a conference was held entitled 'American Independent Cinema Past, Present and Future'. This conference in May 2009 generated the book American Independent Cinema: indie, indiewood and beyond. Bringing together voices in the American indie film field from which many works have grown from. I will give an overview of these theory texts relevant to my practice research; a select group of American indie film comedies sprinkled between 1989 – 2010. But also focus on drawing out practice relevant theories that can be used to make my films. I outline relevant theorists and move into practitioners where possible.

'American Independent Cinema: indie, indiewood and beyond' (2012) offers a broad scope of information, allowing for some focus on the subject at hand broadly using it as a topic for multiple academic research streams. However, it gives the platform to begin discussing some of the foremost scholars in my research: Geoff King, Michael Z. Newman and Yannis Tzioumakis. Geoff King has since written prolifically on American independent and indie cinema in several texts, including the most contemporary analysis on a proposed second wave of indie cinema 'Indie 2.0: Change and continuity

in contemporary American Indie film' (2013). Whilst reserved in its judgement and analysis and remaining more observational, it points to the tone of American indie film comedy as giving the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity (p.193). A more pragmatic and philosophical insight of how American indie film comedy came to be is Michael Z. Newman's 'Indie: An American film culture' (2011). Newman is more forthright and confident, preferring instead to categorise three sets of films as not 'social realism', but socially 'engaged' realism, incisively describing how American indie cinema essentially filled the gap for overseas cinema, a style imported from Europe (p.16). Tzioumakis offers a comprehensive industrial and economic history of American independent cinema ('American Independent Cinema', 2006 and 'Hollywood's Indies', 2012) from the 70s onwards and makes a case for periodisation, whilst speculating on the new dawn of indie film comedies (e.g. mumblecore), documented subsequently by King in Indie 2.0. He argues that whilst the consumption of indie film comedies are changing and being consumed less in theatres, that their 'heterogeneous and polyphonic' nature will remain (p.9 & p.150). Latterly he pieces together the foundations of indie cinema from a distribution point of view. There is an agreement in both the work of Tzioumakis and Newman that the very term 'indie' is problematic as it has multiple connotations, e.g. economy or alternative cool. It means different things to different people.

Practitioner and academic writer on indie film JJ Murphy's focus is on script structure. Similarly forensic in the case of his script analysis in 'Me and You and Memento and Fargo' (2007), breaking down as he sees how American indie film comedy scripts work. The only uncategorisable one he feels is Slacker (1990). Whereas Murphy revels in the textual analysis but doesn't go deeper into its practical application, the Producer Ted Hope ('Hope for Film', 2014) does. For example, Hope has a producer focused, market focused approach, and whilst he does not disagree with Murphy, moreover Hope's focus is on solutions to American indie filmmaking problems and how to overcome them. For example, listing the criteria for a successful Sundance film (p.79-81). This is similar and contrastable in a British context, with Yule and Manderson (2014), who argue for a new type of cinema which moves beyond miserabilism - a downbeat aesthetic they argue is encouraged by national funding bodies. They go on to reflect, analyse and consider that a nations perspective on itself and its creative imagination, is affected by the way it chooses to project itself (p.10-12). A striking and strong argument which contrasts with a different type of dynamic for the American indies, who Geoff King in American Independent Cinema, define themselves by having a 'degree of distance industrially, from the Hollywood studio system often appears to be a necessary condition for substantial formal or sociological departure from the dominant norms' (p.2).

Style and money are a consistent interplay in cinema outcomes as evidenced by the emergence of American indie film and a vertically integrated studio system. In his book 'Declarations of Independence' (2008), Berra argues this is also diverse in style to the government funded independent films, where the interplay between money and style playout differently. He concurs with Yule and Manderson arguing that British cinema is generally culturally stale with great chasms of existence, between generic comedies and thrillers and the more socially 'elitist' work of Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, and Peter Greenaway (Berra 2008, p.161). Whereas the American independent sector is less easily devisable and crucially more culturally elusive:

> 'Compare the work of New York based independent filmmakers (Abel Ferrara, Spike Lee, Jim Jarmusch) with their Los Angeles counterparts (Paul Thomas Anderson, David O'Russell, Quentin Tarantino) or more rural contributors (John Sayles, David Gordon Green) and one discovers a veritable kaleidoscope of modern filmmaking, encompassing a wide range of cultural themes and genuinely intuitive visual sensibility.'

Berra 2008, p.161

Yule and Mandeson outline how films are deliberately down beat, something they define as a tendency towards miserabilism. So in this way major studios act as funding bodies like with the BFI in the UK, and what emerges from these texts is that the films and styles of those films, are a direct result of what the financers are asking for – so continuing the interplay between money and style – downbeat social realism that wins awards internationally for Britain. In the American instance, Berra argues what is encouraged is authenticity and originality; to make films in an understandable, relatable way for a global audience – the aforementioned 'vertical integration'. The focus is then that it encourages the use of known characters, and character driven American literary tradition of outsiders, drifters, loners, criminals, law enforcement officers and aspiring heroes. Yule and Manderson say the interplay between money and style encourage downbeat stories are about working class lives, a social commentary, which Berra concurs with. A peculiar feature is what Berra alludes to as promoting such British films in a blockbuster way release wise, something the vertically integrated US system would never do. The downbeat miserabilist films are given slots in mainstream auditoria through funding and quotas. Vertically integrated systems instead treat the film with the sensitivity it needs of niche marketing, slow roll out, building its audience and earning its place (p.138).

In America, there are ample examples of nano budget, theatrically released American indie comedies throughout modern cinema history (source: internet movie database): Slacker (1990) $23k, El Mariachi (1992) $7k, Clerks (1994) $27k, The Puffy Chair (2005) $15k, In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) $25k, For Lovers Only (2011) nominal, Newlyweds (2011) $9k, Layover (2014) $6k, Frisky (2015) $5k. Other notable American nano budget films in modern cinema from other genres, are Eraserhead (1977) $10k, The Last Broadcast (1998) $90k, Pi (1998) $60k, Primer (2004) $7k, Paranormal Activity (2007) $11k, Hunter Prey (2010) 10k, The Battery (2012) $6k, Getting Out (2015) $9k and the multi award winning Tangerine (2015) $100k, not to mention many, many more such as most of the back catalogue of the b-movie horror films of Troma Entertainment and Lloyd Kaufman, and the inimitable Roger Corman.

Equivalently in the UK there is a disproportionate number of films that have been made at a nano budget level, and many following the invention of the DSLR camera, making it far more straightforward production value wise. These include Following (1998) £6k, Down Terrace (2009) £30k, Colin (2009) £45, Treacle Junior (2010) £30k, Black Pond (2011) £25k, Late September (2012) £15k, and Cosmos (2019) £7k. None are comedies, despite Britain's rich tradition of comedic history. Indeed, a surface assessment of what is mostly regarded in the UK as even 'low' budget breakout comedy hits: The Full Monty (1997) £2.5 million and Shaun of the Dead (2004) £7 million were in fact mid budget films (Follows, 2014). As previously stated, even acknowledged micro budget films start at £100,000 as an absolute minimum, with the industry acknowledged top end being £350,000, which only then qualifies as low budget. Therefore, at under £100,000 we are in the realms of the self-funded filmmakers and by definition the foundation of independent cinema and the definitive method pioneered by the likes of John Cassevetes (Berra, 2008, p.41). It subsequently was the pathway to launch careers for the likes of Robert Rodriguez, Richard Linklater, Ed Burns, Kevin Smith, Jay and Mark Duplass, Sean Baker and many, many more.

Referring back to my research question, there is a sense from this scoping research that American counter cultural indie approaches are drawn from a freedom of expression, not present in the British context. It would therefore imply the need to remain nano budget, or at least independently funded.

3. OBJECTIVE 1: **Define what American indie film comedy is both stylistically and aesthetically through industry opinion, academia and practice research.**

The subject of an indie film (and its subcategory indie film comedy) was not a term understood or acknowledged in my industry interviews. In industry texts it also does not feature. Compare this with

the music industry, where the term 'indie music' conjures up specific sounds, images of floppy hair and guitar music. However, whilst being a used term in film it is not readily defined. As opposed to industry, in some academic circles the term 'indie' (and its subcategory indie film comedy) it is understood and acknowledged, it is defined. Chronologically we can consider American indie film comedy, the Sundance-Miramax era. Beginning with Sex, Lies and Videotape in 1989 and ending with Disney shutting Miramax in 2010 (Newman, 2011, p.1). An era that began with low and nano budget fare such as Slacker (1990) and Clerks (1994), ending with budgeted, polished blockbuster films such as Little Miss Sunshine (2006) and Juno (2007).

The subject of independent film and its definition is an unwieldy beast and has caused much confusion and consternation in critical circles. The literal definition of 'independent' has an economic implication. The shortened 'indie' has a more cultural style implication:

 "To an extent, the diminutive *indie* is simply a synonym for *independent* with an added connotation of fashionable cool. This mystification diminishes or makes vague the significance of economic distinctions and injects added connotations of a social identity. The introduction of "indie" also allows for a separation between strict and loose sense of the idea to which both "indie" and "independent" make reference, so that something might seem indie without actually being independent by whatever strict definition one adopts or alternatively might be independent by that definition without seeming indie."

Newman, 2011, p.4

Academic authors such as Michael Z. Newman above, categorized American 'indie' as opposed to simply 'independent' cinema. An element of this cinema is defined by buoyancy and life affirming quality, upbeat in outlook. This definition is none more so appropriate than the definition introduced by Geoff King in his book Indiewood and Beyond:

"A degree of distance industrially, from the Hollywood studio system often appears to be a necessary condition for substantial formal or sociological departure from the dominant norms."

King, 2005, p.2

With independent film producer Ted Hope wading in with 'The fact is that most indie film comedy success' are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way (see Pulp Fiction [1994], The Blair Witch Project [1999], Memento [2000]). If Hollywood wins with familiar formulas, indie film's often triumph as a result of their originality.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).

4. OBJECTIVE 2: **Explore the genesis of creating an indie film comedy, with a focus at nano budget level.**

Newman alludes to American indie film developing as a direct result of 90s young filmmakers having a thirst for European film. These styles were then blended with the emergence of vertically integrated mini majors who embraced original and authentic material that could potentially garner awards and recognition to major studios, with the only proviso they could be understood and followed by a global audience, i.e. they were proper stories (Berra, 2008, p.152). This culminated in the certain style often referred to as the 'warm hearted Sundance indie film comedy' (Hook, 2016) and therefore its eventual commercialisation coincidentally coinciding with the collapse of the mini major's system during the credit crunch and global financial crisis. From Lost in Translation (2003), Juno (2007), Little Miss Sunshine (2006) - films which grossed multiple millions for studios and created the mould for an indie film comedy, the antithesis of its genesis, intention and creative process. By definition, American indie film of this period, and particularly comedy had reached the end of its era.

Stylistically and aesthetically, American indie film comedies are defined by being notionally fashionable cool, often but not exclusively giving the impression of improvision and a free flowing tangential style, character driven. Traditionally at the centre of an indie film comedy, identically to its mother category independent film, is counter culture (Newman, 2012, p.17). The anti-hero, the alternative lifestyle, a story shunning or offering an alternative to accepted norms.

Characteristics a UK indie film nano comedy might contain, as there is a paucity of this kind of film in the UK, is potentially problematic. In my own industry experience, comedy is an area that is frequently acknowledged as the most difficult. Comedy often does not travel with humour frequently attached to the cultural, political and social climate of a particular country or timeframe (Follows, 2016). What may be funny one year, one generation, may not be funny in another. This potentially lends weight to the vertically integrated structure, which encourages globally identifiable traits and stories, in order to travel and reach a global audience (Berra, 2016, p.161). In the specific area of low and nano budget independent film, commercial data analyst Stephen Follows goes so far

as to say it is the riskiest economic film an independent filmmaker can make. In his 2014 article 'What types of low-budget films make the most money?' only one comedy (Waiting [2005], with a young Ryan Reynolds) makes the list. Yet in Britain it is intrinsically part of a culture and tradition which has deep roots. The one British book devoted to British film comedy 'British Comedy Cinema' by Hunter and Porter, which exudes enthusiasm for its success:

> "Comedy is the most popular of all genres in British cinema, sustaining the film industry in times of economic slump in the 1920s and 1970s, and drawing mass audiences when other genres fail. From adaptations of Oscar Wilde to showcasing Northern comedians, from sex comedies to 'rom coms', the comedy film has dominated production, created major stars such as Peter Sellers and Hugh Grant, and often reached an international audience with cult hits like Withnail and I (1987) as well as slapstick blockbusters like Bean (1997). Along with horror, it is the genre that has created the most dissonance between critics and public, particularly in terms of personalities like Gracie Fields and George Formby, series such as Carry Ons and popular TV spin-offs like On the buses (1971)… Whether northern or Southern, intellectual or bawdy, verbal or visual, British comedy has nimbly adapted itself to a diverse range of cultural identities."
>
> Hunter, I.Q. and Porter, 2012., p.1

They go on to state virtually nothing has been written on the silent period for example, which is almost universally assumed to have been eclipsed by Hollywood. This is partly because the production of British comedies has always been patchy and, for the most part, aimed at niche tastes and domestic audiences. Few British comedy films have achieved instantaneous international appeal and yet humour is considered intrinsic to the British 'character' (Hunter, I.Q. and Porter, 2012., p.2). Landy concurs somewhat in her 1991 book 'British genres: cinema and society, 1930-1960', 'They focus on dominant social institutions – the public school, the world of commerce and industry, political parties – and turn them on their head. In these narratives, the complacency of the status quo and the rigidity of social structures is threatened by eruptions of physical and psychic energy' (1991, p.333). Interestingly in the success of one of these few successes, Richard Curtis, he felt he only found his voice after several stalled US film projects by resolving from that point on to 'only to write 'on something (he) was a hundred per cent sure of an no one in the world knew more about than him (Owen 2003, p.69).

Hunter and Porter's book delineates different facets of the British cinema canon. As with the sporadic nature of British independent film, the same can be said of British comedy cinema. However, there are key themes that reoccur, such as the 'tradition of British character acting that celebrated that idiosyncratic, unconventional behaviour while generating humour, gentle affection and even admiration. In this, and many other respects, Margaret Rutherford contributed immensely to a tradition of central importance in British cinema history' (p.98).

Beyond Hunter and Porter there are a minority of studies examining distinctions between American and UK comedies, in the form of some articles and chapters, without touching upon the differences this study is exploring. From McConnell (1987) exploring differences in America and Britain in broadcast media, Davies (2006) and Friedman (2011) also comment on historical hierarchical society in Britian that created the British comedy tradition, concurring with Hunter and Porter. Shaw's 'The Same Handful of Images:' Submarine, Indie Retro and 2000s Youth (2016), argues that the aesthetic of films such as Submarine, have a distinctive style because they purposefully conveying modern sense of being caught between past and present. Bill Bryson's 'Notes from a Small Island' also comments from an American standpoint in his observations of the British character, that some of the most endearing qualities include, 'Nothing gives the English more pleasure, in a quiet but determined sort of way, than to do things oddly.' (Bryson, 1995, p.31)

As previously outlined, nano budget it not a used or defined industry or academic term. Micro is the smallest term referred to in industry and academic circles. However at this lower end in Britain, there is some key industry guidance. Industry texts The Guerrilla Filmmakers Handbook by Chris Jones and Lo/No Budget Feature Filmmaking by Eliot Grove hold a weight of dense information including discs and downloads with paperwork documents relevant for the field. Both Grove and Jones' view on the filmmaking industry is somewhat chaotic. An unspecific picture is painted of a 'rocky, often bizarre and certainly unpredictable' road if successful (Jones, 2006, p.6). Of the commercial texts, The Guerrilla Filmmaking Handbook is certainly the most comprehensive. A 768 page study of the filmmaking process, mostly made up of interviews with experts in the field. Grove and Jones draw similar conclusions that simply without tenacity and luck, the process is too haphazard to calculate success. They argue that success is in the arbitrary chain of multiple events, never an inevitable outcome. The methodology used in The Guerrilla Filmmaker Handbook is its weakest point as it holds little focus, only to produce the maximum amount of information possible. But who best to dissect a part of the industry than a working and experienced professional. The author Chris Jones has made three feature length films and continues to be active in the industry. It

uses a colloquial style, in order to compile information and reads like an encyclopaedia for the filmmaker, without real focus and qualitative research. The Guerrilla Filmmaking Handbook, now in its third edition, balloons with each new addition, as more and more interviews with industry professionals are added.

Similarly to the journalistically popularised phrase 'miserbalism', 'nano' budget filmmaking has taken various amateur guises in the last decade, via articles and references on amateur and limited quality websites such as Creative Leap Tv, www.thescriptlab.com and www.filmdirectingtips.com. But it is not a used industry phrase. However self funded films are deserving of a different category, as they have different restrictions. Nano budget are categorically different from Micro budget, which can still have industry backing, such as the London funding scheme 'Microwave' which was created to back micro budget films. Nano budget can literally mean two people filming documentary style for the majority of the shoot.

In America there is a veritable tradition of films that not only engage comically but also seem to go further, and retain solid story structure and storytelling, alongside comedic set pieces or moments created. Take the noughties 'Mumblecore' films, many of which were comedies, or other aforementioned examples of Nano budget comedies such as Slacker (1990), Clerks (1994), The Puffy Chair (2005) and one of my case study examples, In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007). These films were made for less then $25,000 yet they involve quality comedy storytelling, a feature synonymous with British storytelling tradition (Shakespeare, Shaw, Ealing Studios). This schism is what I wish to explore in British films.

Historically independent British films which get to the cinema, are heavily influenced by BFI funding, whose creative stipulations for content and production, inspire bleak social realism; a key genre Britain is known and respected for in art house circles across the globe, thanks to the likes of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh. Stylistically this creates this narrow and negative view of a nation. Consequently British films produced independently are either low budget genre based for commercial purposes (e.g. horror) or linked in some way to American studios (e.g. Working Title Films: Universal Pictures) whose focal output is saleable Britishness, not to the traditional indie 'counter culture' which it stems from. The point of indie work is to explore the freedoms it brings, such as character driven, actor centred approaches to small situations, spontaneous and improvised in 'cinema verite' style or implied style.

Traditionally British cinematic comedy has had various streams: Ealing Studios, Carry On, Hammer horror, self-depreciation independent (e.g. Working Title) and tv sketch show gag-heavy comedy (e.g. Monty Python, Christopher Guest mockumentary, Simon Pegg films, Alan Partridge, Ali G). There is no tradition of nano budget British indie comedy, as there is in social realism or genre horror. For some reason less budget seems to equal more gloomy and more cynical plot lines, likely due to the pervasive social realism of British cinema tradition. This is not helped by BFI funding, at least not for comedy.

5. OBJECTIVE 3: **Experiment with aesthetic response to indie film comedy style in a British context.**

It's clear from the section 3, Objective 1 evidence above, that American indie film comedy aesthetic and stylistic traits can transfer in a UK context. Fashionable cool, tangential character based narrative, dialogue heavy, spontaneous feel, counter culture, are all traits universally transferable.

Current British comedy cinema is an extension of examples that have shown the way in the past, completed with a contemporary twist or sophistication. Britain's most successful global comedy filmmakers such as Guy Ritchie from the comedy crime capers of Ealing studios, Richard Curtis from the London comedy of manners Wilde/Shaw tradition, Simon Pegg taking from social realism/Ealing and adding a twist of the Hammer House tradition.

In cinema there has been a history of European cinema inspiring American cinema and vice versa. A mutual appreciation and a conversation existing between the two continents, driving the medium forward in the western world. And that that conversation went back and forth in terms of pushing each other's ideas forward in the same way the Beach Boys and the Beatles inspired each other in the 60's. American indie cinema came about as a result of this process. Young filmmakers in the 80s/90s getting hold of old prints of 60s and 70s European filmmakers such as Fellini, Truffaut, Godard, Vertov, Rosellini and taking that into their low/no budget styles; that's how Slacker (1990) came about, that's what inspired the likes of Jim Jarmush, Wes Anderson, the Duplass brothers and Richard Linklater. Classic examples of American indie cinema comedy filmmakers.

I do not see evidence of the style this created – the American indie cinema comedy – as returning to these shores. Partly because of the limited nature of British cinema, of the type alluded too before. This style of British comedy is reliant on clipped, often overly harsh dialogue, where the comedy is at the expense of a single individual, and continues throughout the film, relentlessly. Not that this style doesn't have value, to the contrary it is tremendously entertaining, it's just not the only way – and

American indie film comedies show that. For example, Juno (2007) is a film where the dialogue at the start of the film begins rhythmically to make it punchy and standout. But then changes and evolves with the emotional sensitivity of the story, it doesn't stay entrenched in it. By contrast the British film Submarine (2010) for example, continues the harsh and curt responses from characters to each other, such as a scene where a parent has contracted terminal cancer, the cold detached response from the protagonist is incredibly jarring and limiting (57:53-1:00:17). This staying rooted in the dialogue style is true consistently in British films, Richard Curtis is an excellent example of this too, and one could speculate those filmmakers' roots in British television sitcom are responsible. Submarine's comedy dialogue style is peculiarly relentless – but it is only following a mould, a tradition of British cinema storytelling, which has set the pattern over decades. This rhythm of dialogue plays like a single note throughout the film. In my own comedy I want to investigate different styles of comedy that can inspire a different approach, and do not include overly harsh, curt, clipped dialogue but instead a different way, and ideally display an ability for characters to talk gently and to one another and from the heart. A film like Superbad (2007) does this with aplomb, being a film where two male best friends drunkenly tell each other they love each other, in a kind and gentle way at the end of the film.

When low and nano budget films are made in the UK they tend to be genre based horror, hoping to sell to the easiest existing audience available to them, where production quality is not important (Follows, 2018). The tradition of British comedy seems not to extend to this micro and nano budget level, yet in the past it has been one of Britain's longest and sustainable exports. Nano budget is not an exported area in British comedy cinema, despite the solid history in America. This goes against the historical role comedy has played in British cinema history culturally and financially. Britain's rich comedic history has played a central role in the history of British cinema and the certain aesthetic and style surrounding it. Ealing comedies for example were an emergent form of high culture that designed the alternative stories and representations, and the same is true of the emergence American indie film comedy (Newman, 2011, p.2).

The primary example of sustained nano budget filmmaking in the UK is One Day films and Erik Knudsen. A self-funded indie filmmaker at nano budget level, producing features every two years since 2004 alongside working in academia. A feat not matched sustainably domestically as fictional feature films are so difficult to produce, yet in 2021 Knudsen sold two of his features to Netflix. A more recent spate of films in Cornwall led by the critically lorded Bait (2019) is unsurprisingly a disturbing drama/horror. More recently a variable of British indie has emerged by Mikey Murray's

debut Mind-Set (2022). In comparison to Knudsen movements are sporadic and short lived, without the self reflective critical dissemination on a research level, where he investigates and analyses, acknowledging independent cinema as critical for survival.

Two commercial texts stand out to contextualise British filmmaking aesthetics and style: The Guerrilla Filmmakers Handbook (GFH) by Chris Jones and Lo/No Budget Feature Filmmaking by Eliot Grove (LNBFF). The GFHB, now in its third edition, balloons with each new addition, as more and more interviews with industry professionals are added. Interestingly where Grove and Jones rely on hope and encouragement that they may 'enter' or 'break through' into the industry, Knudsen disagrees, acknowledging independent cinema as 'critical for survival'. Indeed he believes that without independent cinema, all cinema would 'wither away and die, existing only, like a dead star, on its own clichés and burned-out ideas.' (Knudsen, 2015, Dependency and Independence in British Independent Film, p.53). Erik Knudsen's decade of work and reflection on feature film production, paves the way for my study. For example The Total Filmmaker: thinking of screenwriting, directing and editing as one role bares contrast to Grove and Jones' exploration. The technical systemised approach in the commercial world, is a product of the highly organised and definitive roles in the film industry. Such separation is eschewed by Knudsen and argues the connection between the three media. He argues the industry 'shaped divisions of labour along technological and procedural fault lines' (Knudsen, 2015, p.2). This kind of production line is a draw back for Knudsen who quotes Lars von Trier, perfectly summing up Knudsen's ideology:

> The problem is that a director who turns to a writer comes with an idea for something that has more or less of a heart. And one thing is certain: that when it has been through this very quick dramaturgical treatment there is no longer a heart. Then it is extremely superficial.
>
> Lars von Trier qtd. in Schepelern 2005, 28

The commercial books by design, do not question 'cause and effect' narrative, whereas Knudsen, insinuates his reader wants to 'move away from the dominant classical narrative approaches, with its emphasis on the self assertive, the dramatic, conflict, cause and effect, externalised action, the mutable and the psychologically explicable' (Knudsen, 2015, p.4). The gap for me is how not to focus on 'art film' as with Knudsen, but the cross over area indie, in between art film and mainstream. So Knudsen points to the creative importance of retaining meaning in film, whereas Jones' approach is to make identifiable genre film (Urban Ghost Story, 2009) as opposed to Knudsen's sense of abstract

more obscure art films The Raven on the Jetty (2015), Cleft Lip (2018). It is also intriguing to note that Knudsen virtually ignores the subject of money and film funding. Whereas the sheer volume, technique and time spent talking about, teaching how to create, box office narrative genre technique – in the commercial books, is inherent. In the words of his PhD Thesis, 'It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that, comparatively speaking, the moving image is a young medium and that the potential for research is significant.'

It is easy to see that from these sporadic and confused approaches to British filmmaking mean my application of practice experiments is necessary, to draw out and reflect more, to achieve different results in a British cinema context.

6. OBJECTIVE 4: **Using these discoveries, take that learning into a new form, broadening possibilities and inviting diversity for British films and filmmakers by making an indie film comedy at nano budget level, in a British context.**

In order to take the learning into a new form I will first contextualise forms of production in America and Britain.

The History of Independent Film Production in America

There are a number of films which can lay claim to ushering in the dawn of American independent cinema, such as The Graduate (1967) and Bonnie and Clyde (1967). However in terms of the root of my PhD problem, the two films to lay the bedrock for both the style and the production for their subsequent successors are Easy Rider (1969) and Night of the Living Dead (1968). This is because of the interplay between money and style. Stylistically, the modern American independent cinema of today began in 1969 with Easy Rider (Berra, 2008, p.11). Not only was this film self-funded, unstructured, improvised and had at its core the values of freedom of actions and self expression. Grossing $41 million it was the fourth highest grossing film of the year and a phenomenal box office success for a film whose budget was just $360,000 (source:imdb), even though it was essentially an experimental art film.

> 'Easy Rider was almost a nostalgia piece when it was released... with two characters from
> societies underbelly coming up for air and rejoicing in the freedoms afforded to them by
> the open highways.'
>
> Berra, 2008, p.50

Released at a time of sweeping epic blockbusters and auteur projects from filmmakers such as Kubrick and Zeffirelli, the film was a youthful 'shot in the arm' for American movie studios who had been looking for a new young audience, but didn't know how to reach it. Stemming from a realisation both at a societal and studio level around the erosion of upper middle class values which The Graduate (1967) had started to peel back, Easy Rider was a counter-culture film. And therein lies the genesis of indie film comedy: counter culture. And it exploded into the market creating a thirst for a new style with a new message for a hungry new audience. Complete with its counter culture tagline 'A man went looking for America - and couldn't find it anywhere'.

Whereas Easy Rider set the style, Night of the Living Dead set the DIY method of production. Released initially in 1968, the year before Easy Rider, George A Romero loosely derived his horror film on the gruesome EC comic book series. Less than low budget, this film in fact had no official budget, i.e. Nano budget. Shot in black and white over weekends, taking almost a year to complete. The cast were predominantly non professional friends of the director. It was the first film of its type to use a traditional genre (horror) to make a social critique, blended with a naturalistic, documentary quality; also key stylistic traits you'd get in any independent film. It also even interspersed photographs of dead soldiers in Vietnam in the end credits representing America as somewhere divided against itself, as in Easy Rider. Again, a counter-culture film. It played on an off in theatres for almost four years before it attracted serious attention. It wasn't even reviewed by critics until the following year after its release. But its subsequent longevity pioneered the DIY entrepreneurial aspect for alternative cinema. The slow burning nature of both the production of the film and the distribution, had been set.

If Easy Rider was the film and Night of the Living Dead was the production/distribution model, then the filmmaker and subsequent pioneer of the medium was John Cassavetes. Frequently funding his own films from the money he earned in his successful career as an actor, Cassavetes worked though the 1970's making films in his own time. He would distribute his own films if a distributor would not take them on (e.g. A Woman Under the Influence, 1974). Using his own money to fund his films which reached more mature audiences which lauded critical praise on to his films.

In 1979 the Independent Film Project (IFP) was set up and grew from a small outlier to a main player in the development of American independent film through the 1980s, as an

organisation that had a vision of American independent cinema, as a model of national cinema that would operate separately from the profit-driven Hollywood model. Subsequently in the 1980's independent films found significant success and began to be funded off pre-sales, for example the Cohen brothers' Blood Simple (1984) raised a substantial $1.5m in first feature independent terms. By 1987 video and cable was threatening the existence of cinema and independent films not only could perform well, they frequently garnered critical attention and award winning kudos - two things studios crave. Until 1990, the term American independent cinema was simply a term used to describe anything outside the studio system (Berra, 2008, p.11-22).

The success of a wave of independent films ushered in the beginning of the 'Mini Majors', such as Fox Searchlight (20th Century Fox), Sony Pictures Classics (Sony Pictures), Miramax (Disney), New Line and Castle Rock Entertainment (Warner Bros.). Major studios setting up or acquiring small independent company arms to produce and acquire documentaries, independent and art house films. Designed to purchase or support independent firms that would bring studios kudos, awards and possibly a breakout commercial success. Their purpose was to find an alternative from the main stream. These companies were then responsible for films such as Pulp Fiction (1994), Clerks (1994), Before Sunrise (1995), The Brothers McMullen (1995), Boogie Nights (1997) and Juno (2007).

The mini major period is acknowledged as the beginning of what has been described as American Indie film. The rise of this type of filmmaking, Michael Z Newman attributes to a fusion between American and European filmmaking styles. That the rise of American indie film comedy, was essentially to fill a gap for overseas cinema, which was not easily obtainable by cinephiles in a growing popular medium. Across cinema history there was always a flow of ideas back and forth, that informed a surge in American cinema, then Europe would see those films, and there would be a surge in European cinema, and so on (Newman, p.16). An example of this would be the movie brats (Coppola, Scorsese, Lucas et al) who, inspired by European cinema took those styles of filmmaking and used them to create an American new wave in the 70s, and in doing so ushering in the modern era of the blockbuster. Likewise with the advent of Tarantino in the early 90s, a surge of Britpop films such as Trainspotting (1996), Twin Town (1997) and Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998). It was constantly a conversation that went back and forth. For some reason this strand of American indie film comedy has not transferred back into its British equivalent,

when to me it seems such an obvious thing to do, especially in the context of Britain's great comic traditions.

American indie cinema developed from American independent cinema as the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17). As opposed to art film, social realism or any kind of bleak cinema, its vertically integrated system, the interplay between style and money, made its art accessible to a global audience.

History of independent film production in Britain

Britain has had various sporadic injections and support mechanisms for its independent filmmakers. For example the creation of a production arm of the British film institute in 1964, and independent film and TV department within the television broadcaster Channel 4 in 1982 (Knudsen, 2018, p.56). Indeed British film has even had various attempts at consolidated studio production, such as Ealing in the first half of last century, then again in the 1980s with Goldcrest and Palace Pictures. But they have always ended in failure. Indeed often the independent waves of British production can be attributed to American influence. For example in the late 60's, MGM's investment in Get Carter (1971) and Paramount in The Italian Job (1969), or the Britpop wave of films in the 90s and subsequent brief success of DNA films being supported by Fox Searchlight, who co-financed an assortment of commercially appealing films, including 28 Days Later and The Last King of Scotland, which became great box-office successes in Fox Searchlight's theatrical and home entertainment markets (Tzioumakis, 2012, 147).

Such injections have always been short lived and with the only independently owned James Bond franchise EON, standing the test of time. The most striking aspect of investigating literature around independent film in Britain is the lack of literature on the subject or more specifically British 'independent' cinema, even defined as an actual area. Though mentioning this to an industry filmmaker they would at least understand British independent film as a separate type of filmmaking. But by definition British cinema is only ever independent, as despite its occasional flourishes of successful studio based production (e.g. Ealing, Goldcrest), there is no integrated independent film system, as there is in America:

'Put simply, the central difference between American and British low budget film, is that whereas American independent film is part of a vertically integrated system tied up with major studios, that ask for diverse programming, British independent film operates much

like the Hollywood mainstream, or any other industry of mass production, in that it evaluates the potential profit and loss of any investment against previous endeavours. This is at odds with its American independent counterpart that is more focused on finding fresh material with some novelty value for its loyal audience.'

<div align="right">Berra, 2008<i>, p.159</i></div>

Richard Curtis inspired Working Title, stand out as having managed to operate as a hybrid American-British vertically integrated commercial film maker, and distributing a version of Britishness around the world. But it is the kind of absurd eccentric paradox that could only exist in Britain; that state funded films made under unique government funded stipulations, that are then distributed as if they are international blockbusters. And concurring with Bill Bryson's aforementioned observation of British people desire to do things oddly. Because there is no state funding, American independent film exists within the context of commercial use, but is not bound by it. Completely ironically, British independent film exists within the context of state funded use, but is totally and utterly bound by it, as Yule and Manderson observed, is pervasive in the British state funded model:

"the health of a nation is reflected in its creative imagination and the way in which it chooses to project itself… a dark strand had emerged that chose to project a narrow and negative view of a nation."

<div align="right">Yule and Manderson, 2014, p.6</div>

There have arguably been a number of filmmakers that follow this mould; Tony Richardson to Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Shane Meadows, Lynn Ramsay, Ben Wheatley etc. There is an argument that Britain has a tradition of cinema with a bleak outlook, a miserabilist outlook. This negative cinema is then asked to operate within a non-vertically integrated system, and distributed as if it were a blockbuster.

Berra points to the example of art house Britain and Art House America, and gives the example of two similar socialist motivated filmmakers, Ken Loach and John Sales. Where Sales lets his story and the actions of his protagonists do the talking, Loach uses them as mouthpieces for expositional dialogue voicing his political views. The one element American studios ask for is solid story structure to make it accessible, understandable, relatable to the widest audience possible, the rest is up to you; socialistic, horror, comedy, whatever comes from the voice of the filmmaker. But BFI funding

success would virtually ask out right for British social realist films (Yule and Manderson, 2014) and therefore a discrimination with filmmakers who don't 'fit the mould', limiting films and filmmakers instead of inviting diversity, or allowing more than one type of low budget film.

The UK Film Council was created in 1999 but disbanded in 2010 and subsumed into the British Film Institute (Knudsen, 2015), the very same year just 5.4% of the UK box office revenue generated by independent British films. Perhaps this may seem realistic in terms of the value and scale of US production. But in comparison for example to France in the same year, approximately 1/3 of French indigenous films comprised its box office. It's possible because this is down to a lack of diverse product, where Easy Rider (1969) filled the counter culture gap in the first place, when American independent film started.

7. Conclusion

Exploring the texts that have been written on the subject was of immense benefit in contextualising the various approaches and backgrounds of production. Everything read was useful in some way to analyse how the landscape, whether a commercial production text or academic analysis text, was perceiving the production of independent film. There are key findings from my literature review to take forward. The first key finding was to uncover a body of literature which had identified defining American indie film, and the circumstances in which it developed. The text which went deeper to defining the context of this production was Michael Z. Newman's Indie: An American film culture and key in taking forward definitions and specifics around how to implement that production in practice.

In searching for historical film texts covering independent film from this period, there was an immense body of work and a passion for the subject matter. As the focus of the study is the comparison between Britain and America and drawing out the differences in approach, John Berra's Declarations of Independence systematically brought to the surface the key differences in American and British approaches to filmmaking and the underpinning systems which create them. British cinema has had a skittish and chequered history whereas America has had a gradual build of model of production methods. Several filmmakers were used to outline these different approaches and illuminating to take forward into practice.

To a lesser degree but because again the focus is practical, Ted Hope's Hope for film offered a practical, Producer lens approach, which gathers opinion from industry experience of the approach

to production, even touching on guidelines for what distinguishes an independent film, perfect for the Sundance film festival.

Whilst there have been contributions to informing British film such as those by Stephen Follows or for example, the 2008 report on low budget filmmaking by the now dissolved UK Film Council, the lack of information is an indication that there is a gap to explore. This may contribute to British film having no distinct category as indie film in the same way America does, particularly at a nano budget level, despite Britain's rich historical comedic tradition - this is the schism in a British context I am exploring. This can then hopefully inspire further filmmaking which invites greater diversity of storytelling and possibilities as filmmakers.

Inventing the British nano budget comedy film, through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style

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7. Case Studies

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Introduction

This chapter relates to the Research Question and my four objectives. By looking in detail at three examples of films that are ripe with the attributes previously discussed, it gives greater insight in to how to create a film in practice.

From the beginnings of American independent cinema, two main identifiable features to model have persisted: the independent film as a counter culture alternative national cinema (Newman, 2011, p.17), and the DIY/slow burner production/distribution model (Berra, 2008, p.50). Easy Rider and Night of the Living Dead I identified as the key examples that gave rise to the model which was popularized in the 90s.

American 'indie' film, as opposed to just 'independent' film is effectively a sub-genre of this method, and is chronologically defined as being from 1989 to 2010, the dominant period of the 'mini-majors' and the vertically integrated system. Indie film comedies therefore, can be, but are not necessarily, independent from major studios, but have the added connotation of fashionable cool (Newman, 2011, p.17) amongst other definable traits.

I have therefore chosen three films from this period for my case studies to draw from in progressing to my film experiments.

2. Rationale A: Case Study film choices and why they are 'indie' films

Whilst my focus is Nano budget, the texture I am exploring is American indie film comedy, and its translation/inspiration in a British context. I have therefore focused on three different films in depth covering that spectrum. Many films are inspirational to this study and my case studies had initially

stretched to multiple films as options. These multiple films were based simply on instinct and sensibly: Slacker (1990), Clerks (1994), Buffalo 66 (1998), Sideways (2004), Napoleon Dynamite (2004), Juno (2007), The Way Way Back (2013) are amongst key inspirations. However they are for no particular reason other than instinct, a tacit knowledge without words. In order to attempt to quantify and analyse accurately I chose the following films as the most outstanding examples of mid budget, nano budget and the closest British counterpart influenced by American indie film comedy. Vertical integration, and therefore global financial appeal being a key part of American indie film comedy success. Here is the relative box office to each film's size:

Category	Film	Year of Production	Director(s)	Box Office Gross	%
Mid Budget	Little Miss Sunshine	2004	Valerie Faris/ Jonathan Dayton	Domestic (USA): $59,891,098 UK: $6,458,370 INT: $41,167,856 TOTAL: $101,058,954	60% 6% 41% -
Nano-budget	In Search of a Midnight Kiss	2007	Alex Holdridge	Domestic (USA): $172,605 UK: $401,614 INT: $1,121,571 TOTAL: $1,294,176	13% 31% 87% -
Closest British counterpart	Submarine	2010	Richard Ayoade	Domestic (UK): $2,374,824 USA: $467,602 INT: $3,407,571 TOTAL: $3,875,173	61% 12% 39% -

Source: imdbpro.com

Little Miss Sunshine (Dayton/Faris, USA, 2006)

Little Miss Sunshine is one of the films that marked the end of the indie era, because essentially it turned in to a blockbuster, as others around this time also did (Lost in Translation, 2003, Juno 2007). Taking the aesthetic traits and style of the indie period, this film style finally crossed over into the main stream. But what marks Little Miss Sunshine out above all others, is its central theme and therefore definitive contribution to the notion of indie film comedy, as the alternative national cinema. At its heart is the theme of being a 'winner', a significant part of the American dream and American culture, Little Miss Sunshine's world of struggle and character growth through failing, is its alternative message.

Winner of the Oscar for best screenplay and picked up, vertically integrated and distributed by a mini-major studio Fox Searchlight, the film rages against the American cultural institution that is the child beauty pageant. Despite a perceived publicly embarrassing finale, the protagonist

effectively wins in life by going for it 100% despite finishing dead last, a family triumph in the context of the story. Writer, Michael Arndt describes his inspiration for the film:

> "Most comedies don't work because they're not about anything… One of the things that was an impetus for me to write the script was, I remember reading this interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger… he was talking to a group of high school students… he said "If there's one thing in this world I hate, it's losers. I despise them." And I thought there's just something so wrong with that attitude… there's something so… demeaning and insulting about referring to any other person as a loser… I wanted to attack that idea that in life you're either going up, or you're going down. It's all about status and impressing other people. And so to a degree, a child beauty pageant is the epitome of… the ultimate… stupid meaningless competition that people put themselves through."

<div align="right">Arndt, 2007</div>

In Search of a Midnight Kiss (Holdridge, USA, 2007)

Firstly in contrast to Little Miss Sunshine, this is a nano budget film. A story filmed over the narrative course of 24 hours from new year's eve to new year's day, the film was made by getting favours for friends for time and kit, being shot in chunks over the course of months, and edited in the filmmaker's spare time whilst they waited tables in a Hollywood restaurant. Winner of the John Cassavetes Independent Spirit Award, the film makes LA look like New York and is a bittersweet love letter to Hollywood, an alternative counter culture film opposing the dominant American film image of tinsel town.

Secondly, at the heart of In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) is the friendship of two twenty something male friends. The story begins with one of them masturbating to a picture of the others girlfriend. Not only is his friend relaxed about it, he assists him in getting a date and jokes about it in front of said girlfriend. In fact he goes as far as to say he loves him for doing it, as he is about to propose to the girlfriend and it just made the day so much more memorable. And yet. It works. Despite of, and because of this counter culture attitude.

The plot follows this down and out screenwriter's first date with a crazy wannabe Hollywood actress, complete with crazy Texan x-boyfriend in pursuit. Portraying the conventionally trashy downtown Hollywood in to a romantic yet bittersweet metaphor for lost love. Totally against

the notions of what conceptually socially accepted norms. Below is a selection of counter culture comedy dialogue in the film:

> "Wilson: I moved to the place I had loathed my whole life... LA. And I moved
> there without a car."
>
> 00:09:20-00:09:26

> "Wilson: What are you looking for tonight?
> Vivian: The love of my life.
> Wilson: On Craig's list?"
>
> 00:24:28-00:24:32

> "Wilson: I think LA is the place love comes to die."
>
> 00:32:43-00:32:48

> "Wilson: Typical. New Years Eve in Los Angeles and I'm stuck in traffic."
>
> 01:17:25-01:17:29

The film begins announcing its subject with captions "Between December 25th and January 1st, the number of people on Match.com, Craigs List and MySpace increases by three hundred percent." It ends with the protagonist having found love, yet them not being able to be together, yet triumphing in re-engaging his spirit and meaning in his life. As with Little Miss Sunshine (2006) the film ends with ultimate meaning and clarity for why we have taken this journey. As the film ends in ultimate failure (he doesn't get the girl), but triumphant in that he is reinvigorated and inspired for starting the new year having reconnected with love and romance in his life. He is alive.

Submarine (Ayoade, UK, 2010)

Submarine is very rare, as a vertically integrated British film, as well as being a coming of age comedy. Ultimately it didn't do what it was supposed to do, in the system that purchased it. It had a relatively okay UK release, but it failed to impact overseas. Submarine deploys stylistic traits akin to an indie film comedy, if anything it plays to dominated cultural norms: the British person as cold and unfeeling who struggles to be emotionally available, counter culture/outside the norm influences, such as its pretentious psychedelic neighbour played by Paddy Considine.

It asks pertinent questions, explores existential themes, but arguably ends confused and somewhat unresolved, borrowing its ending from another of its Truffaut inspired inspirations. However, such stylistic borrowing is also the films triumph.

Submarine is not a counter culture film in its story, however does give the impression of spontaneity with the verve and style of the production techniques of counter cultural American indie film. It therefore epitomises the problem in an active way, where a filmmaker has tried to do something different, resulting in American indie film comedy style, transplanted into a British context. As a result it was also picked up by a mini major and vertically integrated. Also unusual for a British film, it does explore existential themes, has a young protagonist in a coming of age storyline, key frequent features of American Indie film comedies. Executive produced by Ben Stiller's company and marketed like an American vertically integrated indie film comedy, it was produced by alternative regional UK company Warp Films, and features a soundtrack by indie music darlings of the time the Arctic Monkeys. The overall impression of the selling of the film in its trailer, poster and verve, is of a fashionable cool coming of age comedy, comparable to Mike Mills' coming if age American indie comedy Thumbsucker (2005). Coming of age comedy is extremely rare in British film. As opposed to it being the staple of American cinema. There have been examples through the years such as Bend it Like Beckham (2002), Son of Rambo (2008) or Days of the Bangold Summer (2019), without it being a staple or recognisable export of British film.

American indie film is a hybrid of 70s movie brat cinema and European art house (Newman, 2011, p.29). Submarine (2010), set regionally in the Welsh countryside, borrows heavily from French cinema of the 60s (Wilson, 2011), whilst showing American indie film comedy commercial traits. These include colourful graphic, fashionable cool inspired poster design, funky titles, chapter divisions such as 'Prologue' and 'Part One', music video inspired editing, purposefully colourful production design and retro filmic grading. Music video techniques are employed in what is a visually accomplished piece of work. An early film shot by the now renowned cinematographer Erik Wilson (Paddington, 2014, Landscapers, 2021), Submarine employed VHS and Super 8 alongside the conventional 35mm (Wilson, 2021), characters breaking the fourth wall, voice over and multiple nouvelle vague style fantasy sequences: 60s European cinema in a contemporary context – exactly the genesis of American indie film comedy. It begins existentially exploring what the protagonists life would be like if he had died. Stating clearly the theme of the film being 'Who am I?', a rare existential theme for a British film and more often delt with in American indie cinema and the films of Jean-Luc Godard.

A final note in this interplay between money and style; the film took most of its money in the UK and did not translate globally. Global appeal is a key attribute of American indie film, allowing them the possibility to be breakout hits.

3. Rationale B: Summary of why I have chosen these Case Study questions

Because of the Nano budget nature of my production, inevitably that brings considerations of production scale into consideration. Therefore I have assembled a list of key questions to identify similarities and drivers of key considerations that can still transfer to a smaller, in fact nano scale, of production.

The questions are therefore aimed at unearthing key similarities and connections in common storytelling tropes: plot situation, character, theme, events, dialogue and characteristics of leading heroes. Having assembled an initial long list based on my own story experience, and heavily influences by the likes of Save the Cat by Blake Snyder (2005), Story by Robert McKee (1996) Syd Field's Screenwriting workbook (2006) and Salva Rubio's updated text from Snyder; Save the Cat Goes to the indies (2017). As this is a practice PhD I took the lens of a practical filmmaker and reduced to eight areas relevant to my study; what is at the core of the films and the style of the films as opposed to their production values, locations or set pieces. This was in order to get to the root of how to create an American indie film in a British context. All questions are achievable and transferable to a nano budget level. These questions are then visually backed up and referenceable through the Case Studies Video Essay, where I have time stamped each question section:

1. PLOT SITUATION Where do all films begin from? (e.g. tranquil normality). What are the key plot points? (Video Essay, 00:05)
2. CHARACTERS What do the characters want? What do they hold dear? What makes them real and authentic? What is their social status and diversity? Do they have money or not have money? Do the characters have accents? What are their jobs, do they have a job? (Video Essay, 06:27)
3. CONFLICT What is the key conflict at the heart of the story? Does this create the comedy? (Video Essay, 08:23)
4. LANDSCAPE Does the landscape play any role in the characterisation or story (e.g. hills, suburbia, vast open planes). (Video Essay, 14:46)

5. COMEDY What are the funniest moments of the film and why? Is there a certain style, e.g. slapstick, alternative? Where does the comedy arise from? (Video Essay, 17:21)

6. THEME What is the theme or themes of the film? What is the message or debate the writer is talking about? (Video Essay, 33:06)

7. ENDING Does the theme end on a completely resolved or unresolved note? Do we end where we started? What elements of the beginning and the end do you notice? (Video Essay, 41:22)

8. TONE and STYLE How would you instinctively describe the films tone and style and how this is achieved? (Video Essay, 49:28)

4. Case Studies

Section 1: Storytelling

1. **PLOT SITUATION Where do all films begin from? (e.g. tranquil normality). What are the key plot points?** (Video Essay, 00:05)

Little Miss Sunshine (2006) begins from a place of mayhem and chaos within a family of differing aspirations and life goals. We are introduced to an ensemble individually who then gather around the same dinner table. The writing clearly stating this film is about winners, losers and dreams coming true. Overall we get a sense that this is a chaotic environment, short of money and aspiring without success for more. The plot situation when the film begins is a state of a broke extended family struggling to keep it all together.

In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) begins with a young screenwriter comically and humiliatingly getting caught in the act of masturbating by his best friend, juxtaposed with the Hollywood hills sign. Overall we get a sense of liberal acceptance and although not actually a family, a sense of a family environment between close friends at home. The plot situation when the film begins is a state of a broke, loveless protagonist struggling to keep it all together.

Submarine begins in voice over stating "Most people think of themselves as individuals, that there's no one on the planet like them. This thought motivates them to get out of bed, eat food, and walk around like nothing's wrong. My name is Oliver Tate." It then goes on to a classroom where the teacher sets the task for the term "What kind of young person am I?" Overall the feeling is one of an existential, dream like existence of the protagonist, of which we are invited in to the world of. The

plot situation when the film begins is a state of a middle class family about to break up and a boy questioning the meaning of life.

Similarities in this respect of all the above include a sense of eccentric/alternative family environment at home where people are examining themselves outside normal socially accepted boundaries; e.g. an aging Grandfather taking heroin his reasoning being now he can because he's old (Little Miss Sunshine), the bored masturbation of his girlfriend being accepted by a best friend (In Search of a Midnight Kiss), and a mother exploring psychedelic pass times whilst her son explores the meaning of life (Submarine).

A uniting theme is that the majority of my case studies films have a set of characters questioning the meaning of life and taking some alternative action in some way. They do this mostly by contemplating death, their own immortality; existentialism.

2. **CHARACTERS What do the characters want? What do they hold dear? What makes them real and authentic? What is their social status and diversity? Do they have money or not have money?** (Video Essay, 06:27)

In Little Miss Sunshine each character is striving to win, in their own way in their lives, being at all the different stages of life from child to being elderly. Although they are an ensemble it is clear they hold dear aspiration and going for their dreams, no matter how far away they seem. What makes them real and authentic is that their aspirations for their age and life situation. Their social status seems a working class erudite.

In Search of a Midnight Kiss although the actual story is about going on a date and falling in love, really this is just what his friends decide for him. Wilson wants to cheer up, he wants to feel positive about the future. He's in a slump, a funk. What he holds dear is the emotional connection with another person.

In Submarine the protagonists 'want' is made clear. He wants to lose his virginity and save his parents marriage. It's more difficult to say what he holds dear, the story is driven forward by the Arctic Monkeys soundtrack and the style. It's almost like he speaks in the style of the film and not his character. In terms of the wiser characters, they all hold some kind of comic quirk and lingo. Whilst in a film such as Juno (2007), maintains such a lingo for only the beginning of the film, for impact, this film seems to keep it throughout. As a result my emotional connection, my empathy is limited. They constantly make me chuckle, but don't give a deep belly laugh. The comedy is structured

around each character having a peculiar turn of phrase (Dad), brisk manor (Mum) and generally harsh or two dimensional comic traits (school friends).

What bonds these characters is that they are triers in life, potentially experiencing epic failures of judgement and humiliation, contextualised in a counter culture/subversive way. All of them are either broke or have little interest in material items or money. Their focus is the exploration of happiness or existence in some way.

3. CONFLICT What is the key conflict at the heart of the story? Does this create the comedy?
(Video Essay, 08:23)

In Little Miss Sunshine the key conflict of the story is that everyone is striving and everyone is losing. But each character is striving in different ways and has contrasting prioritises and ways to get there. The central conflict surrounds motivation to attend the competition and ability to get there. The complications of transporting a dead body, and then the discipline of the competition organisers.

In In Search of a Midnight Kiss, the key conflict is that the couple can't be together because she is pregnant, which is only revealed at the end. Both characters are opposites. One is quick cold and harsh, the other slow, thoughtful and gentle. Aside from this the dark threat of the ex-boyfriend looms large 2/3 of the way in to the film.

In Submarine the key conflict is that Oliver is falling in love at a time when his parents are on the verge of splitting up. Whilst his commitment to Jordana is tested by the pressures of school. Aside from the differences in the characters personalities, the quirkiness, the style the film displays in abundance, the only real key conflict is Jordana's resistance or ice queen persona, and the juxtaposition of trying to begin your first relationship whilst your parents are on the verge of splitting up. There are bad guys in the form of school bullies, but the protagonists themselves actively decide to engage in bullying also.

As opposed to great conflict, the commonality here is a more a series of situational complications, that the protagonist seemingly has no control over. Its also not clear whether the protagonists are event aware of this. A trait of the voyage and return plot (Booker, 2004, p.87), where the protagonist is less active in engaging in the journey or the story they are undertaking, they are thrown into a different world beyond their control, and just have to adapt.

4. LANDSCAPE Does the landscape play any role in the characterisation or story (e.g. hills, suburbia, vast open planes). (Video Essay, 14:46)

Little Miss Sunshine's landscape is mostly in transit and movement, like taking a cross section of America. Hills, suburbia and vast open plains. From desolate country into inner city Los Angeles there does seem to be some deliberate contrasting. Redondo beach where the contest takes place is contrasted with the philosophical conversation Dwayne has with his uncle Frank on the peer, and the colourful glitzy palate of the contest itself. Many locations in build up to this seem to be deliberately baron and sparce to contrast with the busyness of the contest. But moreover these are serving the story as opposed to playing a central role in the characterisation of the story.

Contrastingly In Search of a Midnight Kiss contains the strongest landscape statement as character. Playing out in black and white, like a throw back to times past and a film like Manhattan (1979). The story involves the protagonists talking about the glorious 40s and they even get in to an old dilapidated theatre in down town LA and make up a scene... A bittersweet story about the LA anti-story, what its really like to be on the periphery. The backdrop plays like a reflection of the protagonists state of mind. Interestingly this can be considered a nano budget feature by using what you have, but in this case subverting it (Los Angeles), counter to the common perceived culture of tinsel town, of newness and dreams coming true. Here you have a protagonist whose dreams have not come true, and is showing the old heritage side of the city.

Submarine looks vibrant to watch, and it seems a mixture to suit what is effective to create vibrancy, set pieces to in order to borrow images from Godard and Truffaut . Whereas in Little Miss Sunshine and In Search of a Midnight Kiss, the American backdrops say something about the story, they are not simply to suite the indie aesthetic. I don't feel the Welsh Valleys backdrop has to do with the subject matter. It's just cool, that's it. It doesn't play into the stories hands or enhance it. If for example, this course humour was part of a London landscape, then the protagonist was transported to the coast for some kind of transformation, then the landscape may have more of an influence.

5. COMEDY What are the funniest moments of the film and why? Is there a certain style, e.g. slapstick, alternative? Where does the comedy arise from? (Video Essay, 17:21)

The funniest moments of the films include the extended In Search of a Midnight Kiss joke from the beginning of the film where his best friend walks in on the protagonist masturbating to a photo-shopped picture of his best friends girlfriend who his best friend then proposes too, all in the knowledge of this opening event. This appallingly embarrassing and ethically suspect act is

frequently talked about liberally through the film and creates several laugh out loud moments, from this one incident. Vivian's (female lead) tendency to overreact also then lends an added layer.

In Submarine the funniest moments are not as clear. They more come from the stand up comic style of the protagonists father, or two dimensional nature of the class clown or school bully or bullied child. In particular at the start of the film, the slightly shocking directness of Oliver and his contemporaries is funny at first, but as we advance through the story it keeps us separate, the coldness and lack of vulnerability keeps the audience separate. For example in Juno (2007) the cold or more clipped dialogue to set the tone at the start, relents as the film progresses. For some reason this frequently does not happen in British films. That said in the middle of the film when Oliver prepares their dinner date and sprawls himself across the bed after asking her to close her eyes, with her reaction "Fucking hell you're a serial killer" (00:33:31-3). It is funny, and it is not as funny to me if we had more empathy and were more invested in the meaning of the story. Interestingly enough it appears to have been added in the edit, as we do not see the character say this in a reverse shot, but only from the back of the head, a trait of nano budget filmmaking when resources are scarce and time is short on set.

Little Miss Sunshine also involves an ethically, morally suspect event when the policeman who has stopped their vehicle (as the horn won't stop blowing) makes jokes with the driver about a bunch of gay porn magazines found on the back shelf (not his), but he has to go along with it in order to avoid a fine. This questioning of morals, continues throughout the comedy of the film: Richard's morally questionable pursuit of being a winner, the bereavement liaison officer becoming aggressive as to taking a dead body of state lines, Olive's morally questionable final performance in front of a morally questionable child beauty pageant. The comedy batters you over the head with its point of view of questioning moral standpoint, as a focus for humour.

In Search of a Midnight Kiss gives contrast from the main players. The fact that Vivian is so harsh is a joke in the film, compared with Wilson's meekness. It is not to be taken as normal. Whereas in Submarine there is a normality about being harsh, cold, direct, from both protagonists. Likewise in Little Miss Sunshine, the Grandfather character comes out with stuff which the other protagonists disapprove of when he is so harsh. It's funny, a character. However in Submarine for some reason all the characters in the story seem to be like this. Played at one tone like the voice of the author. Again this reminds me of British sketch comedy, played for laughs but when played for so long begins to

grate on the eyes and ears. Submarine is rescued in to romance by the stylisation which in tern makes the comedy more bearable in its coldness.

In summary the humour tends to arise from morally and ethically suspect actions. Whereas in the past I have noticed this and included it in previous films, the subtlety, placement and moral standpoint is made absolutely clear. I hadn't noticed this before and something to be extremely careful of when choosing any kind of humour of this kind in filmmaking. As so much of comedy involves the lewd and crude (e.g., a film such as Bridesmaids (2011) and the wedding dress parlour bowel meltdown), it has to not be to the detriment of the stories heart and meaning. So for example another exceptionally funny scene from the Case Studies films, is the climax of Little Miss Sunshine, where the message is absolutely clear, when a little girl does a strip routine at a child beauty pageant: this is a stupid meaningless competition where the participants have no idea what they're doing. The comedy seems to arise from not necessarily slapstick or a certain style in that sense, but from a questioning of the moral and ethical and questioning those boundaries and indeed what they may be and why, the counter culture perspective or at least questioning moral code. The edgy, and almost certainly involving the conventional comedy tropes of the lewd and crude.

6. THEME What is the theme or themes of the film? What is the message or debate the writer is talking about? (Video Essay, 33:06)

Winning and losing is the resounding theme of Little Miss Sunshine. With the author playing with the question of whether it's okay to be a loser, throughout the film. Ending with a resounding answer that it is okay to be a loser, in fact by losing and accepting you are a winner.

In Search of a Midnight Kiss is less clear. However to focus on the face value themes of love, romance and pregnancy would be misleading. These are genre tropes to make the film make sense, accessible to a global audience, the vertical integration style I have previously mentioned. Eight minutes into the film, the protagonist says the following:

> "Wilson: I just miss that comfort and connection. Like Karen and I. We worked at the
> same restaurant. And we'd sometimes leave early and go to the McDonalds drive
> through, and we'd just sit there. Eating. Sharing that moment. Just being there with
> one another."
>
> 00:08:09-00:08:27

Minutes later, on preparing an email to Karen which he ends up deleting, he says the following:

"I miss you more than I could possibly imagine. Just hearing your voice would melt all my anxiety as I would know that there's someone out there that still cares whether I live or die…"

00:08:45-00:10:09

At the end of the film, the couple are not together, but the film closes with the dialogue:

"This fuckin' year is going to be awesome."

01:36:18-01:36:19

Fundamentally the film seems to be about cheering up and getting on with your life, and that this is done by having connection with people who care whether you live or die, through having a human experience of connection. This is more related to the characters state of mind and story arc. The actual theme is more hidden and less aware or the interest of the writer. As opposed to the title 'In Search of a Midnight Kiss', the theme should be 'In Search of Someone Who Cares Whether I Live or Die' as quoted by the protagonist eight minutes into the film. Although not as masterful thematically as Little Miss Sunshine, it scratches the surface of its theme, without necessarily being aware of what it actually is.

Submarine, states at the start of the film that it is exploring the meaning of life, at least on some level:

"Teacher: What kind of young person am I… that's the challenge I'm giving you this term… an opportunity for self discovery… discovery of the self: who am I?"

00:02:18-00:02:44

The film then takes the liberty of this existential theme, and takes it as an opportunity to flit from one scene to another, one funny situation to another, as if the theme alone gave license to indulge in stylistic freedom, like a nouvelle vague exploratory experimental film, engaging with many Truffaut stylistic traits, with voice over and shot selection. Romantic escalation in the first half of the film indulges in stylistic freedom to escalate the romance, everything working together: story,

characters, style and meaning. The theme of the meaning of life stated at the beginning of the film is then taken over by what should, or traditionally be the 'b' plot, i.e. the love interest. Coming back to the purpose of this section; what is the message or theme the writer is talking about, despite its lack of thematic balance, the film contains what is common for an indie film: youth. A coming of age story or a story containing some kind of youthful premiss or central element.

Youth is what bonds these films thematically or a sensibility of it. The central journey of Olive to compete in the contest, that binds everyone, as well as adults acting childishly. In Search of a Midnight Kiss is a person in the final throws of youth in courtship. Submarine is literally a coming of age teenage story.

7. ENDING Does the theme end on a completely resolved or unresolved note? Do we end where we started? What elements of the beginning and the end do you notice? (Video Essay, 41:22)

Little Miss Sunshine ends completely resolved plot wise with a satisfying tying up of an ending, like a good meal, a combination of spectacle and meaning, where boundaries have been expanded, each character has grown, got their reward or comeuppance, it is a masterclass of classical storytelling. At the end of the film we have a family united, that at the start was struggling to get along. And with their journey we somehow feel everything is going to be okay, in true comedy style. In terms of the visual symmetry between the beginning and end, I don't think the directors have quite thought through any matching or symbolic frames or metaphors, they seem to be simply serving the story. But they push the car to start it at the end, working together, whereas at the start they were separated around the dinner table.

In Search of a Midnight Kiss ends resolved because their experience is ultimately grounded in reality; if she is pregnant then they can't be together. A slight plot hole in the themes of the script, but because the characters are okay with it and the actors play it well, we accept it for what it is; two people who have decided in the moment they can't be together. In Search of a Midnight Kiss' stated beginning theme is 'having somebody out there who cares whether I live or die.' In leaving the impossible romance they have had over new year's eve, the following dialogue takes place between our protagonists:

"Vivian: Will you think of me next year at midnight?

Wilson: Yeah, I'll think of you every year for the rest of my life."

01:32:30-01:32:37

In the end scene of the film, Wilson sits in the same place he sat at the start; an undersized kids chair where he was so miserable, this time broadly grinning and raising his arms triumphantly. A voyage and return story (Booker, 2004, p.87) as Little Miss Sunshine is.

Submarine roves from its original thematic starting point (Who am I?) like a rough experimental nouvelle vague film, cartwheeling this way and that until it finds its initially 'b plot' romance and takes off. The film symbolically ends in silence when the protagonist, 400 Blows (1959) like, runs to the seas edge, only to find her (Jordana), and they walk to the sea and look at the horizon – fin. The ending to Submarine perhaps is where the overall problem permeates in for British indie cinema; it sits exactly in the centre of European art house and America and can't decide one way or another.

With some exceptions such as Slacker (1990), American indie film involves resolved classically structured stories that play with form and/or combine genre. Caught between those two stools of art house and American commercial filmmaking, Submarine ends okay, butt can't decide if it's straightforwardly experimental and anti-plot, or a globally accessible, classical story structure film. The implication is the filmmaker wants to make the former, but the lack of vertically integrated British system allows him to do this, but ironically it is then picked up by that vertically integrated American system. We don't end where we started and aside from thematically some resolution around coming of age, there is little correlation between beginning and end point visually.

In conclusion the resolution of plot is key to a classical comedy structure, which American indie films tend to employ, to appeal to a global audience and in the case of comedy structure all loose ends are neatly tied up (Booker, 2004, p.107). This is the case in Little Miss Sunshine and In Search of a Midnight Kiss, but less so in Submarine. Certainly the element of voyage and return (Booker, 2004, p.87) seems applicable to all stories. Returning to the same place, the same life, but with somehow everything changed.

8. TONE and STYLE How would you instinctively describe the films tone and style and how this is achieved? (Video Essay, 49:28)

Submarine has a distinctive style of the nouvelle vague and experimental filmmaking, within the context of a more structured narrative film. Its tone is sometimes jarring, deliberately, but I feel this takes from the overall tone of the film and is what I want to explore and see if it's possible in British filmmaking. How it is achieved is through combining film formats such as super 8, free flowing and alternative camera moves and angles. High contrast shooting in autumn. Graded as if in the past/depleted film.

The jarring effect of the continued tone of the dialogue as previously outlined, is exemplified in the following section of Submarine. Having spent an early Christmas dinner with his girlfriend's parents, in the eventuality his girlfriend's mother may die of her cancer operation two days later, the protagonist leaves the house with his girlfriend:

> "Jordana: Maybe you should come to the hospital this Friday? Mum will have had her operation by then and we can visit. If you felt like it.
>
> Oliver: Friday. I've got to do some Christmas shopping. Just because I always leave it too late and I want to get something good.
>
> Jordana: My mother might die.
>
> Oliver: I know.
>
> Jordana: D'you care about that or couldn't you give a fuck?
>
> Oliver: I do, clearly. I'll come, when is it?
>
> Jordana: Friday.
>
> Oliver: Great yeah. Yeah Friday's good for me actually. I could do that. Excellent."
>
> 00:58:13-00:58:43

In isolation this dialogue is funny, at least at face value. But in the context of the film, for some reason a British films ability to leave the funny dialogue aside, and just be in the moment and experience the vulnerability and emotion of it, is railroaded through like a steam train. Instead of playing the moment for the drama it holds, the discomfort, the humour still seems to take precedence, as if mechanically it rolls on. A film like Juno (2007) would never have had the success it did globally without the protagonist rolling in and out of her scything wit and engaging in gentle moments with her partner. In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) also balances well this harshness and gentleness, especially between male friends:

> "Best friend: Don't say anything but, I'm gonna propose to Min.
>
> Protagonist: You're serious.
>
> Best friend: Yeah I love her. I just figured, why not, get married.
>
> Protagonist: Do you have a ring?
>
> Best friend: My Mom just sent it yesterday. Look at that. That's the ring of doom. My father gave that to every one of his five wives and every one of them ended in divorce. My Mum's the only one that kept it. That ring has so much fuckin' hatred and just anger

and aggression, fuckin; frustration and just divorce all tied in to that. But you know

what. I don't care. My love for Min is so strong that I'm going to beat the Macintyre

curse. That right there is going to become the ring of love.

Protagonist: Man I'm so happy for you.

Best friend: I was going to do it this morning but your little jack off stunt kind of killed

the mood. You just made the whole thing that much more memorable. It's great.

Protagonist: Oh that's great, now you're gonna tell that story every time somebody

asked you how you proposed.

Best friend: Man that's why I love you. I love for that.

Protagonist: Alright man, good luck, I'm really happy for you.

Best friend: Good luck."

00:19:27-00:20:48

In Search of a Midnight Kiss definitely has a key ingredient which makes the low cost video camera

look better: it has been shot in black and white. A recent colour version of the film, the addition it

has to the storyline is unbelievable. Filming in colour is such a different medium and in terms of the

characters emotions and state of mind, the black and white adds to the fabric of the story.

The strongest and most potent aspect of Submarine, and what makes it a contender for a British

indie film comedy equivalent (or closest thing to it) is its style. Whereas the tone leans towards this

cutting direct humour, the cumulative effect of its style is highly successful. I struggle to associate

the success of this to one role. The editing, cinematography, production design, scripted set ups,

specifically directed acting and casting are so in harmony that there are passages of style and feel

where this film flows above all American indie film comedy examples previously noted. Passages of

montage, romance, super 8, colour contrasts. Clearly shot in autumn and winter, the film takes

advantage of the high contrast natural light of the season, juxtaposed with autumn colours and the

night lights of the long British winter months. Not something you can really do in America.

Cinematographer Erik Wilson stated that the main influences for the film were entrenched in

nouvelle vague:

"Richard had very clear ideas about many aspects of the visuals for the film," comments

Wilson. "We watched a lot of films for reference, most of them coming from 1970s

French cinema." These included the character studies of Francois Truffaut and Eric

Rohmer's comedies of manners. Another influence was the cinematography of Nestor

Almendros, who photographed several Truffaut films, including *The Man Who Loved*

Women (1977), and Pauline *at The Beach* (1983) for Rohmer, as well as Terrence Malik's

Days of Heaven (1978)."

Wilson, 2011, British Cinematographer

In Little Miss Sunshine, the tone of the film is very gentle when you consider the inner lives of each character: an incomplete suicide, a grandfather taking heroin, a silent teenager, a family verging on poverty, a child who performs a strip act at a beauty pageant and a broke father chasing hollow dreams. None of this is reflected in the tone or style. In fact the tone and style literally could not be any further removed from these inner journeys of these fragmented characters. It is as if the Directors have deliberately steered clear, as if the film will not be successful if they were able to engage in it. A very safe approach. An exceptionally skilfully, beautifully told Oscar winning story, its weakness is its directing and lack of stylised vision. This is in contrast to its exceptional marketing campaign which took advantage of the Sundance connection and bright yellow VW camper, to access its indie audience (Video Essay 1.52:56). The actual experience of watching the film yields little in terms of this style, the inner journey of the characters or story as a whole. In fact in comparison to the other two films, its stylisation and direction are less impactful. Perhaps it was for the reason that the directors were making their first feature film, and had a background in music video. So when it came to short form trailer, they were exceptionally gifted at selling the story to the audience. Whereas the long form was less confidently handled. This film relies on its exceptional script and the stylistic substance, the visual portrayal of the script's strengths, are not as prevalent as in the other two films. As a consequence, the tone and style is like taking a fun loving family trip through southern America, every camera move smooth, every plot point clearly stated, it's a very safe, gentle tone and style. This makes the film pure in terms of letting the script shine through, but the director has the potential to take a very good script and make it great. I don't feel the directors have done this here. They have simply aimed to colourise, golden the look and feel of the film, to make it all about the child protagonist and to make clear the films point of child innocence.

In conclusion the tone and style, similarly to the landscape, can be used in differing measures to reflect the mood of the characters where possible. It is not a pre-requisite of the indie but can enhance the indie film. For example in Submarine its story arc is a weaker element, yet the use of tone and style the strongest. Music video techniques are employed to demonstrate two people falling in love for the first time and/or the coming of age feeling of being youthful; sparklers, slow motion, super 8, Hitchcock zooms, lens whacking, over saturated high contrast colour etc. Secondly

the tone and style need a sense of dialogue and personal voice of the filmmaker where possible, and that must be balanced (e.g. if harsh and cold) with genuine human warmth and vulnerability.

5. Conclusion

Each film has distinctive elements that make it stand out as indie. Little Miss Sunshine's theme, characters and tone. In Search of a Midnight Kiss at a low/no budget level style, creative use of locations, art house feel yet vertically integrated plot. Submarine's heavy stylisation showing how indie might be possible in a British context alongside initial existential themes Submarine struggles to identify what the story is about, and ends simply falling back on 'guy gets girl'.

Summarising these case studies, the following assumptions emerge from the questions asked, when observing my analysis for similarities:

1. PLOT SITUATION

A broke and/or dreaming protagonist, questioning the meaning of life in some way, existentialism.

2. CHARACTERS

What bonds these characters is that they are triers in life, potentially experiencing epic failures of judgement and humiliation, contextualised in a counter culture/subversive way. All of them are either broke or have little interest in material items or money. Their focus is the exploration of happiness or existence in some way.

3. CONFLICT

The conflicts arise from characters extreme differences and contrasts, which act as opposing forces. As opposed to great conflict, the commonality here is a more a series of situational complications, that the protagonist seemingly has no control over. It's also not clear whether the protagonists are event aware of this. A trait of the voyage and return plot (Booker, 2004, p.87), where the protagonist is less active in engaging in the journey or the story they are undertaking, they are thrown into a different world beyond their control, and just have to adapt.

4. LANDSCAPE

Can reflect characters state of mind if used skilfully and enriches the level of filmmaking if used appropriately.

5. COMEDY

Humour tends to arise from morally and ethically suspect actions, played out in counter culture/subversive style acting as a catalyst for the protagonist. Comedy also comes from characters harshness and directness, with the American version more skilled at juxtaposing cold humour with warm emotional moments. Further comedy seems to arise from not necessarily slapstick but from a questioning of the moral and ethical, which then might involve slapstick, questioning those boundaries and indeed what they may be and why; the edgy. Further comedy arises from classical comedy tropes which define the; scenarios that involve the lewd, crude, embarrassment, bodily disfunction etc.

6. THEME

A sense of existentialism and questioning normal ways of living, with an overarching focus on youth or youthfulness.

7. ENDING

Classical comedy and 'Voyage and Return' plot (Booker, 2004, p.87), whereby the protagonist is propelled into a world not necessarily of his own making, returning to the same place or same life as at the start of the film, yet everything is different, and in the case of comedy structure all loose ends are neatly tied up (Booker, 2004, p.107).

8. TONE and STYLE

Music video and/or experimental techniques employed where appropriate to reflect the story and character. Harsh clipped humour juxtaposed with warm gentle moments.

Inventing the British nano budget comedy film, through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style

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8. Portfolio - Case Studies Essay Film

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Inventing the British nano budget comedy film, through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style

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9. Interim Findings

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7. **Film Experiments**

1. Introduction

Through my research thus far, my study has led me to four main points to take forward into my film experiments and feature film script and example scenes:

1. **American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema.**

    - Newman, 2010, p.17

2. **In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes.**

    - My personal observation, and a significant difference in exploring American to British

3. **Stylistically indie film comedy can involve (as with independent film) a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.**

    - A combination of observations, but talked about predominantly in books by JJ Murphy

4. **Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.**

- Hope, 2014, pp. 149

I will now expand on these four points and look at how to take them forward in to my film experiments.

2. The counter culture alternative national cinema

A significance in my findings has been the interplay between money and style. Britain's funding of its film industry has created a style in order to draw attention to socially important themes, and therefore social realism has seen significant prosperity and global attention, and considered a key British export (Berra, 2008, p.152). The films of the British new wave, followed by Ken Loach and Mike Leigh cemented Britain's place in this respect.

In America style has been influenced by vertically integrated mini majors, who have fostered above all a cohesive narrative combined with maximum experimentation. American social realism is just one of these forms, American indie film comedy comedies, for example, are another.

When low budget films are made in the UK they tend to be genre based horror and social realism (Follows, 2014), even when not funded by the BFI. A cast, a dye, has been set (Yule and Manderson, 2014, p.6). Comedy on the other hand, is regarded as the riskiest genre financially (Follows, 2014). Money has played a crucial role in shaping the style of British cinema, its choice of genre. Yet in the past comedy has been one of Britain's longest and sustainable exports and sustained British film business through times of economic slump. Also perhaps significantly in the case of Britain, humour in general is considered intrinsic to the British character (Hunter and Porter, 2012, p.1-2). Perhaps in Britain humour can be considered cold and detached, like it's perception of personality abroad (MORI, 2004).

All of the above aspects have created a gap, a problem in British cinema, where there is a space for indie experimental cohesive narrative, in comedy which is also warm and life affirming, not cold, detached and potentially miserable. The possibility then is for an alternative counter culture national cinema to emerge in the comedy form, contrary to global perception and British cinema norms.

Whereas counter culture in American Independent cinema can mean extreme stories such as drugs, murder and Shangri-la (e.g. Easy Rider, 1969, Bonnie and Clyde, 1967), indie is more concerned with the middle ground. Societies struggles with itself and the subtleties therein and questions of existentialism. Little Miss Sunshine's (2006) commentary on the child beauty pageant, In Search of a Midnight Kiss' (2007) wrestling and resistance with the rise of online dating.

In order to foster a new counter culture national cinema, it is important not to copy or duplicate American indie film comedy examples. Instead use them as a jumping off point to inspire a new aesthetic. An example of this is the most indie-like, visually similar British independent film, my case study Submarine (2010), which visually embraces stylistic techniques yet shuns a counter culture storyline and protagonist. In fact the one counter cultural element is mocked and played for laughs; Paddy Considine's quasi-psychedelia guru character, Graham Purvis.

In America, vertically integrated studio films simply focus on finding fresh material with some novelty value for its audience: its purpose is diversity (Berra, 2008, p.159). This diversity spreads in all directions and creative avenues even at nano budget level; comedy (e.g. Clerks, 1994), drama (Pi, 1998) thriller (e.g. Catfish, 2010), horror (e.g. The Blair Witch Project, 1999), sci-fi (e.g. Primer, 2004), action (e.g. El Mariachi, 1992), as well as social realism (e.g. Prince of Broadway, 2008). In the UK it is restricted to just a few, such as social realism and low budget horror (usually with social realism elements), because of the interplay between money and style. Therefore there is a counter culture gap available in British cinema.

3. Indie film comedy's buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes

Iconic indie film comedies such as Slacker (1990) rail against the dominant job culture by rejoicing in the philosophical conversation and exploring the conversations this opposing perspective brings. Many characters are jobless, but this is apparently not a bad thing, in fact it is welcomed as a life choice, not to be engaged in the prevailing culture. Linklaters subsequent film Dazed and Confused (1993) reveals a relaxed reflectiveness in the face of teenage intensity, and another indie comedy Clerks (1994) ponders the minutiae of the micro grocery store, in black and white, counter to the spectacular world America inhibits. Clerks plays with its restrictions with buoyancy and life affirming quality: a man searches for the perfect egg, conversations are about life's problems, a spontaneous hockey game is contested on the shops roof in youthful style. Chapter title cards playfully divide scenes contemplating life and existentialism. Yet its comedy feels spontaneous, tangential, off the wall, like anything could happen. Down beat themes are dealt with in an upbeat, dynamic energy.

Things go wrong but they are to be dealt with and fought for. Cult mumblecore classic The Puffy Chair (2005) weaves a clear narrative with seeming romantic ends, yet counter culturally explores the twenty something theme of why we break up, not why we stay together. But the downbeat theme has an upbeat, reflective energy. In general most indie films favour a hand held rough edged look. In nano and low budget film this is out of budget necessity. Another practical alternative is to use locked off, static frames on a tripod, letting the action take place within the frame.

In order to create the British indie comedy it is insightful to observe these 'older parts' of American indie film comedy comedies. In order to construct the 'new parts', it's important to contextualise further the global marketplace American cinema has established indie within. Even in its lower budget non Hollywood form, the indie form, American cinema is still very much an 'international cinema, one that is familiar to audiences around the world through its employment of certain characters, themes, cultural iconography, and the American narrative tradition. The classic characters of the American narrative tradition, such as law enforcement officers, drifters, loners, criminals, and aspiring heroes' (Berra, 2008, p.165). This is pivotal to its success overseas, globally. Audiences know this character or that character as a construct of the American narrative tradition. So cult independent filmmakers such as John Sayles, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino all engage with these classical American characters. It is not just restricted to the main stream. Even the great indie film comedy makers of America use these arch types to support their stories, like it's common sense to do so. It speaks a language to the world they are familiar with.

In my case studies both Little Miss Sunshine (2006) and In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), at their centre is an aspiring hero with big ideas of how to turn his life around. One absolutely and resolutely losing, the other his most ridiculous humiliation becoming his ultimate triumph. In Submarine (2010) the coming of age protagonist in a British context, is relatively rare. Therefore the filmmaker is already up against global understanding: if Britain doesn't do many coming of age comedy dramas, then the world is not familiar with it. This is reflected in the mostly domestic box office for the film, whereas globally it struggled to be understood. Completely reinventing something needs to be handled more carefully and with traditional tropes the world understands. Using established character types and expectations is a good starting point to flipping those expectations on their head, counter to the dominant cultural form, be that in character or story. That is why for example, Pulp Fiction garnered awards, critical acclaim, as well as blockbuster ticket receipts. The tough guy hit men talk about existential themes, the traditionally reliable law enforcement officer is a twisted

rapist, the criminals are the good guys. Yet all the central protagonists are the familiar aspiring heroes of the American dream, even this aspiration being a central theme of the story.

The British narrative tradition has classic characters, such as the repressed rich person, the cockney gangster, the police inspector, the clever snob, bumbling aristocracy, the village simpleton and the working class person stuck in the system. Around the same time David M. Thompson made comments at the Cannes film festival that British film needed to move away from its miserabilism roots and embrace being gushy and wear our hearts on our sleeves (Thorpe, 2005), The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce, in an attempt to understand British perceptions abroad, unearthed information on globally understandable aspects of Britishness (MORI, 2004). Being aware of this, in the same way Berra states America is aware of the character driven American literary tradition of outsiders, drifters, loners, criminals, law enforcement officers and aspiring heroes (p.161) is key to finding a new type of British indie film comedy. The survey notes the following comments during its discussion groups:

> "Cleverness makes me think of British humour," one American said. "Clever is a word
> and concept that I think is particular to Britain."

> "Their sense of humour ... it's like laughing with tight teeth," said one.

MORI, 2004

During discussion groups, the report says, the same words came up again and again. Reserved. Uptight. Snobbishness. They treat you with cold detachment," one Italian offered up, "but they are not impolite."

Embracing character types perceptions, and then turning them on their head, is one way to handle this sense of counter culture, but important to embrace and use as a communicating factor globally. Often British films chastise, self depreciate. Characters either see these values in themselves and are critical, or see them in others and are critical, usually in social realism.

Interestingly all my case studies films have a set of characters questioning the meaning of life and taking some alternative action in some way. They do this mostly by contemplating death, their own mortality. British films have a tendency to be down hearted and not upbeat when addressing these themes. The difference American indie film comedies show in extolling these themes, is a sense of

buoyancy and life affirming quality. There is a different energy, a combat whilst being open hearted, that is not present in British film. Downbeat themes still somehow, have upbeat energy. They are not miserabilist. An embracing of the international characteristics that can make your film the most successful, not railing against or being cynical about their use.

4. The impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity

In one sense creating this is the goal of every film, in order to create great performances. In particular independent film has a reputation for doing this and launching acting careers. However my research has unearthed a further realisation.

In my case studies there are aspects which can easily make a film look like it is identifiable as indie: experimental film techniques within the context of a vertically integrated narrative. This can give the 'impression' of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. It is not just the acting that is only the impression we get as the viewer. For example filmmaker David O'Russell weaves his camera through scenes like it is being held on strings, ending on character close ups, breathing life in to performances. Indie black comedy drama I Tonya (2017) does this too, using the moving camera as a punk energy driving the performances, as well as music video inspired animations, whip pans and a moving camera gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. The energy is raw and makes the action feel more in the moment, in there with the characters. Often this moving visual style is developed from the necessity of hand held low budget cinema, as it is the easiest and quickest way to shoot. My nano budget case study In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) is testament to this and employs these techniques.

However the authenticity only follows when the style suits the themes of the film. This is why you can't simply duplicate American indie film comedy and dump it in a British context. For example, although hand held is a prevalent technique, it's opposite works in the right context. Richard Linklaters shooting of Dazed and Confused (1993) is fairly processional and conventional (as the dialogue is so authentic), but it still uses five slow motion frames to segment moments in the film where the protagonist is taking a life decision, playing like a still frame from your memory, appearing out of nowhere in conventionally shot film. Authenticity, realness, different. But inspired by that moment, not copied for aesthetic effect. The impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity is a construct and not necessarily a reality. It can be improvised but more normally this not the case, particularly as budget increases, e.g. Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (2006) and

Juno (2007) are classical indie film comedy comedies that have a tightly structured narrative and script.

Although undoubtedly the acting is key to creating the impression of these values, it is a marriage between the filming techniques and the performance to create this effect.

5. Idiosyncratic, weird and different in some way

Where Hollywood wins with familiar formulas, indie film comedies often triumph as a result of their originality (Hope, 2014, pp. 149). The aforementioned tightly structured and scripted Little Miss Sunshine (2006), has as its final climax a child doing a strip dance style act at a child beauty pageant. Individual characters have made weird or idiosyncratic weird of different life decisions: Grandpa, seeing as he is now old enough, is injecting heroin; their eldest son Dwayne has decided to stop speaking until he makes it into the air force; Uncle Frank has decided to take his own life. These are not in line with expectation, yet they also do not come across as depressing and repressed, despite being down beat. Quite the opposite, the characters and story are dynamic and energised.

A Grandpa conventionally should be settling into his old age and focusing on his personal health and safety, not now beginning to engage in class A drugs. A teenager should be lazy and angst ridden, not silent and disciplined. Conventionally an adult should be together and not being taken in to care at 40.

In my other case study In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), the idiosyncrasy is in his friend being totally okay, totally fine with his bizarre behaviour. It is non-judgmental. The aforementioned Slacker (1990) idiosyncratically makes the normally derided jobless minority, the overwhelming thoughtful majority.

So the events and traits themselves play a part in the idiosyncratic, weird or different in some way, the nature of the film, but also crucially the characters response and/or lack of judgmental attitude to it, is key.

6. Conclusion

When considering re-inventing the British comedy film through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style, it is important to note that duplication alone should not be transferred from an American context to a British one. Rather that the aesthetic and the response to it should be tangibly similar in some way, that it reflects a new positive energy, up beat in outlook, existentially themed British comedy, with counter culture at its heart.

Therefore although one of my film experiments will include duplication, the purpose of this thesis is to go beyond duplication and transcend. Through my studies of Research Problem and its Context, Literature Review, Case Studies and Video Essay, these four key attributes that have emerged.

Moving into my film experiments, Stephen Follows observes the tendency of low budget films not to offer the escapist glamour of high budget films (2016). It is something to consider that in the same way down beat stories have influenced British film, consider the possibility that escapist glamour, for which cinema is one of the ultimate vehicles, can be possible at a nano budget level. A way this can be achieved is through theatrical, inventive wacky narrative, which then broadens the possibilities for techniques which give the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.

As the very same data analysis study by Stephen Follows revealed, the single most important and potent strength of the indie film comedy maker, is the script (2016).

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10. Film Experiments

Following on from my interim findings (IF) I am now engaging into creative practice. The purpose of the experiments is to discover new things, to reinvent. Therefore I have deliberately left them loosely structured, to allow for tangential exploration, whilst still being systematic in my research approach. The purpose is to refine my interim findings into my next stage; Guidelines for an Indie film comedy, through my own practice and experimentation.

Film Experiment 1

Free associate with my own practice tangentially to cultivate style and aesthetics, via old and new video, montage, photography, sound and theme. (IF [Interim Findings] 1-4)

Film Experiment 2

Inspired by findings from Experiment 1, bring together a narrative inspired by a classical American indie comedy character, and translate into a British context. Using experimental/music video techniques and camera movement that gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. (IF 1-4)

Film Experiment 3

Reflect and refine the learnings of Film Experiments 1 & 2, and reshoot/refine the same/similar narrative to explore refining indie aesthetic and style. (IF 1-4)

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11. Portfolio - Film Experiment 1

One Drive Link: 11. Portfolio - Film Experiment 1.mov

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12. Film Experiment 1 Reflection

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4. **IF3: Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.**
5. **IF4: 'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).**
6. **Conclusion**

1. Introduction

> **Film Experiment 1**
> Free associate with my own practice tangentially to cultivate style and aesthetics, via old and new video, montage, photography, sound and theme. (IF [Interim Findings] 1-4)

The purpose of my Film Experiments is to explore my interim findings, in a practice based context. In order to further uncover what it takes to redefine the British cinematic comedy film and taking American indie film comedy as the inspiration, it is necessary to put my discoveries in to practice. To explore and discover how to combine these interim findings with practical exercises to uncover newness, a different way. Here, in my first experiment, I take my first steps to apply my interim findings in American indie film comedy, and applying it in a British context. I detail below my reflections on making Film Experiment 1, structured around breaking down those four interim findings.

2. IF1: American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17).

In order to explore and attempt to break out of my own consciousness of British and American film, I attempted to tangentially explore my own personal interests, deliberately being self indulgent and exploring my own voice in the context of American indie film comedy.

The DIY nature of production enabled me to start with my own family, viewing old footage, exploring filming new footage in an indie style. Embracing music video techniques and deliberately overtly colourful texture. I included trail camera footage of exploring nature, Shakespeare, rewilding, song writing, all ideas that have occurred and fed into my creative process and were part of my life and exploration at the time.

In terms of this montage like work achieving an alternate national cinema, I'm not sure how much this experiment contributes. Stylistically it implies that embracing a softer, gentler counter culture, but subjectively there is nothing really about it that is counter culture. There is only a softness and happy melancholy that could have potential to explore a different vibe.

The Shakespearean monologue is twee, counter to a traditional male protagonist, a lean towards Wordsworth and the romantic movement. In that sense it is counter culture, but when considering contemporary attitudes and mindfulness, not so.

The song was not counter culture. It would be interesting to explore this more in the final script. To write something specially designed for the film.

3. IF2: In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes; Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (2006).

There is life affirming family footage, set against American indie acoustic style music, and this definitely fulfils and creates this IF2 quality. The family scenes are very buoyant and maybe make more sense to me as the filmmaker, as they are all personal, but they do contribute to scratching at the surface of a more open and heartfelt aesthetic and style. I think what will be interesting is how to take this sensibility in to a narrative context. As all this is montage and tangential, how do I capture that spirit of production and take it in to a new story, a new narrative.

The family Chapter is buoyant, and has an uplifting energy. The family element, the new baby inevitably covers existential themes. So too with the Shakespeare monologue Chapter; uplifting and existential words that reflect on nature and its purposes in a life affirming way. The flow of nature, into a song about existential themes of losing a loved one, but in a happy melancholy way. I'm not so sure the song is life affirming. It is examining existential themes, "And I miss you, there is one day more". It is more melancholy than buoyant or even life affirming.

4. IF3: Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.

The family film gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. No surprise as it is a combination of set up and mostly found footage. Taking family footage instead of a scripted narrative, naturally draws an authentic and spontaneity. Actions are not premeditated and whilst the camera can invoke self consciousness, it doesn't dominate in the same way.

As I explored Chapter 2's Shakespearean monologue on nature, my own actions felt less spontaneous and more contrived. In order to use slow motion and hit frame sizes, the spontaneity lessened.

In Chapter 3, there felt more authenticity in my performance playing the guitar and perhaps this had something to do with the emotional nature of the subject matter and song tune. There is a large amount of slow motion used in Chapter 3, as in the Shakespeare monologue in Chapter 2. Peculiarly, and unexpectedly, this gives the impression of spontaneity. I'm not sure why. It gives an odyssey feel, a tangential feel I can't really put my finger on, but I can feel it when I watch it.

5. IF4: 'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).

The family film Chapter is idiosyncratic in that is it is a true stylistic reflection to my own life. However lacking in the large idiosyncrasy that creates great characters and narrative. It does not look particularly different, if following a brightly colourful palate oft used in American indie film comedies.

Chapter 1 is stylistically indie feeling. It has some idiosyncratic elements, such as the foxes and hedgehog, but really it remains stylistically solid, yet lacking real idiosyncrasy.

Chapter 2 is definitely different. The Shakespeare language and the scenes of nature. They do feel a bit weird and different in some way.

Chapter 3 is again indie feeling but has no feeling of being particularly different or out there. In fact the construction of the song contributes to this, and is fairly popular music sounding, if sombre and soft. But again the slow motion contributes to this odyssey, tangential feel, and definitely creates a weird-ness. The split screens, the different elements, create an intrigue, which could be my unique contribution to knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Moving into Film Experiment 2, it is important to build in structure and continue to keep semi-structured, to give room to explore. Crucially taking the feel of Film Experiment 1 and attempt to move it in to a narrative.

IF1: There is only a softness and happy melancholy that could have potential to explore a different vibe. The song was not counter culture. It would be interesting to explore this more in the final script. To write something specially designed for the film.

IF2: I think what will be interesting is how to take this sensibility in to a narrative context. As all this is montage and tangential, how do I capture that spirit of production and take it in to a new story, a new narrative.

IF3: Slow motion lessens spontaneity. Slow motion to music increases spontaneity giving an odyssey tangential feel.

IF4: Brightly colourful palette. Shakespeare monologue increases weird other worldly sense. Slow motion to music increases far out weird different sense. The split screens, the different elements, create an intrigue, which could be my unique contribution to knowledge.

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13. Portfolio – Film Experiment 2

One Drive Link: 13. Portfolio - Film Experiment 2.mov

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14. Film Experiment 2 Reflection

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1. **Introduction**
2. **IF1: American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17).**
3. **IF2: In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes; Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (Dayton/Faris, USA, 2006).**
4. **IF3: Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.**
5. **IF4: 'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).**
6. **Conclusion**

1. Introduction

Film Experiment 2
Inspired by findings from Experiment 1, bring together a narrative inspired by a classical American indie comedy character, and translate in to a British context. Using experimental/music video techniques and camera movement that gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. (IF 1-4)

I wanted to experiment to see how I can adapt a classical American indie character to a British context. Napoleon Dynamite (2004) is an iconic and culturally significant indie comedy film, noted for its cultural significance of buffoonery. Central to the films authenticity is a limited character that would normally be in the background or ignored in mainstream cinema. Taking this as my jumping off point, I began looking at how I could systematically copy scenarios with a British equivalent character who is ignored or left in the background in mainstream cinema. This quickly fell away and was incongruent in trying to capture the essence of indie film comedy and systematically copying was incongruent when developing an equivalent character, who naturally grew their own distinctive characteristics.

Marcus Miles DeFonteen is inspired by Napoleon, as an equivalent British buffoon-like character, often a b-character like Napoleon. The daft posh British bloke is such, a consistent buffoon character, popularised in 80s and 90s British TV comedy, significantly by the television writing of Richard Curtis and others. A (man) who has inherited a fortune but had not a clue how to use it, public school educated and daft as a brush. A man educated in everything apart from how to live his life. Full of knowledge of British tradition and old money ways, Film examples include the character of Tom in Four Weddings and Funeral (1994), the portrayal of Charles II in Black Adder III (1987), Harry Enfields' Tim, nice but dim, in Harry Enfield's Television Programme (1990) and Wooster in Jeeves and Wooster (1990).

Creating an imagined world for Marcus Miles DeFonteen, I created him as an eleventh generation, twice removed baronet. He has inherited several thousand acres of Estate, which his mother considers him completely incapable of managing. As I had explored rewilding themes as a by-product of my research in Film Experiment 1, and reflected in wildlife videos in my family archive, I gave Marcus a desire to bring to rewild the entire region.

IF1: American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17).

The classical male American cinema hero has characteristic traits. These include, but not limited to: physical and mental strength, good looks, confidence, fortitude, cleverness to outwit the opposition, straight talking, valuing actions above words. Such characters have earned careers for the likes of John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Clint Eastwood, Tom Cruise. Power, masculinity, capability. Even the everyman turned super heroes turn on these qualities; Batman, Spiderman, Superman.

An example of the American indie film comedy antihero of this type; the counter culture, alternative national cinema character, is Napoleon Dynamite. A weedy, socially awkward unpopular protagonist. The antithesis of historical American populist cinema, Napoleon displays traits not of the traditional hero, but instead engages with popular American 'hick' cultural identities; the belief in UFO's, extra terrestrial life, time travel, limited communication skills, living on vast quantities of steak at home, physical weakness, uncultured, nerdy yet unintelligent, socially inept, all thrown in with a perm, moon boots and nostalgic references to foods common in American schools; corn dogs, tots, burgers etc. The counter culture hero. A distinguished 'loser', Napoleon is counter to the 'winning' culture of

America, previously discussed when discussing Little Miss Sunshine (2006) in my Case Studies. Engaging in regional middle America stereotypes, Napoleon is a type of populist buffoon. Normally the 'b' character in the background of a cinema comedies such as American Pie (1999), or the many high school comedies or films of Judd Apatow. A figure of fun in the background, not the central focus.

Minor aristocrats who own large estates and are brought up on old money British colonial-esque values, with little hope or experience to be successful in life, just like Napoleon. Such a British character is in contrast to the British archetype. The smooth suave Brit with similar American masculine qualities: James Bond, Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes. Weighing more heavily on his cleverness and brains to outwit his opponent, but calmly and more calculatedly. Even Harry Potter although diminutive, has powers and intelligence beyond his peers and nemesis.

Marcus Miles DeFonteen is the invented counter cultural hero, in a British context. Flapping and reaching for ideas, under the thumb of his mother (still), and unsure of who he is. But displaying a weighty load of background aristocratic comedy stereotypes. Counter to the culture of the archetypal British hero, I treat this character with empathy, as a trier in his life, as with Napoleon. Expanding the empathy in the writing to taking this character seriously.

With the film experiment, the character of Marcus Miles DeFonteen has enough depth in character and story to allow for poignant moments to come through. Because of the possibility of drama it gives the option of counter culture and an alternative national cinema. A stereotype character with a heart, trying to do the right thing, instead of simply an old money caricature. In the same way Napoleon Dynamite draws on stereotypes for humour, I do the same thing with the archetype of Marcus, whilst giving space for greater depth, giving the stereotype a soul, and a conundrum, in how he will inherit and what he will do with it.

The one resounding, striking feature is that he's not terribly cool. Napoleon, despite all his geeky awkwardness, has a certain outlandishness that endears you to him. He knows who he is and what he wants to be more of. And he's going to try and get it. As Robert McKee would say, he is a 'wilful protagonist' (McKee, 1998, p.45). There is a sense of self depreciation and awareness of his place in the world. But that that isn't going to stop him. I wonder if there is a way of incorporating these traits into Marcus. Perhaps that his estate is so on its knees that they have sold the Manor house to a lottery winner, and live in one of the cottages, and have kept all the land. But maybe Marcus wears

David Bowie t-shirts under his Barbour, maybe he supports people to come up and shoot on stag weekends and meets a lottery winner there. But he actually has a plan to rewild the whole estate. The purpose being that we have a man with a plan, and a canvas for some outlandish behaviour from our protagonist. Saying he has this and this plan or buyers lined up. Carrying on as his Mother does, as if they still live in the Manor house. I suppose it could be that Marcus is still at school and is trying to come to terms with succession.

IF2: In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes; Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (2006).

Existential themes are explored with the urns, the death of Marcus' father, legacy and him as a tryer, trying to change. It's fun, light and particular to that world. We enter the scene at a poignant moment, where Marcus is not only dealing with this, but wanting to do something different than what has come before, something positive and life affirming, not just run of the mill. I'm not sure there is too much buoyancy. Perhaps if there was something for to him to react, to get buoyant about, maybe he is literally taking his ideas from a young girl he met at the end of the road who told him all this. Mother knows him as her flaky son Marcus who never completes anything. But he's determined that for once in his life he's going to do something, and he's buoyant about it, stirred, positive.

The stylistic choices however support the buoyancy and life affirming quality. They work alongside the meaning to make yet deeper meaning. For example, the slow motion is aesthetically pleasing and effective at the start, but until the moment mid-way through the music montage where the images match the window zoom shot 'I saw your face in the window', the gravity of the film begins to build subtly, it gains gravity seemingly spontaneously. But mechanically what is happening is words are matching images. This creates a poetry, poetic feel. Meaning and style implied and working together effectively.

As previously stated, the themes are existential, but perhaps the characters could talk about it more, consider it. For example frequently in American indie cinema characters will ask themselves and each other that question directly. They will ask each other about the future, about dying or considering who they are, why they are here: existentialism. An option, an idea therefore with these characters could be, "do you ever think about dying mother?" whilst wistfully looking out of the window, or "why we are here?" or some other dialogue not as on the nose; "What are we doing

Mother?" for example, something less direct and more spontaneously searching... "Just doing the same old same old"… So that the characters are becoming conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence.

Examples of this kind of technique in American indie film comedy cinema comedy are in case study Little Miss Sunshine (2006), where Dwayne contemplates not going into the air force. Further afield the character of Pink in Linklaters Dazed and Confused (1993), where he is dropping out of the school football team. The point of the film where the meaning, the driving force of the film comes to the fore. The discussion tends to come when the character is having a change of heart, or an enforced change of heart, and played out three quarters of the way through the film, when the stories meaning rises to the surface. American indie cinema comedy is good at this, British independent cinema comedy less so. It tends to cave in on itself at this stage, fall apart, something that my case study example Submarine (2010) also does. It has all the component parts to be an indie film comedy but at the crucial third quarter stage, falls over and does not stand up. At least in the case of dealing with existential themes this is the case. It is as if it's too self indulgent to contemplate in Britain. It doesn't know what it is and doesn't know how to question what it is. And everyone who does talk in this way, is considered cheesy and self indulgent.

Whilst the themes are existential here in this Film Experiment scene, existentialism is not the focus of the dialogue and their decision making. If the characters then began to discuss it, they would then begin to take a conscious decision to take a different path. Perhaps I have discovered what gives American indie film comedy its distinguishable quality, that characters become conscious of their own ability to change their path, change their lives, instead of put up with what they are given.

IF3: Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.

I explored working with still wide shots and slower rhythm in this film. What I discovered was that it didn't really work to create a sense of spontaneity and improvisation, although the process challenged my natural instincts of pace, to instead be slower and allow more time in the frame. However what I discovered was it became jarring to the finished product. If anything it had a more prescribed effect.

In terms of authenticity, the dialogue does offer authentic voices, a way of talking, but there is little sense that actors are reacting or making things up on the spot. Whilst the dialogue is particular to the characters; smoked salmon from The Sportsman's Arms, the idea that one would 'put on some bison', amongst other turns of phrase, there is authenticity of character voice, devoid of too much exposition. Authenticity is also increased by my own music, using my literal own voice, heightens the originality. But in relation to interim finding 3, a central discovery is the lack of camera movement and movement in frame. Whilst filming this way engaged in some useful wide imagery, challenging me to make more formal tableau, the lack of camera movement does not contribute to the impression of improvisation and spontaneity, authenticity, as well as the movement in frame.

This restriction I gave myself, has crystalised to do the opposite. For example, the Mother character only smoked in frame, it was her only activity. I could have played with different ideas to increase the nutti-ness, the oddness, creating a sense of unpredictability. This would then in turn increase the 'impression' of spontaneous performance. One might even say, the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity is increased with tangential dialogue and direction, as outlined above. Unpredictable nuttiness. Not actually improvisation itself. This is something to discover and explore when I come to film experiment 3. She could have been filing her nails, powdering her nose, maybe flossing, or doing something random like acupuncture on herself or some other surprising activity. Then the camera comes back on her and there she is swotting flies. Scripted unpredictability.

The movement of the camera can then match the impression of spontaneity, by manoeuvring the camera around an environment to capture each character throughout the scene. This is the next technique I want to try, to give the impression of spontaneity and improvisation.

IF4: 'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).

Interim finding 4 is a quote and it continues as follows from Ted Hope:

> 'Indie film comedy success' are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way (see Pulp Fiction, The Blair Witch Project, Memento). If Hollywood wins with familiar formulas, indie film comedies often triumph as a result of their originality.'

And so it is with what I am exploring with my film experiments: searching for originality, the novel or unusual. The context of Film Experiment 2 is both everyday (Mother and son), yet the context and conversation is idiosyncratic (as per interim finding 4) as their peculiar characters struggle to communicate, with conversations of smoked salmon, turnip and Linda McCartney sausages etc. As outlined above in section 3, they could be nuttier, more out there, more idiosyncratic. These interpretations are the beginnings. There is the fact that the doorbell keeps going for mother, or the stewed tea etc, but I don't feel they are made the most of. Perhaps these elements would be given more gravitas if the risk were greater, the threat was greater, in the story. And perhaps if that threat had a peculiar idiosyncrasy, all the better. The more nutty mother was, in relation to the risk she posed if she didn't agree. E.g. a pre scene where Marcus is in a solicitors office, and the estate is bankrupt. There is funding available for regenerative land practices.

The weird or different in some way could also be the sympathy towards a normally unsympathetic character. Perhaps this character of Marcus was previously a fox hunting, private school educated toff, who has had a change of heart. That would be indie, that it is a sympathetic transformational journey of a conventionally deeply unsympathetic world/character. The scenario, the characters, the dialogue, are a basis for being weird or different in some way. Their eccentricities just need to be brought out more. In order to create a successful idiosyncratic, weird, different indie film comedy, the discovery is to go further and bring out those characteristics more. Perhaps they would even benefit from some unusual angle. For example perhaps they have been down sized but are still living in their own estate. They could have had to sell off the Manor house, but are still operating out of a down terrace council house. Or a tiny old knackered medieval cottage.

Unearthing these discoveries brings to the fore further questions about my inspiration for this idea, Napoleon Dynamite. What are other ways this film (Napoleon Dynamite) is weird or different in some way. More detail. Editing, music, scenarios. From this point of view greater context is uncovered. In the main the film uses prefabricated music through strange keyboard noises and drum machines. Cheap sounding, bedroom music, almost that Napoleon could have composed himself. Electronica and synth pop of the 80s. But then there are more random influences such as the mandolin south American sounding 'Solamente una vez'. Mixed in with the staple of the indie film comedy: solo acoustic guitar. All these influences are then tied in with 'Linguini Western', by composer John Swihart who infuses and weaves these influences in to incidental ditties through

different moments of the film. The music clearly identifies the film as 80s influenced, at least musically. A time certainly when the more weird and odd came in to the main stream. This oddness is matched in the writer's choices in the film. For example Napoleon's household has no pets. However there is what appears to be a pet Llama that is fed in the next field. No other animals appear to be part of their lives, just one Llama living in the field next door, that appears to be being fed on a daily diet of some kind of baked food unceremoniously served with a serving spoon. Their Uncle Rico is middle aged man who lives in a bright orange camper van dreaming of past American football glories, not the most regular uncle. The key observations of what makes the Napoleon Dynamite example 'idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way' are:

- COUNTER CULTURAL PROTAGONIST The central character is a limited, fragmented individual, a geeky socially awkward loser, absolutely counter to the winning American dream.
- OPENING TITLES Novel ways to present opening titles, on food, with chap stick, school desk items, all features from the film.
- PHYSICAL The way the central character does normal things, making them bizarre, e.g. playing sport, running away from a bully, the final dance of the film. The protagonist's physical world is… other worldly.
- LYING He lies to appear cool to peers with wacky stories of hunting wolverines, the Loch Ness Monster and showing best friend Pedro a picture of a model, and saying she is his girlfriend.
- TURNS OF PHRASE "Frick'in idiot", "Gosh!", "This is the worst day ever", the frequent discussions of wanting to acquire great "skills" and generally shouting minor aggressive frustrations from a guttural verbal place of teenage angst.
- EXPONENTIAL & TANGENTIAL Bizarre unrelated exponential incidents, incidental, unrelated to the story, like an artist experimenting or playing with colour on a canvas, so this film sways in the wind exponentially: farmer Lyle shooting a cow in the face as the school bus passes, Napoleon doing a hand symbol dance in class, his job at Lyle's chicken shed drinking egg nog, expressing his favourite animal as a 'Liger', a combination between and Lion and a Tiger (i.e. one that doesn't exist!). All seemingly totally unrelated to the story.
- FOOD plays a central role in the film, both in school and at home. It's very location specific: American school foods, Chicken farm products, but also plays a role in story: opening titles, tots squashed in his pocket, egg nog and egg sandwiches on shift, endless steak meat at home eaten on its own, food for the Llama Tina, the aforementioned opening titles.

- TIME FILLING There is the sense there is a lot of time in the film, and the peculiar choices to fill it: falling off sweet jumps on a bike, spinning an action man out of a bus window on a string for apparently no reason, being towed on roller blades in to town, attending Rex Quan Doe self defence. Being electrocuted accidentally by a bogus time travel machine. Home chores like feeding Tina the Llama, instead of say, the normal thing which would be to feed the family dog, Napoleon instead feeds a Llama. The protagonist is directionless searching for direction, filling time.
- SHOT CHOICE Wide stillness, like a photograph, a goldfish staring out of a bowl.
- X and Y AXIS Instead of using the Z axis to create camera dynamism between characters, action and objects, the film favours X and Y. Much of the action, actor positioning framing is on the X or Y axis. Face on, side to side, up and down.
- NAME Napoleon Dynamite is just a bizarre name.

6. Conclusion

There are several areas to explore moving in to Experiment 3:

• In IF1 I discovered it is the outlandish traits or behaviour from the protagonist and/or the scenarios that make this happen, to be the counter cultural, alternative national cinema.

• In IF2 I discovered the conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence, conversations. Conversations that display they have the ability to change their path, discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence. This creates buoyancy and life affirming quality.

• In IF3, increasing the nutti-ness, the oddness, creates a further sense of unpredictability. This would then in turn increase the 'impression' of spontaneous performance. What would also help this is manoeuvring the camera around an environment to capture each character throughout the scene.

• In IF4 I discovered many ideas including a greater threat, ideally idiosyncratic or peculiar. Ideas include a pre scene where Marcus is in a solicitor's office, and the estate is bankrupt. There is funding available for regenerative land practices. An indie reversal of convention idea: perhaps this character of Marcus was previously a fox hunting, private school educated toff, who has had a change of heart. A sympathetic transformational journey of a conventionally deeply unsympathetic

world/character. Analysis of Napoleon Dynamite further discovers how to systematically to make an indie film comedy idiosyncratic, weird or different in some way.

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15. Portfolio – Film Experiment 3

One Drive link: 15. Portfolio - Film Experiment 3.mov

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16. Film Experiment 3 Reflection

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1. Introduction

Film Experiment 3
Reflect and refine the learnings of Film Experiments 1 & 2, and reshoot/refine the same/similar narrative to explore refining indie aesthetic and style. (IF 1-4)

Film Experiment 3 was about refining and responding to the feedback from experiment 2. I used suggestions from the individual interim findings, then as a central weakness was being weird or different in some way (IF4), I focused on the Napoleon Dynamite findings, which ended Film Experiment 3 reflection, to emulate and bring into Film Experiment 3.

It's interesting to explore, if the genesis of the story idea problematic, or the feedback from Film Experiment 2 which has been put into practice. What I mean by that it is, if I employ techniques, recommendations, stylistically changes, does it really alter the feel or progression of the story, or is the basic premise/characters, are these what is at the genesis of creating an American indie film comedy in a British context?

The recommendations from experiment 2, to be carried forward into Film Experiment 3, were as follows:

• In Interim finding one I discovered it is the outlandish traits or behaviour from the protagonist and/or the scenarios that make this happen, to be the counter cultural, alternative national cinema.

• In Interim finding two I discovered the conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence, conversations. Conversations that display they have the ability to change their path, discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence. This creates buoyancy and life affirming quality.

• In Interim finding three, increasing the nutti-ness, the oddness, creates a further sense of unpredictability. This would then in turn increase the 'impression' of spontaneous performance. What would also help this is manoeuvring the camera around an environment to capture each character throughout the scene.

• In Interim Finding four I discovered many ideas including a greater threat, ideally idiosyncratic or peculiar. Ideas include a pre scene where Marcus is in a solicitors office, and the estate is bankrupt. There is funding available for regenerative land practices. An indie reversal of convention idea: perhaps this character of Marcus was previously a fox hunting, private school educated toff, who has had a change of heart. A sympathetic transformational journey of a conventionally deeply unsympathetic world/character. Analysis of Napoleon Dynamite further discovers how to systematically to make an indie film comedy idiosyncratic, weird or different in some way.

This time, instead if a rough outline, I used a polished script so that I could stick better to the recommendations from Film Experiment 2 reflection.

2. IF1: American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17).

Marcus was not contrasting enough, or fashionable cool enough, in contrast to his Mother, in experiment 2 they had looked like they were from the same world. Marcus was therefore deliberately changed, contrasted in Film Experiment 3, made more modern, giving connotations of fashionable cool, as per Newman's definition of indie film comedy (Newman, 2011, p.4).

Hipster related trends are indie and counter cultural, fashionable cool. I added a half-eaten avocado, beard and shades, dark branded t-shirt, and added the questioning of the quality of his very British cup of tea.

I also changed the Mother characters dress, characteristics, and moved the whole scene in to more closed quarters, to make it tighter between the characters.

I think this did add an indie element. But interestingly I did the same for the Mother character. If she had stayed the same it may have made more sense! That he was the outsider in this world. Or perhaps a combination if the two.

I attempted to link or root the Britishness of a country house with the classical music. The result is, there is a lean towards something newer. The protagonist is pertaining to counter culture, but only in a cinema sense. That this is a broadly liberal, slightly hipster guy, living in a semi-traditional British world. I think that is the big take away in an alternative to national cinema way; to retain those idiosyncratic British qualities, and combine them with liberal values.

3. IF2: In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes; Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (2006).

In the dialogue it was intended to discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence. This creates buoyancy and life affirming quality. The Mother says "Forbes thank god, I'm doing alright though struggling to stay in character." A feature of indie comedy work can be that characters acknowledge that they are characters. The emotional drama which emerges at the end of the scene was also supposed to do this, though again the effectiveness limited. The Chunky chicken joke at the end did not land and did not fulfil its purpose of creating buoyancy. The subject matter is a redemption plot. A redemption plot is melancholy by nature. This is how the story ended.

Though conversely because of the way it is played and the plucky British opening and closing music, it does feel buoyant. The actual subject matter – inheritance, wanting to do something different with your life instead of the norm, and the b-story of a broken relationship – are existential and consciously examining what they are doing.

So the takeaway here is that the buoyancy, life affirming quality comes from the style of the filmmaker, as much as the content itself.

4. IF3: Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.

Much of this experiment was about style, without realising it. Although I have discussed this is my previous analysis, i.e. that simply dropping an indie style is not what this is about, but to an extent, not realising it, this is what I have done.

Sitting down in an old front room with ageing characters talking about ageing things is not story wise what indie film comedy is. It's about youth and/or youthfulness, even if the characters are old. Even in the indie film comedy Nebraska (2013), the ageing protagonist decides to walk all the way to Nebraska, in youthful fashion pursuing a dream (in this case a lottery win).

Which now begs the question, what is indie? Stylistically I examined the styles pointed out in my reflection of film experiment 2: I increased the nuttiness by adding in the Tunnock's chocolate bar, cleansing her aura, and moving the camera around the environment to capture each character throughout the scene. I don't know this worked or particularly did anything other than delay the pace. Also it meant the camera was consistently behind the action, instead of at a pace with it. Did it make for a more sense of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity? I'm not sure. It was authentic again, in a different way to Film Experiment 2. I'm not sure the style really changed or was enhanced by a different method.

A roving camera is what I was experimenting with in this scene, to give a sense of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity. Another suggestion would be to see if actors can take their cue from the camera movement, and be surprised by its arrival. So use the movement of the camera, when it arrives on them, to be startled, and to take that in to their words.

5. IF4: 'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.' (Hope, 2014, pp. 149).

In attempting to bring out the eccentricities of the characters more, to be 'idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way' I took the Napoleon Dynamite examples from Film Experiment 2 reflection:

COUNTER CULTURAL PROTAGONIST Counter to the suave intelligent immaculate, in control British protagonist, I made Marcus more hipster, attempting to be controlled, but gradually losing control.

OPENING TITLES I picked novel contrapuntal ways to use opening and closing titles, being irreverent.

PHYSICAL Extending on the above I attempted to make his movements precise and British and controlled but really he was not and his life is in a mess.

LYING The protagonist will lie to appear cool. But he is also secretive, if it means appearing cooler.

TURNS OF PHRASE, EXPONENTIAL & TANGENTIAL "loose leaf" tea, avocado on the table, Forbes' agricultural speak.

FOOD I added nostalgia foods, including Chunky chicken and Tunnock's caramel wafer bar, as part of the story.

TIME FILLING they are to go to Exeter, as if they have the time to do this whenever they like.

SHOT CHOICE I added more a variety of shot choices and angles. E.g. from above, from the table, maneuverer the camera around the room, I tried push in MS and odd angles for interruption. The key thing I tried to stick rigorously too, was on the X and Y AXIS Focusing shots on Face on, side to side, up and down.

NAME Napoleon Dynamite is just a bizarre name and adds the - weird or different in some way - nature of the film. At the script stage, I experimented with changing the names. But they seemed to not suit a British context, and instead make it more slapstick, and the story less comparable with experiment 2, so I left it out. On reflection as it turned out quite different it would have been interesting to have included it.

Overall Film Experiment 3 was more idiosyncratic and what created this was what Ealing Studios' Michael Balcon called "Odd people set against realistic backgrounds" (The Sticking Place, 2013). Film experiment 2 was more caricature in nature, whilst film experiment 3 was had more straightforwardly relatable dramatic narrative, than just being a slapstick toff. So what I have

discovered is that idiosyncrasy comes from bringing caricature closer to the truth, that caricature alone makes it quickly boring.

6. Conclusion

Finally, I am coming to the conclusion that perhaps my direction of travel is adjacent to the problem I need to research. The key focus to this film experiment was to refine indie film comedy aesthetic and style. What I have found is this is relevant but not the root to discovery. The content of what I did in this experiment was tantamount to rearranging the furniture in an already non-functioning room. There was a point in the edit of experiment 3 where simply stopped editing. I have all the tricks, as an editor, to make things work. I can trick, steal, glue together, add little things, take away others, to get my material to work. But this would be covering up what has happened in the production. I rearranged the furniture but it didn't really make a difference, it just reframed the same problems. This therefore made me think about, instead of style and aesthetics, story content. Examining my case studies and beyond my case studies, what are the story aspects that unite these comedic stories that so stirs me? My instantaneous reaction on reflection is that it is likely that they all have some large element of voyage and return (Booker, 2004, p.87).

The story of Marcus Miles DeFonteen, is about him inheriting from his father. Such stories are generally redemption plots. The rogue son returning home. No matter how much I change characters, reframe scenes, the fact still remains, the story is the story.

The story then drives the style. Manoeuvring the camera was inspired by the film American Hustle. But American Hustle, story wise, is a romantic comedy/Woody Allen style relationship set-up of philandering husband and unfulfilled and unrequited relationships, in a very serious police crime drama situation. Therefore constantly punching on is like the hearts of each character beating to every event. Simply planting that technique in to Film Experiment 3 doesn't work, as it's likely a redemption story which lends itself (ironically) to tableau and comparisons of old and new side by side, divine intervention, epiphany and the protagonist looking on to large open landscapes.

And as far as tangential spontaneous sounding dialogue goes. In order to achieve this probably the best thing to do is write tangential spontaneous sounding dialogue. Just write it that way.

When Investigating my Guidelines for an Indie film comedy, this therefore will be the next stage of my research, to feed in to that process. Examining films I have mentioned thus far in my thesis in terms of the voyage and return principles of storytelling.

My observation and latest discovery is that all of the indie film comedy stories referred to in my thesis thus far, contain elements of an odyssey/voyage and return with a protagonist or protagonists unwillingly not actively by direct choice being part of that odyssey. One way to describe this is the similarity to a 'Voyage and Return' story referred to in Christopher Booker's book The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories (2004). In this book Booker outlines certain characteristics useful to bear in mind when plotting my screenplay:

- Protagonist is abruptly transported out of their 'normal' world into and abnormal world, and eventually back to where they began
- The hero or heroine or ensemble, travel out of their familiar, everyday 'normal' surroundings into another world completely cut off from the first
- Everything seems disconcertingly abnormal
- Two obvious categories: journey to some island/reality, or an imaginary and magical realm closer to home
- The central figure can return, without having been transformed
- In contrast with the Quest, where the hero has a compulsion to begin the journey, voyage and return protagonists have no such compulsion; a totally unexpected adventure. However their mind has been open to it and ready.
- Crucial difference from the quest – protagonist does not choose the journey.
- The first indication that something very unexpected is happening in a voyage and return story lies in the dramatic nature of the hero or heroin's entry in to the 'other world'.

The combination of comedy – voyage and return, is the ability to conjure a cross between up/down ending that McKee craves. Voyage and return is about an unexpected dramatic voyage, that somehow keeps everything the same but changed all at once in someone's ordinary existence.

From my case studies for example, Little Miss Sunshine (2006)'s protagonists are thrown into a last minute road trip and other world – the child beauty pageant. In In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), the protagonist is reluctantly thrown into the world of dating by his best friend, and takes a wild night engulfed in the world of a completely different person than himself. No surprise that the

closest British example Submarine (2010) does not conform to this story shape, perhaps another reason I feel it does not do what an indie film comedy should.

Of the other inspirations I mention in my thesis, in Slacker (1990) there is no protagonist, however we are taken into an abnormal world of misfits, the 'Slackers'. In Clerks (1994) the protagonist is not supposed to be in work this day, and as a result experiences an extremely bizarre odyssey of events including roof hockey, egg testing and a dead body, all other worldly. Napoleon Dynamite (2004) is left alone at home, and we experience an odyssey/other worldliness due to his character traits and decisions. In Sideways (2004) the protagonist is thrown into his best friends chaotic world which is not of his choice. In Juno (2007) the protagonist goes through an unplanned pregnancy and adoption, thrown against her will into a totally opposite world to her teenage one.

The same is true of the odyssey educing non choosing protagonist of The Puffy Chair (2005). The protagonist is somehow transported out of their normal world into an abnormal world, and eventually back to where they began, as combined story structure with comedy. The voyage and return may be more starkly obvious in The Wizard of Oz, or Lord of the Rings, but we are in the realm of comedy, and combining this trait with comedy, in a more subtle indie context, not an overtly commercial one such as Shallow Hall (2001) or Vice Versa (1988), where the protagonist undergoes some overtly supernatural transformation.

This is not conclusive or exacting, but gives another clue as to my direction of travel, adding to my findings. In summary, the predominant finding from Film Experiment 3 is

- The protagonist does not choose the journey
- Abruptly thrown into a different world not of their choosing
- An unexpected experience/adventure an odyssey like experience unfamiliar to their known world

IF1 That this is a broadly liberal, slightly hipster guy, living in a semi-traditional British world. I think that is the big take away in an alternative to national cinema way.

IF2 So the takeaway here is that the buoyancy, life affirming quality comes from the style of the filmmaker, as much as the content itself.

IF3 Youthfulness, not necessarily in age, but in spirit of decision making. Another suggestion would be to see if actors can take their cue from the camera movement, and be surprised by its arrival. So use the movement of the camera, when it arrives on them, to be startled, and to take that in to their words.

IF4 idiosyncrasy comes from bringing caricature closer to the truth, to the present reality in time, and not too far away from it, as in Film Experiment 2. The caricature makes it quickly boring.

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17. Guidelines for a British indie film comedy

Contents
1. **Introduction**
2. **The Guidelines for a nano budget British indie film comedy**

1. Introduction

In this Chapter I will build on my interim findings and film experiments and reflections, to feed into my Guidelines for an indie film comedy. This is the second evaluation point of the study and the Guidelines are the basis that the Screenplay and example scenes will be constructed under.

The interim findings below were developed through the experiments and gained the following further insights.

American indie film comedy is the counter culture, alternative national cinema (Newman, 2010, p.17).

• It is the outlandish traits or behaviour from the protagonist and/or the scenarios that make this happen, to be the counter cultural, alternative national cinema.

The protagonist is a broadly liberal, even slightly hipster, living in a in a contrasting British world.

In its sub genre indie film comedy, the tendency is towards buoyancy, life affirming quality and existential themes; Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Little Miss Sunshine (2006).

• The dialogue should involve conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence, conversations. Conversations that display they have the ability to change their path,

discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence. This creates buoyancy and life affirming quality.

• The buoyancy, life affirming quality comes from the style of the filmmaker, as much as the content itself.

Stylistically indie film comedy can involve a tendency towards acting which gives the impression of spontaneity, improvisation and authenticity.

• Slow motion lessens spontaneity, but slow motion to music increases spontaneity giving an odyssey, tangential feel indicative of indie film comedy.

• The creation of spontaneity is at the effect of authenticity, and vice versa. By increasing the nutti-ness, the oddness of characters, creates unpredictability, and therefore the 'impression' of spontaneous performance. Manoeuvring the camera around an environment to capture each character throughout the scene can then support this.

• Youthfulness, not necessarily in age, but in spirit of decision making of the characters.

'Indie film comedy successes are idiosyncratic or weird or different in some way.'
(Hope, 2014, p. 149).

• indie uses brightly colourful palette.

• indie creates other worldliness.

• Slow motion to music increases far out weird different sense. Split screens, the different elements, create an intrigue.

• Idiosyncrasy comes from bringing caricature closer to the truth, to the present reality in time, and not too far away from it, as in Film Experiment 2. Too caricature makes the character quickly boring.

• Idiosyncrasy can include but is not limited to: titles, food choices, odd habits pets.

Although I am not focusing on story structure per se in this thesis, it would be impertinent not to gather some foresight of pertinent findings and texts, to take forward in to the screenplay. A nano budget British comedy needs to be carefully considered in what is a niche contemporary context. Systematically in line with my case studies, I therefore have drawn information here from nano budget inspired indie film hustle podcast's Rise of the Filmtrepreneur (2019), the aforementioned indie Producer Ted Hope's Hope for Film (2015) which straddles micro to low budget films and the more commercially focused indiewood story structure text Save the Cat goes to the Indies (2017), an updated text from the widely lorded Blake Snyder text Save the Cat (2005), updated with predominantly American indie film

case studies. This has then been amalgamated and informed by my own tacit knowledge thus far and my experiences and observations from my film experiments.

• Ensure you write a film for a niche audience where you can place it (e.g. a niche sport or interest, where you can point to a social media page with 2m likes). (Ferrari, 2019, p.24)

• Be bold: Show risk taking in the filmmaking. Make it feel like it may all fall apart, but then save it at the last moment: People should say, "It's bold". (Hope, 2014, p.79)

• Engage bigger issues: The story has to be bigger than the movie itself and should deal with issues of either class, conflict, gender conflict, sexual conflict, or other topical issues. How do you comment on the world at large while still examining the minute and the particular? (Hope, 2014, p.79).

• Cast: You need to cast a few stars or soon to be stars, so it should be an ensemble piece that covers generational conflict. You have the old name actor you're bringing back and the up-and-comer who no one had seen yet, along with actors who can move from TV in to feature films. (p.79, Hope, 2014, p.79).

• Shock value: It needs some moment of audacity, the kind of thing that people will talk about and that might even shock the uninitiated. (Hope, 2014, p.79)

• The right mix: Have a sense of humour about great tragedy – or find the tragedy in the hilarious. Embrace the cocktail; make it at least feel fresh. (Hope, 2014, p.79).

• The film should be ready to be vertically integrated by a studio, and therefore distributed, watched and understood internationally. The only proviso they could be understood and followed by a global audience, i.e. they were proper stories (Berra, 2008, p.152).

• Play on the characteristics the world expects of British people: doing things oddly, idiosyncrasy, good manners, queuing, sense of clever humour, wit, stoicism, intelligence, Shakespeare, The Royal Family, The Beatles, rules, school uniform, pomp and ceremony, tea, coldness, reserved, uptight, snobbishness, chastise, self depreciate. From Wikipedia: "fancy British man" who is charming, suave, and well-dressed with an attractive accent, bad food, bad weather, discussing the weather, discussing travel plans.

• Indie film comedy is structured just as much as any other story. It is hidden by, for example, the dialogue, visual narrative, montage or art direction… doesn't let us see the script behind it. Tangentially longer scenes or dwelling on beats hide the structure. (Rubio, 2017, p. xii).

• Indie film comedies tend to mix genres and/or introduce a new blend of genre mix.

• Notionally 'fashionable cool', often (but not exclusively) giving the impression of improvision and a free flowing tangential style, character driven.

• British context Historically: Class, social and sexual embarrassment, thwarted ambition and a love-hate relationship with convention, conformity and the establishment in all its forms. In this latter respect, British comedy has often explored the space between consensus and revolt, conformity and anarchy, normality and chaos, and the genteel middle-class reserve of stereotypical Britishness, British comedies are frequently 'carnivalesque' (Hunter, I.Q. and Porter, 2012., p.1).

• You've got to give people something to talk about festivals, the process, a hook, something to distinguish it from every other film in its genre, what is it's USP. Need to have something. (Ineke Hagedorn, Industry Interviews thematic analysis).

• In America they make films to make money, and hope they're good. In Britain we make films to be good, and hope they make money. In America, 1 in 2 Hollywood films make money. In Britain it's about 1 in 20. America calls our films indie because we don't have anything to be independent from. – as this is an interplay between money and style, I need to first make a film to make money, and then make it good/cover up the structure. (Follows, 2016).

2. The Guidelines for a nano budget British indie film comedy

1. COUNTER CULTURE The film should be counter to the commercial culture in character or theme, but contemporarily indigenous, thereby offering an alternate national cinema. For example this could result in outlandish traits or behaviour from the protagonist and/or the scenarios that create to make this happen.

2. STORY Indie film comedy stories have a tendency to have elements of voyage and return, and tangential narratives, and/or road trips. An odyssey or unexpected voyage, not necessarily

consciously or actively undertaken; Little Miss Sunshine (2006), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), Clerks (1994), Sideways (2004), Buffalo 66 (1998), Juno (2007). Redemption, Tragedy or Monster in the House stories (Booker, 2002) are not usually within this story type. The story must have a sense of humour about great tragedy, or find the tragedy in the hilarious, embracing the cocktail; making it feel fresh.

3. HIDE THE STRUCTURE (e.g.) by tangential dialogue and random incident, visual narrative, montage, art direction etc, that shrouds the structure behind it. The focus should be to monetise the film first (an American artistic approach less natural in British film) through accessible story structure to a global audience, but then to cast a cloak over that structure through, for example, tangentially longer scenes or dwelling on beats that hide the structure (Rubio, 2017, p. xii). The Cohen brothers are perhaps the most remarkable for this. An example of this is the Cohen brothers' Fargo (1996) scene shovelling snow where actor Steve Buscemi is iconically described as 'kind 'a funny lookin''. It's a funny scene where seemingly nothing is discovered and there is no reason for it, but the style adds to the tapestry of the whole film. Yet on closer inspection, the character is delivering key information as to the whereabouts of the killers, and a key structural point of the film. Yet it is hidden with the overwhelming eccentric nature of the delivery and context. And example of what Rubio describes in indie film as dwelling beats to hide the structure. This dwelling on beats can also encompass other stylistic forms, such as music video and animation techniques, slow motion, split screens, different theatrical stylised elements, to create intrigue and authenticity, and helping to cloud the structure from the audience.

4. INDIE COMEDY In the indie world the additional element is the questioning of moral standpoints and conventional thinking, followed by the normal comic use of the lewd and crude e.g. toilet humour, nudity, mistaken identity, changing identity, accidental drug use, food fights, national character stereotypes or tropes; the English dream, surgical enhancement, pathetic fighting or people trying to be macho and failing, randomness and tangential moments, characters with extreme lack of self awareness.

5. VERTICALLY INTEGRATED: IDENTIFIABLY BRITISH The film should be ready to be vertically integrated by a studio, and therefore distributed, watched and understood by a global audience. To do this, root the film in knowable Britishness: good manners, pomp and ceremony, up-tightness, tea, clever wit, detached/coldness, gardens, stoicism, good manners, wit, intelligence, eccentricity, the

Royal Family, Shakespeare, The Beatles, rules, school uniform, queuing, snobbishness, self depreciation, idiosyncrasy/oddness, bad food, bad weather, discussing the weather.

British comic issues historically: class, social and sexual embarrassment, thwarted ambition and a love-hate relationship with convention, conformity and the establishment in all its forms. In this latter respect, British comedy has often explored the space between consensus and revolt, conformity and anarchy, normality and chaos, and the genteel middle-class reserve of stereotypical Britishness, British comedies are frequently 'carnivalesque'.

Draw from classical British archetypes; The romantic vigilante hero (Bond, Biggles, Robin Hood, Dick Turpin), the fussy man unwilling to change (Mr Bean, Basil Fawlty, Scrooge), the uber intelligent hero (Sherlock Homes, Dr Who), eccentric colonialists, the ordinary small man caught up in grand adventure (Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins, Dr Watson, Arthur Dent). The classical romantic protagonists of Shakespeare, Austen and the Bronte sisters; the witty independent strong willed woman and the tortured male romantic antihero.

6. FASHONABLE COOL, RELAXED PERSPECTIVE Notionally 'fashionable cool', often but not exclusively giving the impression of improvision and a free flowing tangential style, character driven. The protagonist is a broadly liberal, even slightly hipster, possibly living in a in a contrasting world they inhabit. They are more relaxed and chilled out than the world around them. British people are known for being uptight. Indie protagonists are generally chilled out, relaxed about rules, in comparison to those around them, who may be more uptight. So therefore the counter to the culture British protagonist, is someone, who is not uptight.

7. IDIOSYNCHRATIC The film should be idiosyncratic. To do this, stay the right side of character caricature, less the film became boring and unengaging. Idiosyncrasy can include but is not limited to: unusual names of characters, titles, food choices, odd habits, pets, physical movements, wholesale 'bullshitting', turns of phrase, exponential and tangential incidents distracting from the structure (asides), time filling, unconventional shot choices, large wide shots and shooting on the X and Y axis with limited use of Z.

8. DIALOGUE The dialogue should involve conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence, conversations. Conversations that display they have the

ability to change their path, discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence rebel against the system.

9. SPONTANEOUS FEEL Indie creates an other worldliness. E.g. By increasing the nutti-ness, the oddness of characters, creates unpredictability, and therefore the 'impression' of spontaneous performance. Manoeuvring the camera around an environment to capture each character throughout the scene can then support this. When using slow motion, only do so to music. This increases spontaneity giving an odyssey, tangential feel, indicative of indie film comedy. When done without music, the effect is not so, and lessens the spontaneous feel.

10. YOUTHFULNESS The character and/or film should be either about youth or have adults acting with youthfulness; the crux of indie film comedy.

11. HOOK Indie film comedies tend to mix genres, introduce a new blend of genre mix. i.e. make it echo and borrow through the annals of cinematic history; the single/multiple perspective film, the jumbled narrative, the theatrical asides etc. Give people something to talk about festivals, the process, a hook, something to distinguish it from every other film in its genre, what is it's USP. You need to have something (Ineke Hagedorn, Appendix III). Be bold: Show risk taking in the filmmaking. Make it feel like it may all fall apart, but then save it at the last moment: People should say, "It's bold". Shock value: It needs some moment of audacity, the kind of thing that people will talk about and that might even shock the uninitiated. (Hope, 2015, p.79).

12. CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY Engage bigger issues: The story has to be bigger than the movie itself and should deal with issues of either class, conflict, gender conflict, sexual conflict, or other topical issues. How do you comment on the world at large while still examining the minute and the particular (Hope, 2015, p.79).

13. NICHE AUDIENCE Ensure you write a film for a niche audience where you can place it. E.g. a niche sport or interest, where you can point to a social media page with multiple likes or subscriptions. The feature film is then a potential marketing tool to sell ancillary products, even for niche audiences (Ferrari, 2019, p.17).

14. DIY PRODUCTION Listing all the locations (internal and external), props, crew and potential actors you have freely available, concoct a story from the below guidelines for a British indie film comedy.

15. NAME ACTOR Cast: You need to cast a few stars or soon to be stars, so it should be an ensemble piece that covers generational conflict. You have the old name actor you're bringing back and the up-and-comer who no one had seen yet, along with actors who can move from TV in to feature films.

16. COLOUR FORMAT Indie film comedy generally uses a brightly colourful palette. Equally Black and white is a staple of the Nano budget; Stranger than Paradise (1984), Sidewalk Stories (1989) Clerks (1994), Pi (1998), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), Frances Ha (2012), Bait (2019). Black and white is the easier production format instead of colour, to cover up the production value difficulties, but only when used appropriately for the storyline.

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18. Portfolio – Screenplay and Example Scenes

Contents
1. Introduction
2. Portfolio

1. Introduction

The Screenplay and Example Scenes were constructed by building story ideas through the filter of the guidelines. If an idea did not fit the Guidelines it was further worked on and inspired by ideas that would. But also as a result of the film experiments. For example the identity of the protagonist as a teenager was as a result of the realisation that youth was central to the identity and success of being an indie film. The simplicity of using guidelines was a supportive guide within the creative process. Both the screenplay and filmed scenes should be seen as one and not be analysed in isolation.

2. Portfolio

Screenplay link: Appendix V

Example Scenes link: 18. Portfolio - Example Scenes.mov

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19. Chapter – Screenplay and Example Scenes Reflection

Contents
1. Introduction
2. Reflection

1. Introduction

The intention of writing the script and filming some scenes was to view both of these outputs as one and not in isolation. Therefore in this chapter I touch upon both filmed moments and those of the feature film script interchangeably as one.

Using the Guidelines for an Indie Film comedy to produce the screenplay and example scenes, I came up with ideas and then revisited the guidelines for inspiration to steer the creative process. If ideas didn't fit or go closer to the guidelines then ideas were abandoned. This was an exciting process and I found it tremendously useful and inspiring to guide my thought process and creativity. For example, sometimes I did not look at the guidelines for a couple of weeks, which meant when coming back to them, my ideas around what could be added to the story were inspiring and not restrictive. Revisiting the guidelines inspired ideas and did not limit them. In terms of the finished screenplay and example scenes, ultimately there are elements which fit with the guidelines and those which fall short. I will now systematically go through those one by one in relation to the Examples scenes and screenplay.

2. Reflection

The film is counter to commercial culture in that the protagonist is not engaging with tablets and phones and tech, and her father is regularly banished to a canal boat due to his on-off relationship with the protagonist's mother. So the scenario we have a is a sort of dysfunctional nuclear family. This does result in some limited outlandish traits and behaviour; Theo's obsession with fine cuisine, Libby wondering into a strangers house. But ultimately there is no great dramatic counter culture element. Particularly with sensitives around all subject matter in contemporary society, I was

mindful of not pushing too far in this way. For example the counter culture elements of Little Miss Sunshine and In Search of a Midnight Kiss would be not possible in today's cancel culture world.

The story of Libby Lightning is structured as a voyage and return story with elements of odyssey like turning points. There are tangential narrative points such as the English classes Theo has to teach, or the wonderings of Libby in the hillside. There is a sense of humour about perhaps not great tragedy but the mini tragedies accompanying Theo's storyline. It does embrace a certain eccentric cocktail and have a freshness, certainly when compared to Film Experiments 1 and 2. There is not great jeopardy at stake (e.g. life or death), yet it does well to hold drama and meaning. The story has elements of voyage and return where the protagonists are thrown into a different world on the hillside and taken out of their ordinary existence. The student who eats mushrooms, Joe becoming a guide, Theo having to be a salesman, Libby on an odyssey like trip. But again they are not extreme in their voyage and return elements, as, for example Alice in Wonderland, a classical voyage and return story. That said I did attempt to dwell extra on conversations or wondering in fields that were against my natural instinct to push a story forward economically and efficiently.

There are definitely elements which hide the structure and dwell on beats. Theo talking with the homeless man, Joe, at the start is exponential but reveals his penchant for fine cuisine. Libby wondering through the countryside. The two men discoursing at the train station provide a counterpoint narrative throughout to hide the structure and dwell philosophically on counterpoints. Overall the eccentric nature of several characters, dialogue about rocks and mushrooms, obsessions, provides a narrative fabric, a vale to throw over what is a structured story. Perhaps even more characters and ensemble approach would assist this.

In terms of indie questioning of moral standpoints, I found this tricky to decide on story options in the current sociological climate of cancel culture and exploring contentious issues. For example in my case studies of Little Miss Sunshine (2004) and In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007) it is unlikely that those films would be received in the same way today, as they hinge on a grandfather teaching his granddaughter a strip routine, and a best friend accepting his pal masturbated over a picture his own girlfriend. In my example scenes and screenplay, there is encouragement to question the validity of Penny's motherhood support, and whether she should be more supportive to her child or be more career focused. Not dramatic counter culture, but a healthy questioning of that moral standpoint. There is also the ecological wind farm storyline, looking at on the one hand the environment is crucial, and on the other it takes from the natural ecological systems, so is it so

ecological after all? There is also a serious reflective quality to the existential conversations and subject matter, that then leads the comedy style to naturally evolve and encompass comic tropes typical of the genre; e.g. physical humour, embarrassment, misunderstandings. The purpose of the train station characters giving the youth's weed at the end of the film was also intentional in this respect, to question a moral standpoint. I feel this works because it questions moral standpoints which is at the core of the indie film.

Whilst the story and themes are identifiably British, I wasn't sure how to present this new form of fashionable cool, relaxed perspective when the vertically integrated view of Britain would be uptight and not relaxed. This was difficult. How to align national tropes with a new way. But that said the story is understandable and identifiable in a global context. The only way I thought I could do this was through the tourist elements to trying British cultural stereotypes. Although there were difficulties, there was successful comedy in drawing out these elements, and framing them within an (albeit flat foreign characters) meant it was directly referencing the film to be vertically integrated. I very much enjoyed playing with a different Britishness and watching it play out with Libby and Theo. I felt their presentation of Britishness was different and not miserabilist, not uptight. In fact when they were uptight it was in a very light way which was pleasing as my intention. This was then in contrast to Penny as the mother, who very much was a strong independent woman synonymous literary figure in British culture, to contrast with the relaxed perspective of her daughter and husband.

Having a fashionable cool, relaxed perspective was mainly done through the silence of Libby and the obsessions of Theo and I found them a success offering a new feel to British character performance. Theo's hipster obsessions made for a sense of free flowing style. Libby's pensiveness, wondering and generally moderate responses contributed well, getting away from this British up tightness.

The idiosyncrasy applies here too. It was enjoyable to see this come to life in the final piece yet disappointing at times that it was not fully executed. For example whilst very successful with the character of Theo, the more stayed version of Madame Reverie was a surprise. In the filming of the role the actor played Madame Reverie in a more traditional, parochial British sitcom way. I tried to address this on set; in the end I just got her to yell lines out loud, and ended up having to edit around it. In future I would explore how to better support a wilder version of the character, supported with perhaps a more back story. For example that Reverie had just been released from an asylum having been picked up by police in her dressing gown at the gates of Buckingham palace

demanding to see her relatives. Perhaps suggesting outlandish traits to the actor that her horse was recently using the front room as a stable. Or even go further that, similar to the Grandfather character in Little Miss Sunshine, and in line with the story had recently taken up class A drugs. That is the level of idiosyncrasy I think is working towards a different aesthetic, provided it is played straight. Further support for the idiosyncratic perspective, could also have been explored through the Z and Y axis choices and the tangential incidents which hallmark an indie film. Although there is experimentation and discussion within my experiments, this was not used in these Reverie scenes, but clearly needed to be.

In the dialogue it was pleasing to see the incorporation of conscious, stepping outside of themselves, considering their own existence conversations. Conversations that display they have the ability to change their path, discuss existentially, not simply contemplate their own existence rebel against the system. In the script Theo is often the catalyst to existential conversations. Libby is clearly conserving this internally and we explore it through natural imagery. Using the landscape to give this odyssey, tangential feel of contemplation. In the films example scenes mixing music genres whilst having staples of indie film comedies of the past.

Whilst the film has elements of being a spontaneous odyssey, I would not describe it as being strongly so. I think with more time and shooting for two to three weeks this could be explored further. There are elements where I have used slow motion to music, and there are opportunities in the script, particularly around the homeless character of Joe where tangential moments and improvisation could be explored more. And so perhaps this is a discovery of practice that the spontaneous feel can be developed to a greater extent through the production of a fully fledged feature film. That said, the story does begin and end in the same place, implying voyage and return and characters such as Theo and Libby are thrown into their worlds, as opposed to choosing them like Penny.

It was a pivotal discovery in my experiments to see the starkness of an indie film comedy without youth. I therefore put at the centre a teenage girl in existential questioning of the world around her. This was one of my most important discoveries and the way the character Libby, in this relaxed way was able to move through the film reflected this successfully in a British context. Theo in all his adult situations also displayed a youthful energy and approach, with added connotations of fashionable cool. Ironically the deliberately flat background characters of his students were less so. But overall this youthful quality paid off, and Penny's drive and aliveness in her own life, Clarence's own

obsession and of focus, transferred that American indie film aesthetic, in a similar way to my observations in the Little Miss Sunshine case study; all these characters are triers and aspiring in their lives.

The hook of the film is interesting, in that we are combining American indie film in a British context. Overall however I don't feel this has been achieved. My reluctance to push the acceptability of moral standpoints in a contemporary society, the film doesn't really echo through the annals of cinematic history and there's no crossing of genre streams to really impress the viewer. Perhaps this is a guideline that is particularly more difficult one to fulfil. The next step would be to look at different exercises to do this to potentially add to the guidelines. E.g. take the timeline and play with when events happen (jumbled narrative), or take the film and see what genre could be introduced and combined with another; adding some further options at what it would take to produce hooks. However this may be a deeper, further study in itself.

There is a certainly a drive to engaging the bigger society issues of ecological impacts as a topical issue. I have always been intrigued how for example, the film Casablanca (1942) manages skilfully to do this via a love story and America entering World War 2. The central story is the love story, yet the pervading bigger issue is the war. In Slow Lightening we have the central story being Libby's self discovery by interacting with different adults, yet the final discovery is the bigger picture at large.

The niche audience interest in this story is rewilding and broadly environmentalism. Whilst this is not the central focal point it pervades the background and ultimate meaning of the story. Whilst there is a contrast potentially that could be considered selling ancillary products, certainly the contemporary importance of such a subject matter would inspire further marketing and elements that could be distributed from a website.

This is a DIY story and is based around easily accessible locations in the area. Props and crew were minimal and the total shooting cost was roughly around £1000 per day. In the case of a feature film this would mean a notional nano budget figure of around 30k based on shooting for 2-3 weeks and some post production costs to consider. Actors were mainly local and crew were utilised for multiple roles on set.

The name actor element is tricky here without the fully fledged project underway. However interestingly the project managed to attract high standard of performers and experience and

approach, which enabled a very professional nano budget format, and one I have not encountered before. This type of production would lend itself to stunt casting aimed at specific actors with, for example themes related to the story. Environmentalism is something close to many actors' hearts, Emma Thompson and Leonardo DiCaprio to name two very high profile. So as long as the subject matter is within scope of actor's common interests, I would see name actor stunt casting at the very least more than viable, in the context of this particular story.

I considered how to play with colour for the storyline, for example exploring a nature element to the script to do with rewilding where the film was in black and white, and gradually appeared in colour at certain points when prosperous ecological landscapes were shown. But in the end that wasn't the focus and the more conventional oversaturated, warm palette for comedy. As at the centre is the youthful energy of Libby and the coming of age element to the story, a yellow desaturated tone with bright highlights and muted warm tones were used, keeping to the bright and warmth of the indie comedy palette.

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20. Conclusion – Overall Evaluation of Findings

Contents
1. **Introduction**
2. **Research Question, Aims and Objectives**
3. **Final observations and future developments**

1. Introduction

In my literature review I used my research question, aims and objectives to systemically investigate the basis of information for this study. This was then deconstructed into methods of discovery; in my case studies though the analysis questions, from there the interim findings from both the literature review and case studies, to the guidelines to an indie film from the film experiments, and now reconstructed into the final conclusion here for scrutiny. I will now revisit the research question, aims and objectives to summarise discoveries and will then comment on the study's strengths and limitations and this thesis as an original contribution to knowledge. I will end by noting my final observations and possible future developments.

2. Research Question, Aims and Objectives

To recap, my Research Question, Aims and Objectives were as follows:

RESEARCH QUESTION

In what ways can American counter cultural indie approaches to film comedy style and aesthetics contribute to the inventing of the British nano budget comedy film?

AIMS

1. Discover new aesthetic and stylistic approaches to filmmaking that can support filmmakers re-evaluate and/or re-invent their creative relationship to making comedy films in the UK.

2. Articulate a series of creative filmmaking strategies that can help encourage an indie counter cultural comedy filmmaking culture in the UK.

OBJECTIVES

1. Define what American indie film comedy is both stylistically and aesthetically through industry opinion, academia and practice research.

2. Explore the genesis of creating an indie film comedy, with a focus at nano budget level.

3. Experiment with aesthetic response to indie film comedy style in a British context.

4. Using these discoveries, take that learning into a new form, broadening possibilities and inviting diversity for British films and filmmakers by making an indie film comedy at nano budget level, in a British context.

In terms of my research question, there is an interesting journey of which has developed within the definition of counter culture in an indie film comedy context. Counter culture is defined by being in opposition to mainstream values. In American independent film, historically this has led to drama with radical spectacle about outlaws, violence, sex and drugs; Bonnie and Clyde (1967), Easy Rider (1968), Night of the Living Dead (1968) are notable early examples. Counter culture within American indie film comedy is not as radical in story incidents. The counter culture I have identified and then brought on as part of my guidelines is to do with moral standpoint or questioning of the moral standpoint on issues which may normally be taboo, but presented as liberal or without judgement. See here in my case studies, the strip routine at the end of Little Miss Sunshine or the best friends liberal acceptance and in fact embracing of his best friend masturbating to a picture of his girlfriend. In a British form, or indeed any other form, this pertains to and encourages, a stylistic approach to storytelling and not simply a blanket copying of a visual style, production values or story incidents. This principle of not copying follows throughout my answer to the research question, and I have produced principled guidelines and not rules for production. Whilst this is was a successful approach in creating the guidelines, it has limitations in its current form. The practice of the screenplay and

example scenes displayed promise, and greater detail in guidelines approach can go further to support the creative process, to create the counter cultural approach. For example, the Little Miss Sunshine and In Search of a Midnight Kiss examples of counter culture are both quite male orientated sexual taboos. With a female protagonist in Slow Lightning, I am not sure how to progress or include this within the story make up. We have a character living on a canal boat, a mother trying to juggle being a career person and successful mother. Its solid and not completely counter culture. What needs to be explored and outlined further in the guidelines are some constructive tools, of how to identify more subtle and gentle counter cultural approaches. This may, for example, be in workshop form, to uncover the writers desired approach to counter culture within their story.

In terms of my Aims, in the literature review I uncovered a fundamental approach that emerged and had been categorised as American indie film comedy. The approaches were then informed by practice to uncover the genesis of why these films formed this way and some key examples to but borrow production values, but moreover the fundamental underlying principles as to why those production values exist. There are constructive tools I have developed. In particular greater awareness of how Britain is perceived in the world and the approaches to using that. Certainly the context of what I have discovered and talked about, i.e. the American indie films and how they have come to develop through the interplay of money and style, is supportive to reevaluate and reinvent filmmakers creative relationship to making films in the UK. There is then the development of that through practice and giving constructive examples to build on. However within the development of that revaluation there are clearly limitations; why would somebody even know that miserabilism exists? If they are making a good career out of it and enjoy its aesthetic and cultural approach (miserabilism), why would they be interested to listen? As most of the British film industry are applying for BFI money, why would this be useful information? I discus the dissemination in the next section, and much like the indie sleeper hit with slow roll out, beginning at grass roots before somebody gets into that system is key. The problem with new information is without clear examples and pathways of success to draw from, this study acts only as a potential pathway for change and transfer of filmmaking techniques.

The objectives were followed as practical steps through the process. I used my literature review to systematically divide my objectives, as well as industry opinion, academia and practice research to analyse what American indie film comedy is both stylistically and aesthetically. In my literature review American indie film and can be described as the period 1989 to 2010 of which many films produced during that period were nano budget comedies. Whereas in Britain, despite its rich history of comedy very few if at all, were made. The style produced as a result of these films created an

aesthetic which eventually crossed over into the mainstream with films such as Juno (2007) and Little Miss Sunshine (2006) which took over £200m worldwide at the box office. In the process of my research I have outlined that there is a paucity of this kind of film in the UK, and defined what indie film is at a nano budget level and explored the genesis of how to create one. I have experimented in a British context what this means and laid the foundations to possibly broaden the possibilities for British film. I have outlined how the different approaches due to the structure of funding, the interplay between money and style have inadvertently helped to mould a miserabilist element to British filmmaking which pervades and potentially stunts the growth and variability of genres and creativity. In order to further inspire this creativity through the American indie film style and aesthetics, I have come up with guidelines as the basis to inspire new beginnings in British film and a potentially healthier engagement with British culture, without the need to be consistently downbeat. The result being a format, a basis, that inspires a different British film comedy culture that can evolve, transform and diversify common practices. I have experimented with American indie film stylistic and aesthetic traits, narrative, technique and ethos to inspire a new style of modern day, upbeat British indie film comedy.

A crucial discovery was the interplay between money and style which informed the stylistic approaches in the American and British contexts. Whereas in America employs a vertically integrated system with the studios, in Britain there is a state funded approach. This creates an unexpected convergence of styles in Britain, and divergence of styles in America.

Exploring through analysis in my case studies and experiments meant I could unpack the kinds of elements in the American indie film comedy forms, to bring into the British form. I looked at how these could be further interpreted through case studies and applied interim findings to film experiments, which could then inform new ways or forms of approaching a new type of film and filmmaking. These new aesthetic and stylistic discoveries then formed the guidelines.

The guidelines clearly articulate how this can be strategized in to both the story structure, style and placement of a British indie film. This came through the experimentation of indie film style in a British context. The genesis of how to create this was developed through experiments and the production of screenplay and example scenes, with particular focus at nano budget level. These discoveries distinguished differences with American indie film, as opposed to simply copying that aesthetic and style. By steering clear of simply copying the traits of those films, the guidelines, screenplay and example scenes use many aspects you could transfer into any culture or country of

filmmaking; counter to the common culture, odyssey stories, hiding story structure, vertically integrated, fashionable cool, idiosyncratic – these are all principles transferable and not simply laying one list of aesthetic traits on to another. The challenge moving forward is to take these discoveries and develop them fully, take that learning into a new form, broadening possibilities and inviting diversity for British films and filmmakers by making an indie film comedy at nano budget level, in a British context.

The key discoveries in order to create a British indie film comedy were Michael Z. Newman's Indie: An American film culture which defines to the root causes and principles of indie filmmaking to avoid copying. John Berra defining the interplay between money and style and to a lesser extent Ted Hope's Hope for Film which has its own set of guidelines for the ultimate Sundance movie. Moving in to practice and case studies my key findings were documented in the form of the counter culture alternative to national cinema, a buoyancy and life affirming quality, spontaneity, authenticity and the idiosyncratic. In practice the difficulty of putting these elements in to action was then challenging. How does one in practice, develop those theoretical elements? As I was discovering these things for a first time, teaching myself to do this had its limitations. There were some key discovery successes', namely the element of youth or youthfulness within the storytelling, which came out of my experiments, as well as the odyssey voyage and return propensity of indie storytelling creating the other worldliness such a feature of an indie film. Expanding the interim findings in to guidelines through practice laid the bedrock to increased, practical guidelines, that ultimately come back down to the rigorous base of the interim findings from the literature review. The practice successfully played with how to achieve this in an example story context. This enabled the final screenplay and example scenes to more squarely answer the inventing of the British nano budget comedy, with a sensibility and dynamism not present in the experiments and showing that it is possible to make a British nano budget indie film comedy, with the support of some guidelines as constructive tools for development.

3. Final observations and future developments

When I set out on my research I investigated how these American counter cultural indie approaches to film comedy style and aesthetics, can contribute to the inventing of the British nano budget comedy film. There were successful elements and some not so. What worked was the systematic style of investigation which led me to the guidelines for an indie film; the crux of drawing these key elements together to create an original contribution to knowledge. These provided an undoubtedly solid foundation to build films and creative material to develop the British elements. As with any

creative endeavour the struggle is then the implementation of that unwordable creative force that makes something work and have a life of its own. Whilst there were elements which were very interesting through practice, for example the refining of the guidelines and discoveries such as the youthful element of indie film or the implied nature of improvisation or a free flowing camera, ultimately the practice was limited in its key discoveries. However these individual elements in isolation were extremely informative into the study. The true success would be blending and making these elements into a voice and body of work more defining, perhaps even a movement to experiment with the ideas at an industry level, to propel them forward. As the study was essentially the journey and not the finished film, I think that finished film material is limited in quality and ultimately just lays the platform for discoveries and quality work to now happen. That would ultimately bare the fruit necessary to properly test the guidelines and propel the ideas forward beyond this research. Moving forward the basis of this research needs to be explored in further contexts and experimented with more. There is a solid nucleus to create the breeding ground for new films and filmmaking, to further invent the British nano budget comedy film, through counter cultural American indie film comedy aesthetic and style.

The key part of this research is to put into practice what many have alluded to in the British film industry, that there is a tendency towards downbeat stories. Perhaps this is as a result of the natural British delf depreciation nature or the funding streams withing the BFI. For whatever reason, this study is an attempt to uncover a way of doing it differently in a specific area (nano budget indie film comedy). In order to look at how to further test and distribute these works, my output intentions include further development of these ideas into a book form, as well as dissemination within conferences and teaching. As the information contained may not be entirely welcomed or felt relevant, due the intension is a slow build through inspiring filmmakers to experiment and use the information to build different narrative approaches.

When I started on this research journey in 2018, independent film was a rapidly changing landscape. Now I am finishing it, it has become almost unrecognisable. An industry dominated by streaming services where independent film still exists and is still prevalent, but whose outputs are far less. What is clear is currently the independent landscape has shrunk, and the future of cinema in general is uncertain, as it always has been. But like many older forms of culture of entertainment, things expand and contract and grow into different forms. Just like this I hope that British film grows and develops into different forms, and this study in some way contributes to that growth. It is only by identifying the current restrictions, we can then identify the gaps for expansion. One such gap is the

British nano budget indie film comedy, and this research can support the growth and expansion of that new film form. By using this as its genesis, it is then a useful addition to develop indie film comedy, in any country or different cultural context, simply by applying the guidelines.

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Appendix I: Ethics Approval

Leeds Trinity University

Brownberrie Lane · Horsforth · Leeds · LS18 5HD · UK
Tel: +44 (0) 113 283 7100 · Fax: +44 (0) 113 283 7200

www.leedstrinity.ac.uk

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL
David Thompson
1807156@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Professor Karen Sayer
Chair of SCBL Research Ethics &
Integrity Committee
Tel: 0113 283 7100 ext 212
E-mail: k.sayer@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Date: 14 July 2020

Dear David

Re: SCBL\2020\001: Re-inventing the British cinematic comedy film

Thank you for your recent application for ethical approval for the above named project.

After reviewing the application it has been resolved that the research project is granted ethical approval.

I wish you well in your study.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Karen Sayer
Chair of School of Communications Business and Law Research Ethics & Integrity Committee

c.c Prof G Roberts, Dr S Ordorico

Appendix II: SRN and MeCCSA abstracts

Screenwriting Research Network (SRN) Conference, August 2016

David Thompson
Course Leader, Film & TV, University of Cumbria, United Kingdom

Abstract

'Indie' film narratives have a tendency towards small personal human stories, internal journeys, existentialism and idiosyncrasy: Sideways, Little Miss Sunshine, Annie Hall. These films are often exhibited and receive higher admissions in independent or 'art-house' cinemas. Characteristically, the more commercial a film is, the greater the concern with spectacle and ego. Those stories concerned with survival, war, good versus evil: Star Wars, Batman, James Bond. There are different types of story to tell.

Video on demand, the internet and social media, has accelerated cinema's box office to previously unimaginable levels. This has created a general disinterest in funding mid-range budget level 'indie' screenplays. The market is flooded with large scale blockbuster movies, which go on to recoup huge revenues through these new streams. With this sea change in modern media, what are the ingredients that make an 'indie' viable, in a modern day cinema context? Previously the UK had regional screen agencies, feeding youthful new wave filmmakers, through purpose built schemes. Since the credit crunch, such schemes have been cut.

Through my PhD by practice, I am writing and directing my own feature film and reflecting my experiences in to the film's narrative. I will use it as a reflective vehicle to explore the nature of 'indie' cinema, as well as investigating what makes it commercially viable in today's world, getting to the route of what makes an 'indie' film an 'indie' film narratively.

This article examines my early findings of qualitative research and recordings with industry Producers, Screenwriters and Distributors as I begin my research.

Contact: david.thompson@cumbria.ac.uk

Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) Conference, January 2017

Stories that sizzle: Making indie films viable in a modern day cinema context

'Indie' film narratives have a tendency towards small personal human stories, internal journeys, existentialism and idiosyncrasy: Sideways, Little Miss Sunshine, Annie Hall. These films are often exhibited and receive higher admissions in independent or 'art-house' cinemas. Characteristically, the more commercial a film is, the greater the concern with spectacle and ego. Those stories concerned with survival, war, good versus evil: Star Wars, Batman, James Bond. There are different types of story to tell. Video on demand, the internet and social media, has accelerated cinema's box office to previously unimaginable levels. It has also created illegal downloading and the easy exchange of feature films. This has created a general disinterest in funding mid-range budget level 'indie' films. The market is flooded with large scale blockbuster movies, which go on to recoup huge revenues through these new streams. With this sea change in modern media, what are the ingredients that make an 'indie' viable, in a modern day cinema context? Previously the UK had regional screen agencies, feeding youthful new wave filmmakers, through purpose built schemes. Since the credit crunch, such schemes have been cut. Through my PhD by practice, I am writing and directing my own feature film and reflecting my experiences in to the film's narrative. I will use it as a reflective vehicle to explore the nature of 'indie' cinema, as well as investigating what makes it commercially viable in today's world, getting to the route of what makes an 'indie' film an 'indie' film narratively. This article examines my latest findings of qualitative research and video recordings with industry Producers, Screenwriters and Distributors as I continue my research. I am an independent writer-director and academic, and have just begun my PhD by practice in Feature Film. I have written seven feature film scripts previously and produced my own feature film The Girlfriend Audition in 2013. I am in the process of developing Introducing Film (2nd Ed.) with Professor Graham Roberts at Leeds Trinity University and am currently Course Leader in Film and Television, at the University of Cumbria.

Appendix III: Semi-structured interviews with industry

Jennine Lanouette, former New York Journalist

• **indie narrative:** A main stream narrative can be done independently but with much more freedom to elaborate or innovate. You can experiment with narrative, that's the signature quality of independent film. Sex Lies and Videotape was a conventional narrative, told entirely personal, profoundly personal. He was in his own 12 step programme to tell the truth.

• **Definition:** "The independent film will always be the weed fighting its way up through the crack in the sidewalk. It will always find its audience"
Another definition: Films that are talking about something real. As opposed to the Hollywood films that are these fantasies. Talking about something real can be in the form of artistic innovation, social statement (issues), personal expression: these are different types of being real and within them you can have any number of sub genres. Another one from Jonathan Danner, of an indie film company at the time: "the independent film is like a bumble bee. You examine it aerodynamically and in terms of physics, there's just no way it could fly. Yet, incredibly it does. When you look at the complications of the financing and how you put a film together, how do people ever get these things made? Yet, they do!"

• **Marketing:** Now harder to distribute than make a film.

• **Great story:** The perfect balance between intellectual and emotional engagement. Layers of meaning. There's a difference between emotional exploitation and engagement. But you can say interesting things about the world and life in indie film. You can get people thinking. You can work in layers of meaning and metaphor. The more of that depth and richness you have, the more appeal you have for your film.

• **What makes a British film travel?** Can't distinguish indie or not. My Left Foot, Crying Game…

Kevin Allen, Producer

• **Market:** Too many sausages, not enough places to tell them. That's the big change: there's too many films. Technology; a kid can make a film for 25k in his bedroom if he wants to. Every kid wants to be a film director these days, Media studies courses have mushroomed. Universities are making big money out of doing media studies which is contributing to this global population of filmmakers.

• **Online:** Online platforms still have a way to go. Things haven't sorted themselves out yet. But there's still a butter mountain of product. Netflix is a false dawn. It's got a way to go and how far can it go? It all dependent on advertising.

• **Great story:** Truth. It's got to resonate. It's got to mean something to ME. It has to be appeal to me as the filmmaker. I want to feel that a story needs to be told. Doesn't preach. Not preachy or worthy. If you want to get a message out there in to the wider world, you have to learn how to disguise it. I don't want something that's telling me how to feel. I want it in a multi-facetted way to somehow take me through a great story, and make me think at the end of it. That takes craft if the writing isn't there, you ain't going to get anywhere.

• **Community**: Young melting pot of creative. Connecting with artists, dancers, painters, actors, playwrights… art. Jazz. It's gone in London now. It created a whole generation of filmmakers. I feel sorry for these kids who are going in to do media courses in isolation. They make horror films to add to the 37,000 other horror films. Great. Have you got anything to say?
You've got to have the madness at ground level. The BFI used to be the place that all the looney filmmakers got help, got funding: Derek Jarman, Seamus mcgarvey. The BFI now is pretending to be a mini Hollywood. You've got to have the madness at that grass root level to grow in to fresh, interesting, original filmmakers.

• **Concept:** In some ways nothing's changed. You make a success of an independent concept and the big boys will come and eat you for breakfast.

• **Indie world:** Audience, Indie: America is a big place. They can sustain the market of British indie films.

• **Getting talent:** Actors are only interested in one thing. Don't tell them it's a small indie. Don't undersell yourself. All an actor is interested in is the part. That's the least of your worries. If it's a good script, it'll make it to a good actor.

• **Pitch:** is so important: 2 pages maximum. If you want me to look over something and you're at the development stage. Did I send you some?

Ed Barratt, Producer

• **Market**: Video tape was the market in the 80s. That was still prevalent up until 5 years ago with DVDs in supermarket, e.g. White Van Man consuming 3 on a weekend. Gangster, foot soldier movies. White van man is harder to access now on VOD. Tesco used to have the sign off on White van man titles. Foot Soldiers shifted 150,000 units. Sky movies, virgin, the home ents section would be what they use. Name actors still prevalent, stunt casting. IP (Intellectual Property) driven these days; re-boot, book or comic. Mid-level films in terms of talent v hard.

Positives: democratisation of filmmaking. Hoping that the income streams will all settle down and there will be more reliable paths. At the moment, there isn't.

• **Audience:** e.g. the Sundance movie is almost a genre in its self now: used to be drama with a comedic edge. But more cynical these days. The drama with a comedic edge happened by accident/was organic. Now people are making films in that mould on purpose.

• **Indie cinema:** Should always be about being more truthful, Mud, Dallas Buyers Club, Rise of the Foot Soldiers. The studios are not doing anything else other than IP based cinema at $120m scale. Different part of indie cinema: Valerium (even though 150m pre-sales), top end. Genres and scales that define it.

• **Habit:** British audiences are out of the habit of watching British films. Whenever Exotic Marigold happens, there's a rush to do the same thing or a sequel. British audiences don't go and see British films.

• **Script:** Hook.

• **Talent:** Begins with the script and the director and then a sense of hw the finance is coming together 'private equity' – enough vague commitments to even get the read. Practically: go to their agent, outline the project. Depending on what leverage you have in terms of what you have in pushing forward that read. How quick and how you get a no. Most of the time talent will pass on a

personal situation they have or in reading only the first 10 pages. They might have just had a baby and they don't need to be on the other side of the atlantic for 3 weeks. They don't need it in terms of money or profile and they've got a big show to go on to straight after anyway for 6 months. Personal connections are really important in terms of getting those reads – a director who is well connected with talent is hugely important: he can get them to read it. The cast's first question is: am I going to be embarrassed in this film. For example, if there is an actor directing the film they trust the director knows their side of the art, and trusts them that they are not going to be embarrassed in the film.

• **Online:** Netflix don't tell you how many people have watched your film. They pay above market rate at the front end, to effectively buy out the back end. So if you're an indie filmmaker that can be great. Because all your investment is re-cooped in a oner, it's a success.

• **Raising funds**: Quickest easiest way: credit card. However if you're getting family to give you money, you may as well structure it as an EIS for tax purposes. ESIES.

• **Politics:** Being politically savvy is really important.

Ineke Hagedorn, Producer

Question: "What makes 'indie' film narrative, commercially viable in a modern day cinema context? A practical exploration"

• **Marketing:** It's different, but only because everyone told us so. Also films that took Alex films before, wouldn't take now: e.g. Greece. People don't take that many risks any more. Their film would have been a risk they were told.

• **Berlin financing**: In Germany there is funding, that's why people come and film here.

• **Digital revolution, viability**: positive: making easier, helped Meet Me in Montenegro. Restricted in film, makes Alex be able to work in the way that he works. Self distribution easier to let people know who you are also positive. Negatives: financial difficulties. Getting Rupert Friend for example: doesn't know if that would have been possible ten years ago.

• **Indie world**: different ones, there's many layers to indie: Hollywood stuff on Netflix, and then like us: director uses his money to make a film. The way they make films is becoming easier and easier for example Tangerine is made on an iPhone. But it's still, as always has been, a lot of work. So ideally people wouldn't do it. Not sure how many people can afford to make films like this.

• **Budget & money to live:** It just costs money whatever. E.g. as a Producer, it would be 5 years pay to Alex Holdridge for this film. People need to make money, a lot of people want to do this in the industry, and that's totally understandable. We have been lucky but not overly lucky with this film. It's not as if anyone went bankrupt.

• **Smaller stories**: You have to inevitably because of budget. But we did shoot in Hollywood, London, Berlin, Montenegro. But it's more a personal story because the filmmaker wants to tell the story. So something like Alien versus Predator is not really a story an indie filmmaker wants to tell. Coming from the inside of the human being its more of a construct, then here you have the story first (as an indie filmmaker). Then you also have to think how is that doable, because you always have restrictions. With other films you are not thinking of story ways around the problem. For example in MMIM there were scenes of snow in London, then its summer here etc etc. I'm like how is that ever gonna work! But Alex great about working around it. Re-visited the locations when it was actually snowing. Shot a little bit of it like this, then like this for the scene etc. He managed to create the world around it. Could still keep his big story, still shoot in London. Still make it do-able. But in order to be so driven, someone like Alex is it has to be your story, otherwise you wouldn't do it. It's too much money, it's too much energy.

So in summary: I think this is how it will always influence the story you want to tell: you've got to have in your mind, or know how you're going to do it.

• **Distribution:** We had offers from streaming services, but we thought we would never see a dime. People take work in to displaying these films, so people need to get paid for it. We can get the film in the cinema, but we have to have the publicity to tell people it's on. Otherwise nobody will look at the film or come across the film: make it known. Online, unless you're really lucky (there have been some really good deals with Netflix – e.g. the Duplass brothers), the money is not so great. Positive: fb, iTunes, films with Rupert Friend, rom-com – good key words make it easier for people to find your film. You can get to people that way. It's all from an indie indie place! We were very lucky with an American distributor, which was a great deal. Above us there is a Sundance level, where it's easier for the films to be known and sold.

• **Funding:** Got private money. Funder gave money with private topic. To do it, you need a lot of time for that. Probably more in the US though. I don't know about in the UK, but in Germany there is a system set up. Germans don't really trust people that much to give them their money. Germans need a really good reason to give someone a couple of thousand euros. There is also a bad history of German funds where they make really bad Hollywood movies out of them, and then it was outlawed. Our money all came from US people. It seems that if any market, the US would be the market: that's why they got the US deal. But we had so little time for money and financing because we were planning on doing it with our own money. You need time to really put it in place. If we had Rupert on board in the first place before we started shooting, maybe more people would have been interested because it was a higher scale film. It made it more legit, also Jennifer. 20k is a lot of money and you have to tell people that they may not ever get it back.

• **What makes a great film?** You've got to give the press something to talk about, to write about, a hook. The story that is a semi-documentary was something that gave people something to write about. A mixture of the film and the making. A hook for the festivals and the public. Then having Rupert Friend on top of that. So: one famous actor, a hook to write about: something to distinguish it from every other film in its genre, what is it's USP. Need to have something. If we had made it clear that the film was shot in Berlin, it would have helped also, it's a USP: Berlin as the new cultural capital of the world.

Stephen Follows, Media analyst

• **Money and style**

In America they make films to make money, and hope they're good. In Britain we make films to be good, and hope they make money.

In America, 1 in 2 Hollywood films make money. In Britain it's about 1 in 20.

America calls our films indie because we don't have anything to be independent from.

• **Narrative**

We don't do things about ambition. We do things about failure.

Even The Kings speech: inner problems. We don't make independence day, we make the Kings Speech. We tend to do small interior stuff. We export misery and royalty. Which is why the Kings

Speech works so well, because he is a miserable royal. It's also why Downton Abbey works. There's a paper by David Steel, who used to work at the BFI, and now Age Concern.

Appendix IV: Film credits

Case Studies Video Essay

Music: 'Ho Hey', The Lumineers, Dualtone

Film references: Little Miss Sunshine (2004), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), Submarine (2010)

Film Experiment 1

Music: 'Ho Hey', The Lumineers, Dualtone

Poetry: William Shakespeare; As You Like it, All's Well that Ends Well, Troilus and Cressida, Sonnet 98, King Lear

Film references: Little Miss Sunshine (2004), In Search of a Midnight Kiss (2007), Submarine (2010)

Film Experiment 2

Mother: Rosalind Richold

Camera: Erik Knudsen

Music: 'Just Like Honey' The Jesus and Mary Chain, Blanco y Negro Records

Film Experiment 3

Mother: Rosalind Richold

Forbes: Mark Winstanley

Camera: Erik Knudsen

Music: 'Spring', Vivaldi, St. Mark's Philharmonic Orchestra

Example Scenes

Libby: Hannah Frankland

Penny: Francesca Anderson

Theo: James McClelland

Madame Reverie: Martina McClements

Jon Smalls: Charlie Collicutt

Director of Photography: Pishdaad Modaressi

Producer: Hira Hosein

Art Direction: Samantha Babrovski

Sound recordist: Jake Marvin

Production Assistant: Chloe Bush

Sound Post Production: Johan Prinsloo

Music: 'Dreams', The Cranberries, Island Records; 'Just Like Honey' The Jesus and Mary Chain, Blanco y Negro Records; (In My) Solitude, Billie Holiday, Verve Reissues

Appendix V: Screenplay

Slow Lightning

By

David Thompson

INDYFILM   davidsigston@gmail.com

FADE IN

EXT. HILLSIDE VIEW - DAY

LIBBY LIGHTNING (15) roams through the countryside aimlessly.
Leaning down, she finds buried in the ground, a SMALL PINK
COMPASS. She dusts it off, intrigued. She turns it over, and
it reads:

TITLE CARD:

"orienteering

/ˌɔːrɪɛnˈtɪərɪŋ, ˌɒrɪɛnˈtɪərɪŋ/

The action of determining one's position correctly."

Libby looks all around her. She fixes here gaze. There is a
tree with an inscription reading "North".

FADE IN

INT. YOUNG GIRLS BEDROOM - DAY

Libby talks slowly in to a hairbrush announcing the winners
of a competition.

          LIBBY
    And the winner... of the Royal British
    Orienteering Championships is... Libby
    Lightning!

She leaps in the air and does rock'n roll like OTT
celebrations. She steps up on to a mock podium made out of
kids jewellery boxes. She performs very formal celebratory
actions in front of a mirror, bowing to each corner of her
imaginary crowd.

She puts on a girl guides hat, amongst various incongruous
clothes.

          LIBBY
    I thank Princess Ann and her Royal
    subjects for being here today and the
    late Queen Elizabeth for her
    patronage. I am truly honoured to take
    this most prestigious award, and I too
    promise to do my very best and be true
    to myself... and determine my position
    correctly in this world...

She produces a Polaroid camera and takes a picture of herself
in the mirror.

An adult female voice from the distance is heard.

                         VOICE
                Libby?!

   INSERT IMAGE: A CLOCK HAND ROTATES WILDLY AROUND A COMPASS ON
                                  A POLAROID CAMERA PHOTO

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

A cabin door opens. Hair that could only be from waking. A
hipster bearded man, scarf around his neck, begins the latest
morning of his canal boat life. He (THEO LIGHTNING, late
thirties) opens doors in his little kitchen, releasing
credits that appear and float away, like releasing helium
balloons.

He empirically grinds and makes his own coffee.

INT. YOUNG GIRLS BEDROOM - DAY

Libby empirically plans her day. Her wardrobe is colour
coded, her day on a ticked schedule list. She decides on her
outfit.

INT. CAR - DAY

A CAR DRIVES through the countryside. Libby stares out of the
window intensely.

                         LIBBY
                This is it, here!

PENNY (early 40s, Libby's Mum) is driving and abruptly and
reluctantly stops.

                         PENNY
                Please stay in the car.

Libby hastily jumps out.

                         LIBBY
              I'll meet you at the bottom.

The car door slams.

Libby reveals a compass from her pocket, quickly finds north,
then breaks out sprinting off.

Penny opens the door of the car and stands

                         PENNY
              I've a London call at 9am!

Libby shouts back as she is sprinting in to the distance.

                         LIBBY
              I'll be on Sally Lane...

EXT. SALLY LANE - DAY

Penny drives to a spot, a school behind her, and looks up
towards fields where Libby should be coming from.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The school bell chimes as Libby runs through the empty school
corridors.

She TRIPS and her compass SPINS WILDLY on to a floor.

A hand picks it up, examining. It is the Head Mistress, MISS
LORRAINE CARTER.

                         MISS CARTER
              Elizabeth Lightning You really need to
              determine exactly how to orientate
              yourself to lessons on time.

                         LIBBY
              I'm sorry it won't happen again.

Libby goes to leave.

                         MISS CARTER
              That's four times in a row this week.

Libby stops.

                    I see you have been with your Aunt
                    again, Madame Marguerite Reverie. Now
                    she's not right and it's very sad, and
                    I'm suprised your Mother allows it.

Libby is sheepish.

                    I see. Go on, Mr Bruce will be waiting
                    for you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A quote on poetry is written on the board:

"Shakespeare: renewal and transformation."

MR BRUCE, a young, enthusiastic, bearded English teacher is
supporting his class to present from the front, one by one.

ELEONOR LANGHAM stands at the front of the class. Blonde
hair, blue eyes, poised and ready.

                         ELEONOR
                    (Overly innocent and earnest, but
                     perfect)
                    If by your art, my dearest father, you
                    have
                    Put the wild waters in this roar,
                    allay them.
                    The sky, it seems, would pour down
                    stinking pitch
                    But that the sea, mounting to th'
                    welkin's cheek,
                    Dashes the fire out. O, I have
                    suffered
                    With those that I saw suffer — a brave
                    vessel
                    (Who had no doubt some noble creature
                    in her)
                    Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did
                    knock
                    Against my very heart! Poor souls,
                    they perished.
                    Had I been any god of power, I would
                    Have sunk the sea within the earth or
                    ere
                    It should the good ship so have
                    swallowed and
                    The fraughting souls within her.

⌀ Created using Celtx

The whole room has fallen silent.

                    MR BRUCE
          Thank you very much Eleonor, an
          excellent rendition as always, very
          poigniant. There's something poetic
          about a storm set amongst hillsides
          and seas isn't there.

                    ELEONOR
          I really enjoyed the both the literal
          and the figurative meanings in this
          speech.

                    MR BRUCE
          Yes the father and the daughters
          pleas. Very good

The class claps, and Eleonor sits.

                    TEACHER
          Next up; Clarence.

CLARENCE CLEGG, a fuzzy haired confused teenage boy shuffles
to the front. He unfurls a creased A4 sheet of paper and
holds it out in front of himself.

His audience is already looking bored.

                    CLARENCE
               (monotone)
          Rock formations in this area tend to
          be from the carbonaforious period in
          Yorkshire which means there is
          charcoal in rock formations.

Mr Bruce checks his notes to see if this is what Clarence
should be doing.

A classmate begins to go to sleep.

Clarence reveals a massive lump of charcoal and clumsily
lands it on the desk in front of him.

          Charcoal plus rehydration is an
          antidote to mushroom poisoning. This
          is a reflection of the renewal and
          transformation of rocks. And of
          course, the slow lightning.

Clarence holds up his wrist to reveal a small lightning bolt,

drawn in with a biro pen.

Mr Bruce is not sure where this is going. He goes to
intervene.

      This is none more prevalent than in
      Shakespeare's The Tempest when
      Prospero addresses the fairies.

Mr Bruce is relieved, back on track.

Clarence stops. He feels his pockets.

Still feeling his pockets.

He still feels his pockets.

Mr Bruce goes to intervene again.

Digging deep Clarence unfurls a much smaller piece of paper.
Mr Bruce relents again. Straining his eyes, Clarence read off
the paper.

      "And you whose pastime/Is to make
      midnight mushrooms"--

That's it, Mr Bruce intervenes.

          MR BRUCE
      --Thank you Clarence, that was very
      interesting. A lot of geological
      references in this play, interwoven
      with the play's themes of
      transformation. Maybe look at some
      metaphor and similie next time around.
      Some alliteration would be nice
      also...

          CLARENCE
      But Mister Bruce there is. The
      mushrooms--

          MR BRUCE
      Excellent thank you Clarence.

Clarence carefully scrunches his papers back up in to a mess
in his hand, lumps the charcoal in to his hand and trudges
back to his seat to muted applause.

7.

I/E. CAFE - DAY

In a hipster too cool for school café, Theo waits, holding a
small menu.

                    ATTENDANT
          Turmeric oat milk flat white?

Theo takes the drink.

                    THEO
          Can I also get some Gluten free
          organic avocado toast.

The Attendant pauses.

                    ATTENDANT
          We don't have gluten free bread.

                    THEO
          Yes you do.

Theo points.

                    ATTENDANT
          Oh sorry yeah.

                    THEO
          Gluten free organic smavo my friend.

                    ATTENDANT
          I don't know whether the avocado is
          organic today.

                    THEO
          Okay fine, just smavo.

                    ATTENDANT
          What's smavo?

                    THEO
          What do you think it is?

The Attendant thinks.

                    ATTENDANT
          Smashed avocado?

                    THEO
          Excellent.

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8.

Theo looks at his watch. He goes to make a call, then
relents.

He goes outside to wait, and lights up a rolly. Out of
nowhere he is startled by a familiar face, a homeless man,
JOE (late 50s/early 60s, grey, long long beard).

>   JOE
>   I'm preparing for world war three.
>   There's a wagon-- the white one
>   (points to white van)
>   They've Alkaeedah inside. I'm just
>   waiting. I've been looking to buy a
>   gun. Shhh...

>   THEO
>   Well I don't have a gun but I could
>   get you an oat milk flat white?

>   JOE
>   Okay that'll do...

Theo hands over his coffee.

Joe takes a swig.

>   JOE
>   Funny aroma.

>   THEO
>   It's tumeric.

>   JOE
>   Very nice.

They both stand sharing a moment, Joe with his coffee, Theo
with a rolly.

>   THEO
>   Do you ever think about death Joe?

>   JOE
>   If it comes, it comes. But I want to
>   be sure I'm dead before they kill me.

>   THEO
>   I think I'd like to at least be eating
>   something.

Theo stares in to the distance.

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9.

                         THEO (CTD)
               Maybe, I'd indulge in a nice croque
               madam, or maybe a Tartiflette followed
               by an indulgently sweet Macaron. A
               gratin, with sushi croissant, and
               pumpkin spice... All finished with a
               nice single origin brazialian bean.

                         JOE
               Or a Liberty cap.

                         THEO
               A forager to the last eh Joe. Have you
               been up on the hillside, where they're
               planning this wind farm?

                         JOE
                 (defensive)
               I don't know anything about it.

                         THEO
               Maybe just some simple emmental
               cheese...

                         JOE
               I don't know anything about it.

                         THEO
               With a clean baguette...

                         JOE
               Good idea, a nice cheese roll.

Joe downs the coffee.

               I'll see you later.

Joe slaps Theo on the back making Theo jerk forwards, and
flies off.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Libby stands around with five other girls.

                         GIRL 1
               She was so winding me up. I could have
               sworn she was staring at me the whole
               time.

                    GIRL 2
          Do you like my nails? I got them last
          week.

                    GIRL 3
          Oh yeah they're really nice.

                    GIRL 4
          I was <u>so</u> suprised you didn't say
          something to her, she was so winding
          you up.

                    GIRL 1
          She was wasn't she, I'm not just
          making it up.

                    GIRL 2
          I've got this mascara as well and this
          foundation's online.

                    GIRL 3
          Yeah it really suits you.

                    GIRL 4
          What are you gonna do?

                    GIRL 1
          I know I've got to do something.

                    GIRL 2
          Libbs have you had your ears pierced?

                    LIBBY
               (distant)
          No, no. I'm not sure.

                    GIRL 4
          You're not sure. What do you mean?

                    LIBBY
          I think I dreamed it. But I don't
          think I have.

                    GIRL 2
          Let me look.

     Libby pulls her hair back. Girl 2 looks.

                    GIRL 4
          No, you've definitely got your ears
          pierced.

Libby holds her ear lobe and is pensive looking at the girls.

> GIRL 1
> She was <u>so</u> winding me up, I could have
> sworn. Libbs she was winding me up
> right?

> LIBBY
> I don't know, she's always kind of
> sad.

> GIRL 1
> She's sad. What does that mean?

> LIBBY
> I don't know she always seems sad,
> like she's having a bad day or
> something.

> GIRL 1
> She was winding me up.

> GIRL 4
> She was winding you up.

> GIRL 2
> Yeah well your hair looks really nice
> anyway.

> GIRL 1
> Oh thank you yours is lovely, did you
> have it permed?

> GIRL 2
> It wasn't permed really but I go this
> new shampoo and it makes it go like
> this.

Libby feels her hair, pensive, looks out in to the distance.

> GIRL 1
> So why is she so sad?

> LIBBY
> I don't know, I guess she just needs
> time to figure things out...

The school bell rings. Things echo, opera echoes in the
distance.

E/I. HILLSIDE HOUSE - DAY

An elderly woman sways in a rustic yard, hand feeding a flock
of different varieties of chickens and singing opera loudly.

> MADAME REVERIE
> Recondita armonia, Di bellezze diverse
> È bruna Floria, L'ardente amante mia!
>> (to a chicken)
> Ah my Floria you shall have your corn
> as you shall have your pellets. Un peu
> carrot peals?? I should think so.

She breathes in the country air and out dramatically.

> Un chante mon amours, aur revoir...

She turns her back and tootles off.

Inside her house she meanders through sunny musty hallways.
Formal portrait pictures of her and a man. His items
scattered across the arm chair.

She picks up a scarf and sings, draping the scarf around her
and begins dancing formerly around the room.

An ornate picture sits on wall with a very young woman,
surrounded by several medals and trophies.

She sparks up a cigarette on a cigarette holder. She throws
the match in to the fire place.

She wonders to the window and looks out on to the hillside.
She sings again.

> MADAME REVERIE
> Recondita armonia, Di bellezze diverse
> È bruna Floria, L'ardente amante mia!

EXT. HILLSIDE HOUSE - DAY

Opera singing can be heard in the background. A pair of hands
pick up a chicken on a hillside.

INT. CAR - DAY

Libby and her Mother Penny, drive along a country road. Libby

sits with a chicken in her lap, looking bedraggled.

                         LIBBY
               Did you--

The phone rings loudly. PENNY (Libby's Mum) picks up.

                         PENNY
               Yes I can't quite talk now I'm, on the
               school run. Yes I know the deadline is
               Monday. Yes it-- it will get done.
               Hello? Hello?

The phone goes dead.

The chicken flaps its wings.

                         LIBBY
               It was all on its own.

They drive in silence, Penny bites a nail.

                         LIBBY
               Have you--

The phone rings again loudly.

                         PENNY
               Hello John? Yes I know. Yes sorry I'm
               driving, the reception is terrible
               around here. Hello?

The chicken squawks. Penny slams the phone down.

               It looks like its riddled with
               disease.

                         LIBBY
               It's a chicken.

                         PENNY
                  (completely losing it)
               I can see its a fucking chicken!
               God...

Silence.

                         PENNY
               I'm really sorry. I've just got a lot
               on at the moment. And it could all
               come crashing down if I don't keep it

14.

                    all together.

                              LIBBY
                    Lights.

                              PENNY
                    Thank you.

                              LIBBY
                    No - LIGHTS!!

Penny slams on the breaks of the car and it SKIDS TO A HALT.

                              PENNY
                    Thank you.

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Theo sits at his computer on a work call with colleague, JON
SMALLS (late 30s). They are both whiling away the time and we
arrive with them in mid-tangent of a random conversation.

                              THEO
                    I was cooking with Al bronzo last
                    night and the way it stuck to the
                    side, well I was impressed, though it
                    was blatantly factory made, I still
                    thought it packed a punch.

                              JON SMALLS
                    Not Al bronzo then is it.

                              THEO
                    It's still bronze cut pasta. It's
                    texture was highly porous.

                              JON SMALLS
                    Did you do that sculpture?

His colleague points behind Theo from the screen.

                              THEO
                    Oh that old thing. Just something I'm
                    working with.

There is a knock at the door.

                              JON SMALLS
                    Anyway we need to talk about changes

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        to the policy change policy.

                THEO
        Sorry I've just had a knock at the
        door. Just a sec.

Theo excuses himself from the call.

                JON SMALLS
        No problem, and we have to make sure
        we talk about the policy change
        policy.

Theo opens the cabin door. His sort of estranged PENNY stands
in front of him. Behind her Libby pets a chicken, frustrating
her mother.

Nothing is said.

Theo begins to close the door.

                PENNY
        No, what are you doing?.

                THEO
        I'm on a call. I have to look at the
        policy change policy.

                PENNY
        She's ill.

                THEO
        What are you saying?

In the background the Colleague wants to get back down to
business.

                JON SMALLS (O.S.)
        The change to policy is a real hot
        potato.

                THEO
        I'm not sure this is good for my
        diagnosis. I've said I want to come
        home. Please can I come home?

She stands contemplating. Libby removes a twig and tries it
for taste.

PENNY draws herself together.

                                    THEO
                    I've got a new tiramisu recipe. It's
                    double cassis.

                                    PENNY
                    What time are you going to the Piece
                    hall?

                                    THEO
                    It's based around an ancient Sicilian
                    aromas, developed over centuries. I
                    can have it ready this evening.

She pushes Libby in to the boat, who is still chewing on the
stick, finding it pleasant to taste.

                                    THEO
                    I have to be there at six thirty or
                    I'll miss The Young Professionals.

Behind him on the computer screen, his colleague is wondering
where he's got to.

                                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
                    We also need to focus on change
                    management.

                                    THEO
                    Do you not think it would be easier if
                    I just came home?

                                    PENNY
                    Yes. Well maybe. No. Libby and Bill
                    need to eat before ten o'clock.

                                    THEO
                    It was a genuine punjabi curry. You
                    can't just produce it out of nowhere.
                    It's grinding, it's producing ways to
                    infuse textures by hand.

PENNY goes to leave. Theo goes after her. Libby spins round
and round in the cabin.

Theo pops his head from the boat.

                                    THEO
                    If I work on it at lunch time, it will
                    be set perfectly for when they're in
                    bed.

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PENNY continues to walk and speaks over her shoulder.

                    PENNY
          You can stay in the attic.

She disappears in to the distance.

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Libby sits at the end of the boat staring out of the window.

Theo waffles on in the background talking about pedagogy.

                    THEO
              (talking to the computer screen)
          This is my fifteenth call of the day.
          In terms of Bloom's taxonomy I am
          barely understaning today, never mind
          remembering it.

                    LAPTOP
              (Dry, monosolabic)
          Well I can't say I blame you. Although
          if this call with China is anything to
          go by we are likely to need another
          twenty students before we even break
          even.

Theo is dumbfounded.

                    THEO
          Twenty. Twenty students. And where in
          the paella are we supposed to find
          them??

                    LAPTOP
          Keep calm Theo we are looking in to it
          and it should just mean a few
          commitments on your part.

                    THEO
          A few commitments? I have doctorate in
          the depiction of indigenous British
          food art in sixteenth century Britain.
          My time now seems to be taken up with
          recruiting international students, who
          for the life of them can't seem to
          tell the difference between, between,
          a wok and a frying pan.

                    LAPTOP
          I'm sorry I don't know what you mean.
          I'm sure you'll think of something.

Libby is now sat, continuing an art project, with driftwood.
Trying to mimic her fathers sculpture.

                    LIBBY
          I can't get the fins to fit on. Is
          that what it should look like? I used
          to think I was really good at art, do
          you remember when i wanted to be a
          curator, Dad?

                    LAPTOP
          I'm sorry?

                    THEO
          Dad. Dad's can often not understand
          woks and frying pans.

                    LAPTOP
          Well whatever we just need to ensure
          all of us are on our best form for the
          China call.

                    THEO
          I don't even like Chinese food.

Libby picks up his wooden sculpture.

                    LIBBY
          Dad can we go to the river?

He waves Libby away.

                    LAPTOP
          Well you may have to start liking it.

                    THEO
          What does that mean?

                    LAPTOP
          I've go to go now.

                    THEO
          What do you mean?

                    LAPTOP
          I'll see you on the Rotterdam call in
          an hour.

Libby spots something out of the window of the boat. A duck
sails across the canal and Libby watches.

               LIBBY
      Quack quack, quack quack.

She gets out the compass, and begins pointing it out of the
boat and then up towards the sky.

She remembers something a looks at her watch.

               LIBBY
      We have to go. Dad I've got to go.

Libby goes to leave.

               LIBBY
      You need to take me.

               THEO
      Where?

               LIBBY
      Never mind.

               THEO
      Alright. What are you going to do with
      the chicken?

               LIBBY
      Caramel?

               THEO
      She's called Caramel?

               LIBBY
      I'll have to pick her up later.

               THEO
      Alright well I can't guarantee she
      won't be in the pot.

Libby, moving fast.

               LIBBY
      We've only got a few minutes!

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20.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo drives whilst speaking on speaker phone, waiting in the
car outside their house.

                    THEO
          I haven't even written my lecture for
          tomorrow.

                    VOICE
          Well its only half an hour and they
          consider it an insult if they don't
          get to speak to the teacher. The
          teacher is revered in Chinese culture,
          they're seen as messengers of wisdom.

Libby arrives back to the car with a rucksack.

                    LIBBY
          Why aren't you driving?

                    THEO
          What about my culture?

                    LIBBY
          Go!

                    VOICE
          If we get on the call in half an hour
          it'll save us a boat load of headaches
          later on.

Time passes: They arrive at the station.

                    LIBBY
          I need the money.

Theo navigates some money from his tight pocket.

                    THEO
          It's a high price to pay to risk the
          student experience.

Libby grabs the money and leaps from the car.

                    VOICE
          It's only a few words in mandarin.

                    THEO
          You want me to speak <u>Chinese</u>? How??

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                    VOICE
          It's very simple with the likes of
          google translate these days. It'll
          even spell it out for you
          phonetically. I've got to go - see you
          in half an hour.

EXT. STATION PLATFORM - DAY

Libby sprints past a bench, where two recently retired
gentleman, sit chatting.

                    MAN 1
          I have a corduroy. I did have a denim
          but it was too slippery. I find the
          corduroy gives much more grip.

                    MAN 2
          It's the padding for me. I just can't-
          -

Mimics movement of resting elbows on a table.

          --place them down without minor
          bruising. It's all skin and bone here
          now.

A moment of silence. There is a rustling of paper and they
both begin to eat sandwiches.

                    MAN 1
          Have you heard about the recent
          discovery; about the interaction of
          photons with the ultracold rubidium
          atoms?

                    MAN 2
          I didn't, no.

                    MAN 1
          They discovered a particle that is
          actually time negative.

                    MAN 2
          So they've found time is judgmental?

                    MAN 1
          No. It departs before it arrives.

                    MAN 2
          Meaning?

                    MAN 1
          It travels through time, presumably.

                    MAN 2
          I see. So it's a particle that departs
          before it arrives, fascinating.
               (pensive)
          Sometimes I think I depart before I
          arrive.

                    MAN 1
          How so?

                    MAN 2
          The other morning I had this certain
          feeling that my mackintosh had just
          been outside, before I was going out
          to water the Azaleas.

                    MAN 1
          It just shows you. It's all an
          illusion.

                    MAN 2
          Really, you think so?

                    MAN 1
          All around us. It's all made up. Time
          is made up.

                    MAN 2
          Well yes of course you're quite right,
          and even in space I hear it
          lengthens... Bit of a problem if
          you're on a tight schedule.

     They both take a munch of their sandwiches simultaneously.

                    MAN 1
          The sky is not blue. We are 99.9%
          space. My body is an illusion. It's
          all an illusion, we're not really
          here.

                    MAN 2
          I think they do chips in the cafe here
          you know.

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Theo sits with his laptop open. He practices sentences in
Mandarin, bowing his head. He is frantically doing typing to
get some Chinese phrases, but has no time to practice.

                    THEO
          Neen-how.

He sighs... and types some more on his laptop.

          Chinese food...

He makes a positive sound.

Theo types in to the screen, "I very much like dumplings,
especially when marinated in oil."

                    THEO
          我很喜欢饺子，尤其是用油腌制的饺子 Wǒ hěn
          xǐhuān jiǎozǐ, yóuqí shì yòng yóu yān
          zhì de jiǎozǐ.

Theo types in to the screen, "Roast potatoes."

                    THEO
          Kǎo tǔdòu...

The meeting is suddenly started and Theo is straight away on
screen.

                    ALL
          Nee-how.

                    THEO
          Neen-how.

Theo still types away as he tries to settle himself.

                    ALL
          Nee-how.

                    THEO
          Nee-how-mah?

There is mandarin spoken back at Theo which he does not
understand.

24.

                         THEO
                    (repeatedly nodding)
                Neen-how. Neen-how.

Some introductory conversations ensue, whilst Theo is
frantically scribbling down writing on his note pad.

Theo looks down at something he has written in front of him,
squinting his eyes.

                         THEO
                今天是烤我丈夫的好日子 Jīntiān shì kǎo wǒ
                zhàngfū de hǎo rìzǐ.

There is SILENCE. The Chinese delegation nod charitably, but
unsure.

Theo tries again.

                我很喜欢吃饺子，尤其是用尿液腌制的饺子 Wǒ
                hěn xǐhuān chī jiǎozǐ, yóuqí shì yòng
                niào yè yān zhì de jiǎozǐ.

There is even more silence. They utter some words very
quietly to each other. Then in perfect cut glass English:

                         DELEGATE 1
                I am so sorry we have some business we
                need to attend. This has been most
                interesting meeting. Thank you so
                much.

                         JON SMALLS
                Of course. Let us reconvene once you
                have completed your business?

                         DELEGATE 1
                Of course, of course. Goodbye.

                         JON SMALLS
                Thank you, thank you.

                         THEO
                Fare thee well.

Theo makes a peculiar OTT wave with his hand.

The Chinese delegation depart the call.

                         JON SMALLS
                Theo please don't share about your

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                    personal life again, they won't like
                    it.

                              THEO
                    Why was I speaking manderin, they
                    spoke English?

                              JON SMALLS
                    I didn't want to say anything, and I
                    really did think that was bordering on
                    the overtly sexual. Please try and be
                    a bit more discreet in future.

                              THEO
                    Jon I was just talking about the
                    weather, how hot it was.

                              JON SMALLS
                    You said that today is a good day to
                    roast your husband.

Pause.

Theo looks down at his notes.

                              THEO
                    I can't have done. You told me to use
                    google translate.

                              JON SMALLS
                    That might have helped.

Theo frantically rummages through his notes.

                              THEO
                    I was trying to lighten the atmosphere
                    -- get in to some Chinese cooking, say
                    something positive -- I was saying
                    some nice things about marinated
                    dumplings.

                              JON SMALLS
                    You said you wanted to marinate them
                    in urine. I mean come on Theo.

Theo is frantically looking for papers.

                              THEO
                    What? Of course I didn't. Here we are:
                    今天是烤我丈夫的好日子 Jīntiān shì kǎo wǒ
                    zhàngfū de hǎo rìzǐ!

Jon Smalls puts his hands over his ears.

>   JON SMALLS
> Please Theo, for the love of god.

>   THEO
> It was all going so quickly - clearly
> I was being too ambitious.

>   JON SMALLS
> Now whatever you do in the privacy of
> your own home is fine by me, but
> there's just no call for that kind of
> sharing.

>   THEO
> Jon I'm a married man. I've two kids
> and a pet chicken. I've no need to say
> anything about roasting my husband.
> Why would I?

>   JON SMALLS
> Well I'm afraid there'll be some
> relationship repairing to do. We need
> to save face, and build an apology
> back in.

>   THEO
> Anything of course. I can explain I
> have a wife and I am perfectly happy
> to roast her.

>   JON SMALLS
> Just -- stop. Right. Now this is very
> important in Chinese culture. You need
> to tell them you're not worthy.

>   THEO
> What?

>   JON SMALLS
> You just need to say you're not worthy
> then you can save your face.

>   THEO
> What's the matter with my face?

>   JON SMALLS
> No it's just like, being honourable.

Theo is frantically typing.

                        THEO
            Right so -- I've got it.

LATER: They're back on a call.

Theo starts talking in mandarin, making the apology saying he
is not worthy.

                        THEO
            對不起 duì bù qǐ. Jīntiān bù hǎo yào
            shā wǒ de qīzi 今天不好要杀我的妻子.

He has now said - "I am not worthy. Today is not a good day
to roast my husband." Theo has also started doing speech
marks with every sentence he is saying.

Jon Smalls takes Theo off the call.

Conversation with Jon Smalls.

                        JON SMALLS
            Look you've got to stop it with this
            roasting your husband business.

                        THEO
            I was apologising and saying I was
            happily married.

                        JON SMALLS
            And why have you started doing speech
            marks every time you talk. You just
            look ridiculous. It's patronising.

                        THEO
            I thought that's what you wanted? I
            said I wasn't worthy and then
            "retracted" the comment.

                        JON SMALLS
            I'm not sure what we can do now. Let
            me call them back one last time. We've
            a lot of these going on at the moment.

Jon Smalls opens the call and there is A MAN WEARING A
TRADITIONAL ARABIC THOBE.

They all look blankly at each other.

Theo has not noticed he is on a call with a different person,
and begins.

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                        THEO
                    (in speech marks)
            對不起 (duì bù qǐ) - That's it.

                        QATARI MAN
            I'm sorry what did you say?

                        THEO
            Oh! English at last. So I am very
            sorry about the "roasting my husband".
            I'm completely unworthy and I would
            like to save face.

Jon Smalls is MORTIFIED. He goes to speak.

                        QATARI MAN
            No problem habibi. We all have
            difficulties. I have a very nice grill
            you could use.

I/E. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Back at the boat Theo is packing to go home whilst still
attending to emails on his laptop and talking to a colleague.
Penny arrives.

                        THEO
                    (to computer)
            The bearded tooth is fantastic fungi
            if foraged, though only widely
            cultivated by the Chinese, so to be
            honest, I can't say it's not a draw.
            It's a protected species here of
            course.

                        PENNY
            Haven't you finished packing yet?

                        THEO
            Sorry Szu Ping I'm afraid I have a
            colleague visiting. We'll circle back
            on this when I have an eye on the
            ball. Catch you in the 5pm.

Theo closes the laptop.

            How is the pitch coming along?

                  PENNY
     Very good. They just want one last
     meeting then we should seal it,
     fingers crossed.

                  THEO
     I've just packed the basics and I'll
     come back for the rest tomorrow.

Penny looks around the boat.

                  PENNY
     Where's Libby?

                  THEO
     She's at the station.

                  PENNY
     Why?

                  THEO
     I took her there.

                  PENNY
     Why, where did she go?

                  THEO
     I don't know she needed twelve pounds.
     I thought she was going to meet you?

                  PENNY
     Why would she be going to meet me?
     I've been at work. She's supposed to
     be here.

Theo becomes sheepish.

                  THEO
     I don't know. It was all very
     confusing. They wanted me to talk
     mandarin.

                  PENNY
     Who?

                  THEO
     The university. I mixed up all my
     words and now I'm to declare I'm not
     worthy.

                    PENNY
          Theo where's Libby?

                    THEO
          I don't know let me get these things
          in the house and we'll soon find her.

                    PENNY
          You know perfectly well I have the
          pitch tomorrow.

                    THEO
          I told them I roasted my husband.

                    PENNY
          What? No. Stop it.

Penny marches off the boat.

                    THEO
          Where are you going?

                    PENNY
          I can't do this again.

                    THEO
          I'm confused. Because I roasted my
          husband?

                    PENNY
          Just. Stop. I don't want to hear it.
          Find Libby.

Penny exits.

                    THEO
          But how?? You know I struggle with
          vertigo when I'm in new places and
          don't know where I'm going?? This is
          so unfair - I told you she needed a
          phone!

                    PENNY
             (shouting behind her)
          No phones til sixteen!

E/I. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Theo pulls back up at the train station and enters.

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INT. TRAIN STATION CAFE - DAY

Theo enters the cafe and orders.

> THEO
> Oat milk turmeric flat white please.

> ATTENDANT
> Is that a curry? I can get you a tea
> cake?

> THEO
> A what?

> ATTENDANT
> A tea cake, a balm. A bread roll with
> sommat innit.

> THEO
> Right. You need to know this
> information. The flat white is an
> espresso with steamed milk. The
> turmeric is the topping.

> ATTENDANT
> Right. D'want that on a balm?

The attendant begins banging away at the espresso machine.

> THEO
> No no no that's a cappuccino.

> ATTENDANT
> Espresso, and steamed milk.

> THEO
> Would you mind?

> ATTENDANT
> If you must.

Theo gets behind the counter and begins making the coffee.

> THEO
> Cleanliness of the instruments is of
> optimum importance. We make sure the
> espresso is of concise precise amount
> and the milk between 60-68 degrees.
> The smaller cup and the greater

                    balance of espresso to foam...

                              ATTENDANT
                    Okay. Very nice. Spot of cream?

                              THEO
                    The tumeric with oat milk, the fusion
                    and subtle almost disguised taste of
                    walnut that comes from nowhere. You
                    don't have four gas hobs back there do
                    you?

                              ATTENDANT
                    Yes. It's funny a girl ordered one of
                    those earlier on...

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Penny stands in front of a board room table, mainly
surrounded by late middle aged men. She is standing
presenting in front of a large screen with a slide which
reads "Winning with Wind!".

                              PENNY
                    With that in mind we have to look to
                    sources which are renewable and within
                    the spirit of the communities we build
                    in.

                              MAN 1
                    Playing devils advocate what if it
                    doesn't serve those communities and
                    they hate it, they don't like it.

                              PENNY
                    We think this will really push this
                    forward if we can flip that mindset,
                    which will then propel us forward,
                    front and centre the central aims of
                    the community, i.e. put community to
                    the forefront.

There is a lot of nodding.

She clicks on to the next slide. It reads "Winning with Wind
and you!".

The office claps in unison. People get up from their seats
and approach to shake hands with Penny.

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INT. TRAIN STATION CAFE - DAY

Theo is now calling a variety of parents whilst serving
customers from behind the coffee counter. He has also begun
to cook in the kitchen his béchamel sauce.

>   THEO
>   Hello Jackie, it's Theo.
>
>   Penny's husband.
>
>   Penny Lightning?
>
>   I'm just looking for Libby actually,
>   she's not by any means ended up at
>   your house has she?
>
>   No nothing to worry about, just a bit
>   of a mix up.
>
>   Yes well I'm onboard with that its
>   just Penny-- no problem, yes hope it
>   goes well. Bye.

Theo is stirring the sauce and adding minor touches whilst
the phone nestles under his ear. He dials another number.

>   THEO
>   Hello? Carol it's Theo, have you seen
>   Libby anywhere?

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

A large posh lady speaks in the style of Joyce Grenfell.

>   LADY
>   Orienteering is an exciting outdoor
>   challenge that exercises your body and
>   mind. Perfect for a family of all ages
>   or group of friends. Navigate between
>   control points marked on an
>   orienteering map, add a competitive
>   edge and see which team finishes
>   first. Yes what is it Susanna?

The field is surrounded by expert advisors or on hand who
look particularly boring. Wearing 1980s sweat bands and head

bands. Libby lines up looking decidedly out of place.

Libby has entered a competition without telling anyone.
JUDITH JOHNSON's mother notices Libby is there without anyone
else. The race starts.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Judith Johnson's Mother calls on her phone.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Penny is still being congratulated by her colleagues and is
excitedly shaking hands with everyone.

Meanwhile her phone is on the table, "Judith Johnson's Mother
calling". The phone rings out.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Judith Johnson's Mother ends the call as it goes to
voicemail.

Judith calls again, this time a different number.

INT. TRAIN STATION CAFE - DAY

Theo has the four hobs on the boil. His phone rings and he
picks it up.

                    THEO
          Hello, Judith?

                    LADY
          No it's Judith Johnson's mother.

                    THEO
          Oh hello.

EXT. ORIENTEERING COMPETITION - DAY

Competitors begin to finish the race in the background.
Judith Johnson's Mother slaps her clipboard on to a
diminutive man holding a stopwatch, as she walks off and
stands talking to Theo. He struggles to take account of

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proceedings on his own.

                    LADY
          Theo I can't get hold of Penny. I was
          wondering why Penny hadn't registered
          Libby for the race today, especially
          given she has never taken part before?
          We need to give her the correct
          running atire. Really if she can't
          look after her own daugter how is she
          going to successfully deliver a multi-
          million pound project?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

                    THEO
          I'm so sorry-- you're quite right.

                    LADY
          It's fine, it's just we need to ensure
          we know who is coming, so that we can
          update the relevant parents on the
          touch points.

                    THEO
          I'm so sorry--
             (Theo can't remember her name)
          Whereabouts is that exactly, would you
          be able to can you text me the
          location?

                    LADY
          Of course. Anyhow, I expect you knew
          that she was coming, always such an
          attentive father, and it's fine, we
          really just need to know who is
          coming... Is that-- are you cooking?

                    THEO
          Yes it's a béchamel sauce.

                    LADY
          You're there cooking, I'm here
          orienteering, how fun life is.

                    THEO
          Suppose they're pretty similar really,
          there's a map and a destination, but
          the ways of getting there are
          infinite...

                         LADY
          Quite right, quite right. You always
          do speak so eloquently on cuisine.

                         THEO
          Oh please, I'm just a mere amateur.
          Anyone and everyone knows the basics
          about mise en place. I just happen to
          love eating a la minute.

                         LADY
          Ah bien bien how right you are.
          Fascinating. I don't imagine Penny has
          time to cook, with everything she has
          going on.

                         THEO
          Well to give her her due, she does
          like to suis chef now and then. It's
          then I get to wine taste, ahead of
          Penny the sommelier.

                         LADY
          Yes I imagine all that work work work
          makes for constant perspiration. You
          really should look in to it, I imagine
          there are many restaurants looking for
          someone with your refinement.

                         THEO
          Well for me it's a passion, not a
          profession.

                         LADY
          Ah very good. I suppose for me, my
          passion is for others profession.

Behind Judith Johnson's mother, the diminutive man holding a
clip board is going out of his mind, waiting for Judith
Johnson's Mother's help.

                         LADY
          I must go I'm afraid terribly busy
          with the race. But it was lovely
          chatting with you as always Theo, you
          always have such fun stories. Lovely.

                         THEO
          I'll be there right away.

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INT. OFFICE - DAY

Penny picks up the phone and calls back Judith Johnson's
Mother. The phone rings out.

The phone is in Judith Johnson's mothers pocket as she is
seeing girls over the finish line.

Penny is concerned and heads home.

EXT. HILLSIDE - LATER

Theo arrives, haphazardly getting out of his car still
wearing a cooking apron.

Judith Johnson's Mother greets him.

> LADY
> Theo at last.

> THEO
> I'm so sorry it took so long, I had to
> leave instructions with the cafe.

> LADY
> Oh and I was rather hoping you brought
> me a little taster of the delights you
> were cooking. But perhaps you have
> some ideas for crudites for Judith's
> lunch box. I'm forever out of ideas.

> THEO
> Ah well crudites are another question
> entirely.

> LADY
> I'll bet they are. Always so
> thoughtful...

Libby finishes the race. The barriers are being taken down
and she is finishing dead last.

She looks up to see Theo. Theo goes over.

> LIBBY
> (mortified)
> What are you doing here?

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                    THEO
          Judith Johnson's mother called me.

                    LIBBY
          It's not fair.

                    THEO
          Libby your mother will hardly speak to
          me, I have to stay on the boat again.

                    LIBBY
               (tearful)
          I got completely lost.

Judith Johnson's mother approaches with Judith Johnson, arm
around her daughter.

Judith takes Libby's head and offers her shoulder to cry on.

                    JUDITH
          Peace be with you Libby.

                    LADY
          Thank you Judith. Theo, I'm so glad
          you came, lovely to see you again. She
          does always keep you under wraps from
          me. With a bit of practice Libby would
          be a lovely orienteerer.

Theo cannot remember Judith Johnson's mothers name.

                    THEO
          Thank you--er. Judith, did well?

                    LADY
          It's all going so well with Jonathan's
          project. We're so glad to have Penny
          on board. She does like to be away
          from home doesn't she. I don't know
          how she does it running the family and
          managing her work and such an
          importnant time for a mother to be
          with her children. Do you get to
          travel much for work Theo?

                    THEO
          Well I'm currently living in transit,
          so to speak.

                    LADY
          I bet you are pinging off all over the

                    globe for academic conferences and
                    rightly so, the only one of us from 8F
                    to go off to university, well of
                    course I could have done, but I
                    followed the path the God set out for
                    me, and heaven knows I'm reaping the
                    rewards now. As Penny will too...

                              THEO
                    Oh so that's confirmed then?

                              LADY
                    That's what Jonathan told me. She made
                    a striking proposal. And with God's
                    will, we will be successful.

                              THEO
                    Well there's enough wind around here I
                    imagine we should be able to capture a
                    smidgeon of it.

                              LADY
                    Smidgeon. I've not heard that word for
                    years. Lovely. I must get back, Judith
                    is singing at evensong, so she needs
                    to do her scales.

                              THEO
                    Excellent well good luck with your
                    larynx's.

                              LADY
                    Cheerio.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Penny is marching across the living room, hurling her arms
about.

                              PENNY
                    I cannot believe you would do that!!
                    today of all days, you know how I have
                    been building up to today.

                              LIBBY
                    I'm sorry.

                              PENNY
                    Sorry isn't good enough. Today should

                    have been the biggest celebration and
                    now it's completely ruined. I was
                    worried sick!

                              LIBBY
                    I'm sorry next time I'll be more
                    careful.

                              PENNY
                    Why didn't you tell us?

Penny searches under pillows and other things for her keys.

                              LIBBY
                    You were busy, I didn't want to
                    disturb you and it's nothing. I'm 15
                    now what did you do, where did you go
                    when you were 15? Not long after you
                    were off in Thailand doing Dad.

                              PENNY
                    Libby! I am busy with having a life.
                    And you should appreciate that. We are
                    working parents, it's a good example.

                              LIBBY
                    Example of what, how to abandon your
                    children? Getting that message loud
                    and clear.

Mum takes away Libby's running shoes, replacing them with
brogues.

                    No what are you doing?

                              PENNY
                    I'm grounding you.

                              LIBBY
                    What why?

                              PENNY
                    For a month.

                              LIBBY
                    A MONTH?!

                              PENNY
                    Where are my keys? I'm not sure you
                    quite understand; turning up to a
                    race, without a parent or guardian

> reflects badly on me as a Mother, and
> especially Judith Johnson's mother.
> Someone who is a stay at home mum is
> critical of me. They own the wind farm
> land, it reflects badly on me. If it
> looks like I can't keep tabs on own
> child, they'll think I can't manage
> the project properly.

>   LIBBY
> You can't I've got the compass now.

>   PENNY
> Why the sudden interest in racing?

>   LIBBY
> I just, thought it was something
> different to try.

Penny comes closer to Libby.

>   PENNY
> Have you been to Marguerite's?

Libby is uber sheepish.

>   LIBBY
> There was just some shouting...

>   PENNY
> 2 MONTHS.

>   LIBBY
> But she's my Aunt!

>   PENNY
> She's your fathers Aunt.

Penny resumes looking.

>   LIBBY
> Who has two minutes in a day to talk
> to someone.

>   PENNY
> Yes and turn you against me! I'm
> worried about you darling, she's not
> good for your mental health, or anyone
> else's...

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                    LIBBY
          Like you would care when you were
          smoking hash in Thailand, searching
          for your Shangri-La.

                    PENNY
          Would you stop this. Where are my
          keys? She is not of sound mind
          anymore, it's very very sad.

Libby throws herself on the sofa and buries her head in
cushions.

Penny stops looking for her keys, and sits down beside her.

                    PENNY
          Listen I've spoken to the neighbours
          and--

Libby takes her head out of the pillows and stares at Penny.

                    LIBBY
          No.

                    PENNY
          I've spoken to the neighbours and--

                    LIBBY
          Noooooooooooo. The young geologists??!

                    PENNY
          He's a very committed boy and he needs
          to collect rocks and minerals for the
          village fete display.

                    LIBBY
          Oh my god!

Libby crawls in to the corner of the sofa clutching a
cushion.

          This is worse than being grounded,
          you're giving me community service!

                    PENNY
          You know he has learning difficulties.

                    LIBBY
          He does not have learning
          difficulties, HE JUST LIKES ROCKS!

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Libby HURLS the cushion across the room.

       Where are my trainers, why are the
       brogues there?

              PENNY
       He set up the Young Geologists himself
       and it's struggling to get any
       interest.

              LIBBY
       I wonder why!

              PENNY
       This is really no way to behave.

Libby throws herself on the sofa and buries her head in the
cushions again.

              PENNY
       Where are my keys?

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

The two guys with elbow pads at the station continue their
discussions.

              MAN 1
       Do you think it matters to dress up?

              MAN 2
       For what?

              MAN 1
       For stuff. For dinner, on a Sunday, in
       life.

              MAN 2
       To be honest, I'm more of a slacks or
       jeans man.

              MAN 1
       That is not without merit.

              MAN 2
       But it's hard to think past a chunky
       knit in this part of the world, at any
       time of year.

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                    MAN 1
          Well I suppose you've a point, I find
          sea wear a lot of the time is
          appropriate for here and the outer
          hebrides.

                    MAN 2
          The outer hebrides, whyever?

                    MAN 1
          It's just a more extreme climate and
          so the attire tends to suit.

                    MAN 2
          No I mean have you been to outer
          Hebrides?

                    MAN 1
          Not lately, not since the drought. Or
          the Ullapool debacle.

                    MAN 2
          Ullapool?

                    MAN 1
          Yes we were sent on a fools errand and
          ended up waiting and waiting. It was
          terrible.

                    MAN 2
          Right...

                    MAN 1
          But yes I think it matters to dress
          up, to have standards, to have a sense
          of pride and dignity. It's a kind of
          grounding.

INT. SHED - DAY

Libby cleans rocks in a shed in silence with Clarence. You
could hear a pin drop in the silence, with the sunshine
delicately making its way through rusty old windows.

Libby, is thoroughly bored. She reluctantly sweeps with a
brush, dirt off rocks.

Clarence is doing odd things. Getting out his monocle and
surveying surfaces close up. Shaking rocks to see if there is

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any hollowness inside. Tapping at surfaces and occasionally making sniffing and "mmmmm" utterances.

Libby's hands feel about in the box of rocks. She comes across a rainbow moon stone, scuffed up and dusty. She holds it to the light.

Libby continues to clean and clean until the stone becomes shiny and new.

They both continue in silence and are pretty shy.

Libby holds the stone to the light.

>   CLARENCE
>   Labradorite.

Libby is shocked that he's said a word.

>   CLARENCE
>   Fairly common, but sometimes can be as
>   rare as a diamond.

>   LIBBY
>   Not common here I imagine.

>   CLARENCE
>   More the antipodes and southern Asia.
>   Quite distinctive in that it can be
>   many colours; blue, grey, white, pink,
>   peach, green or brown, as well as
>   colourless.

Libby looks at him and he looks away. Libby holds it again to the light. An orange streak appears through the pearly colour.

Clarence is busy cleaning at a tough rock the size of his hand.

>   CLARENCE
>   That one is from Madagascar, it's a
>   new find.

Clarence is struggling with his large rock, to get it cleaned up.

>   CLARENCE
>   Whereas this one is from the
>   carboniferous period locally.

                    LIBBY
          Yes I remember, in class. So, it's
          coal?

                    CLARENCE
          Well I suppose so.

                    LIBBY
          Sorry I didn't mean-- do you like it?

                    CLARENCE
          It roughs up well, you think it looks
          useless, but it can go in breads,
          burgers, has fired whole
          civilisations, and can even be an
          antidote...

                    LIBBY
          To mushroom poisoning. I remember.

In front of them sit a line of several rocks, gleaming in the
shed.

                    LIBBY
          Shall I make some labels?

                    CLARENCE
          There's a bunch of grandpa's old cards
          in the drawer.

                    LIBBY
          What did you mean in class when you
          said 'slow lightning'?

                    CLARENCE
          Because although it looks fast, a
          lightning bolt travels at less than 1%
          of the speed of light. It would take
          like an hour to get to the moon on a
          lightning bolt.

                    LIBBY
          The moon?

                    CLARENCE
          On a beam of light it's going to take
          you about a second. Lightning is slow.
          That's what Grandpa said to me; what
          looks fast can often take a lot longer
          to develop.

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47.

I/E. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Theo takes delivery of a parcel.

He opens it up inside, to reveal a very expensive looking
Vitamix blender. We see on the packaging it says
'Professional'.

He goes back on to his work call.

                    JON SMALLS
          Theo was that a delivery?

                    THEO
          No.

                    JON SMALLS
          You're on mute Theo.

Theo takes himself off mute. POV computer camera: Theo is
sitting with a the delivery box half opened behind him.

                    JON
               (pointing)
          That's a delivery.

Theo looks behind him.

                    THEO
          Sorry it was a special delivery. On a
          timed order, you know how these things
          are.

                    JON SMALLS
          Right well as you know a lot of
          companies now are demanding staff
          return to the office.

                    THEO
          No I wasn't aware. In fact I was
          reading this paper on productivity
          from home the other day.

                    JON SMALLS
          So unless staff have a compelling
          reason to stay at home I'm afraid
          we're no different. And before you say
          then no, I'm afraid the--
               (looks behind Theo)
                 (MORE)

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                    Vitamix is not a compelling reason.

Penny arrives on the canal boat. Theo is unaware.

                         THEO
               Have you any idea how much a Vitamix
               costs? Renowned worldwide for their
               durability and quality. It can break
               down ingredients into a variety of
               textures. It's not to be sniffed at, a
               commercial model costing two and half
               thousand pounds.

Theo notices Penny. Penny is <u>appalled</u>.

                         JON SMALLS
               Well Vitamix or no Vitamix, we need
               bodies in the office and sharpish.

                         PENNY
               Two and a half <u>thousand</u>!

Theo puts himself on mute and off camera.

                         THEO
               It's okay - I've put it on monthly
               payments.

                         PENNY
               Monthly payments!?

Penny goes in to the tiny toilet, continuing to talk to Theo
from round the corner.

                         THEO
               I have to go back in to the office.
               That will shorten my prep time by at
               least ninety minutes. I have no time
               to do anything by hand anymore, I am
               forced to buy a machine.

                         PENNY
               Nobody forces you to do anything.

                         THEO
               Does this mean I can't come home
               again?

Penny doesn't answer.

               Why don't you just be honest and say

why you really don't want me to come
home?

                    PENNY
Don't start with that again.

                    JON SMALLS
So I need you to report to the city
office for 8.30 as we need cover for
the global class again.

                    THEO
The global class, what happened to
Boris this time?

                    JON SMALLS
He's off sick again, some complication
with his medication.

I/E. HOUSE - DAY

Libby is allowed to walk with Clarence.

                    PENNY
And remember don't go anywhere near
Marguerite Reverie's house.... It's
strictly rocks only.

Clarence and Libby walk through long grass and away across
fields.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

They come to a river. There is a small foot bridge. Clarence
crosses in earnest, his enthusiasm for the possible findings
getting the better of him.

Libby, still on the other side, is spooked by a bee which
approaches. She abruptly chooses to run down the side of the
riverbank, and is therefore now parallel with Clarence, who
walks in the same direction.

The mink bee cheerfully continues its pursuit of Libby.

Clarence looks behind him and around noticing Libby is not
present. He sees Libby on the other side, who is bolting down
the riverside swotting as she goes. She sharply turns towards
the river - and FALLS HEAD FIRST IN TO THE RIVER. The bee
cheerfully departs, just as quickly as it had arrived.

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Clarence, still on the other side, hesitantly tries to be
brave. He fumbles his feet in to the water with little
confidence and - spread-eagled - he FLOPS STRAIGHT IN TO THE
WATER with her.

Whereas Libby has soon sorted herself out, Clarence is now
the one in distress. He is floating down the river, whereas
Libby is safe and sound on the bank.

Libby grabs a large branch and runs down the river finding a
suitable vantage point ahead of Clarence.

Clarence haphazardly grabs on to the branch and PULLS HIMSELF
TO SAFETY.

Clarence is sufficiently freaked out. He feels he should have
been the one doing the saving.

                    LIBBY
          Are you alright?

Clarence goes haring off in to the distance.

                    LIBBY
              (shouting after him)
          But Clarence, what about the
          conglomerates?

                    CLARENCE
              (shouting back whilst running)
          A simple sedimentary!!

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Libby wonders through the woodland at sunset. Twigs/grass
adorn her hair from the river fall. She is confused as to
where she is.

From the woodland a clearing emerges and she wonders through
fields.

In the distance a DISTRESSED VOICE cries out.

                    VOICE (O.S.)
          HELP! HELP!

Libby, unsure starts to walk and then gather pace towards the
cries.

She passes a broken old sign on a stump; 'Reverie Hall'.

INT. REVERIE HALL - DAY

Libby enters an old corridor and tentatively approaches a
room where the sound is coming from.

As she slowly enters, and MADAME REVERIE (late 60's), strides
across the room barely noticing Libby.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               OUT, OUT BRIEF CANDLE!
               LIFE IS BUT A WALKING SHADOW...

Startled, but knowing the vagaries of her Aunt, Madame
Reverie, she dives for the arm chair, out of Reveries way.

Madame hurls the window open.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               Would you mind sodding off you little
               wretch, this is private property!!

She closes it back up again.

                    LIBBY
                 (teen angst)
               Who was that?

                    MADAME REVERIE
               Damn Dunnocks, raiding all my seeds.
               What would it feel like to burn, all
               those thoughts and feelings rushing
               around your vessel, contemplating this
               firesome fate.

Madame puts herself on one leg again.

               Like a tree in the forest waiting for
               the fire to come. What then?

                    LIBBY
               I'd probably run.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               But what if you had no legs, you were
               rooted in the earth.

Madame slowly opens her arms as if embracing the fire, eyes
closed.

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                    MADAME REVERIE
          Embrace the fire. At least that's what
          it says in the experiment.

                    LIBBY
               (inquisitive)
          What experiment?

                    MADAME REVERIE
          I'm on number three of the seven
          thought experiments.

                    LIBBY
          On second thoughts maybe I would
          decide to burn, I've had a rough year.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          That's the stuff of life; the ups, the
          downs, the high notes, the low notes.
          The tree has not decided my dear, more
          an acceptance, you look hungry darling
          can I get you something?

Madame is up on her feet again.

                    LIBBY
          No thank you.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          There's a note here somewhere. Can you
          look?

Madame is up and down looking under things.

Libby picks up a shawl revealing a LARGE HUNTING RIFLE.

                    LIBBY
          There's a blue note here.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          Yes that's it. The blue one.

Libby peels a blue post it note from the rifle and passes to
Madame Reverie.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          Thursday 5pm. 5pm. I can't for the
          life of me remember. Do you know?

Madame searches through drawers.

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53.

                         LIBBY
          An appointment? Visitor? Date? Did you
          have a class?

Libby joins in the searching.

                         LIBBY
          What are we looking for, is there
          something you need?

Libby catches the time on a clock.

                         LIBBY
            (pensive)
          My Dad will be wondering where I am.

                         MADAME REVERIE
          You know my parents sent me away to
          school and I barely saw them for
          years.

                         LIBBY
          That must have been horrible.

                         MADAME REVERIE
          No I'm fine thank you.
            (tapping on her chest)
          Independent learner. Thursday at 5,
          yes, my next scheduled experiment.

                         LIBBY
          Whats the next one?

                         MADAME REVERIE
          I don't know. The gun? Anyway. Perhaps
          next time you could bring me some of
          your own verse? You do write don't
          you?

                         LIBBY
          Yes, I would like that.

                         MADAME REVERIE
          Thursday 5pm, see you then dear,
          enchante au revoir.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Penny is working late. She sits around a board room table

full of bored people listening to her colleagues
presentation.

> COLLEAGUE
> And what better place than the Town
> Hall, for us to ensure the sustainable
> future of this beautiful valley.

The Colleague clicks on a slide, revealing some statistics.
Penny compares the slide to her report on the table. Penny is
confused. She goes for another report in her bag. She fingers
trough both documents.

The colleague has become slightly nervous.

> COLLEAGUE
> (unsure)
> And we have the perfect site where we
> have cleared all the local searches
> and collaborated with local surveys to
> construct the best possible robust
> plans that will ensure the projects
> success.

> MAN AT TABLE
> At the apex of the cliff edge and the
> forest, the moorland beyond is of the
> perfect variety for everything to be
> fully integrated with the environment.

A lot of nodding from all around the table. Whilst Penny
looks suspiciously in to a desk full of documents.

Penny taps at the report. She looks across at the town hall
notice board on the other side of the room. A small poster
sits on the wall: Flora and Fungi of the Valley Exhibition.
Penny is sure that Theo has rambled on about mushroom species
before and something doesn't sound right about the report her
colleague is presenting.

> PENNY
> And the funky-- I mean the fungi.

> MAN AT TABLE
> The funky fungi.

The table chortles with laughter, almost coming to life.

Penny gathers herself. This is after all her client.

55.

                    PENNY
               (strained smile)
          I just remember some conversation
          about-- the bearded tooth or
          something?

Everyone around the table looks at each other and shrugs
their shoulders. More chortles.

                    MAN AT TABLE
          The bearded tooth? By 'eck.

More chortles. Penny's colleague does the fakest shrugging of
shoulders.

                    PENNY
          The bearded tooth. The bearded tooth
          fungus. It's a protected species... it
          must be my mistake.

INT. CITY OFFICE - DAY

Theo is sitting at his computer. On the computer there is a
virtual gallery of eight students (18-21), all who look like
they are from the four corners of the world.

There is a slide he is sharing picturing an apple and a
globe.

                    THEO
          And so although the humble apple is
          well represented in the western world
          as a staple of the global diet, it in
          fact originated in Syria.

He changes the slide. There is now a picture of the globe,
but this time with bags of spices.

          Likewise if we compare the spices so
          synonymous with Indian curry, do we
          know where those spices in fact
          originated?

A hand is raised on the online system.

                    THEO
          Yes, Diego?

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56.

                    DIEGO
              (heavily accented Argentinian)
          Erm, Meester Lightning, I thank for
          this, boot, I no understand whey wee
          do thees.

Total silence.

                    THEO
          Well Diego we are understanding the
          connection we all share around the
          world of different foods that connect
          us.

                    DIEGO
          I understand thees Meester Lightning,
          boot I want lern Anglish.

                    THEO
          That's right and we can do that
          through the wonderful discovery, of
          the food that connects us around the
          world.

                    CHANG
          I no like English food.

                    THEO
          It's not english food per se Chang,
          but the influences the english have
          had on their cuisine.

                    LILJA
          Is fish chips english?

                    WAHLID
          Theh beef I think.

                    ADI
          I lak beef.

                    THEO
          I think we're all getting a bit
          confused.

                    DIEGO
          We can tawk footbol.

                    THEO
          Well that's a different subject
          entirely.

                    LILJA
          I think it is english.

                    THEO
          Can I just stop you there. Fish and
          chips is a fusion, combination of
          Jewish and english, where the fish is
          fried in flour for shabbat on a Friday
          evening, to be eaten cold on a
          Saturday afternoon, which then spread
          as a result of the industrial
          revolution. It's fascinating.

                    WAHLID
          Well I am not interested in the beef.

                    THEO
          We've not mentioned beef, beef is off
          the menu. Okay we need to get back to
          the spices. Where do we think spices
          originated from?

     Total silence.

          Well I'll tell you. In fact, spices
          originated in South America, and only
          in fact spread as a result of
          colonisation. Where the spices were
          taken to grow in English colonies in
          India.

                    ADI
          What is colony?

                    CHANG
          They kill people.

                    WAHLID
          And take all their stuff.

                    ADI
          I had people steel my house.

                    THEO
          Right again we're getting a bit off
          topic.

                    ADI
          What's topic?

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58.

                    DIEGO
          I no understand your english words.
          How do I say about Manchester United?

                    THEO
          Look--

The class is abruptly interrupted when Jon Smalls arrives on
the call.

                    JON SMALLS
          Hi Theo. Sorry ignore me, I'm just on
          my observations.

                    THEO
          I thought observations weren't until
          next week?

                    JON SMALLS
          No no we're on week 8.

                    THEO
          Is it, are we? So it is, my mistake.

Theo changes the slide and this time the globe has a banana.

          Though to originate from Indonesia and
          maybe, just maybe the worlds first
          ever fruit.

Dead silence.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Libby is lying on the sofa listening to music. She fingers
through a magazine.

Penny enters.

                    PENNY
          I was speaking with Clarence's Mum
          earlier.

                    LIBBY
          Oh yeah.

                    PENNY
          She said he seemed a little wet when
          he arrived back the other day.

>   LIBBY
> Yeah its been so wet lately.

>   PENNY
> He said his knee was cut and he had a
> bruise on his head.

>   LIBBY
> Oh no is he alright?

>   PENNY
> He's fine.

>   PENNY
> She said he was back at 5pm.

Libby continues to listen to music.

>   PENNY
> You know if you're not careful, I
> won't let you go to the village fete.

>   LIBBY
> And that's a punishment?

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

The two guys sit on the railway station platform.

>   MAN 1
> What I can never understand is... why
> any clothes at all?

>   MAN 2
> Science I guess. Without them there is
> no insulation to all that is.

>   MAN 1
> We've got to understand why we do
> these things, or else.

>   MAN 2
> Or else...

>   MAN 1
> Or else some things will never change
> and we'll be here for eternity with
> the same old same old.

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                    MAN 2
          I like the same old, though I do see
          what you mean.

                    MAN 1
          We better go or we'll be late.

                    MAN 2
          Right.

They get up and head out of the station.

INT. FUNGUS EXHIBITION - NIGHT

Penny arrives at the Fungus exhibition. There are pictures on
the wall depicting different mushrooms and fungus.

She is walking and looking at a picture and accidentally
bumps in to someone.

She looks up, it is Joe. For a second their eyes catch on
each other. Like destiny, Joe can see the future in her eyes.

                    PENNY
          Sorry.

                    JOE
          I've fifty of these at home.

Penny looks at the picture, of a Liberty Cap mushroom.

                    PENNY
          You must like mushrooms.

                    JOE
          I am a mushroom.

                    PENNY
          Right.

                    JOE
          We all are mushrooms.

                    PENNY
          Do you know anything about the bearded
          tooth--

Joe clasps face in horror.

                         JOE
          The <u>bearded</u> tooth. What of it?

                         PENNY
          I heard it's very rare and in the
          valley.

                         JOE
          In the valley.

Joe clasps her arms.

          Where my sweet angel of life?

                         PENNY
          Above Reverie Hall, those hills, they
          call the flaming waves pass.

                         JOE
          Take me there!

EXT. VILLAGE FETE - DAY

Libby has to stand at on the stall with Clarence. They both
wear oversized badges saying 'Young Geologists'. All the
other stalls are food and arts and crafts.

An assortment of geological stones and minerals sit nice and
shiny on an old wooden table.

Clarence is deliberately not looking at Libby, still
embarrassed from the fall in the river. Libby looks at her
watch, mortified to be on the table and scared a school
friend may see her.

Two old ladies come by. They are mid-way through a discussion
about their recent food purchases.

                         OLD LADY
          I got a nice tea cake at the village
          store. And a pound of craggies ham
          from on the meat raffle.

                         OLD LADY 2
          What do you need a whole pound for?

                         OLD LADY
          My grandson is here while Wednesdays.

62.

                              OLD LADY 2
                    Needs two of him to eat all that lot.

          Libby and Clarence stand observing the banality.

                              OLD LADY
                    Are these a nice door stop young man?

                              CLARENCE
                    You need a door stop?

                              OLD LADY
                    Have you got a wedge shaped one?

                              LIBBY
                         (trying to help)
                    You might try Screw Time.

                              OLD LADY 2
                    I beg your pardon?

                              LIBBY
                    Screw time. It's for hardware, on the
                    high street.

                              OLD LADY
                    We want to buy local.

                              LIBBY
                    The high street is pretty local I
                    think.

                              OLD LADY 2
                    My grandson will get through a pound
                    of ham. If there's a barm cake.

          The two men from the train station appear at the fete. Man 1
          picks up a rock, weighing it in his hand.

                              MAN 1
                    Hefty piece of material this. Coal is
                    it?

                              CLARENCE
                    Geologically. It would once have been
                    used as an antidote.

                              MAN 2
                    An antidote to..?

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63.

                        CLARENCE
              Poisoning. So it doesn't get absorbed
              from the stomach in to the body.

Libby looks at her watch and as they continue talking she
sneaks away.

I/E. REVERIE HALL - DAY

Libby walks quickly through long grass to Reverie Hall.

On entering she sees Madame Reverie busy balancing on one
leg, whilst singing repetitive buddist chanting, with a scarf
covering her eyes.

                        MADAME REVERIE
              Ommm... Ommm... Ommm...

Libby quietly pads in to the room and sits down in the arm
chair.

The clock chimes five times.

Libby looks around the room, the gun is nowhere to be seen.

                        MADAME REVERIE
              Omm... Ommm... Ommm...

Libby looks up and sees the gun attached to the chandelier,
taped so it is FACING REVERIE'S HEAD. Libby is now extremely
concerned.

Still blindfolded, Reverie walks towards the gun.

                        MADAME REVERIE
              Omm...

She places her hand on the trigger.

She pushes the trigger slowly.

Libby can no longer bare it.

Reverie slowly pushes the trigger further.

                        LIBBY
              AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!

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                    MADAME REVERIE
               AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!

Simultaneously they both scream.

Reverie pulls her scarf from her face grabbing the gun,
swiftly POINTING IT AT LIBBY.

                    LIBBY
               AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!

                    MADAME REVERIE
               AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!! What are you doing
               here?

                    LIBBY
               Thursday, five o'clock? I bought some
               writing.

Reverie haphazardly swings the gun and it FIRES THROUGH THE
WINDOW, smashing the glass.

                    LIBBY
               AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!

                    MADAME REVERIE
               AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!

Reverie confidently breaks the barrel over her knee as if she
has done it a thousand times before.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               Good to know it still works after all
               this time. Daddy would be very
               pleased.

                    LIBBY
               I found the compass.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               You found the what?

                    LIBBY
               You were a champion.

                    MADAME REVERIE
               Of sorts, it was a very interesting
               time. Your poem, please let's hear it.

65.

                     LIBBY
                 (reading)
          Have you ever heard of the bearded
          tooth?
          The one that makes the world uncouth.

          Stop. Dead still. And it will flash
          before your eyes.

          The Slow Lightning keeps us
          mesmerised.

Libby stops reading and puts her paper down.

                     LIBBY
          I entered a competition, for
          orienteering, like you. I got lost.

Libby begins to cry.

          Why do I have to make so many choices
          when I don't feel ready for anything?

Reverie places her hand gently on Libby's back.

                 MADAME REVERIE
          Up on your feet. The bearded tooth is
          not coming back. I buried it, where
          was it?

                     LIBBY
          I don't understand.

                 MADAME REVERIE
          It's buried with the compass, but now
          it's unearthed and the position
          disturbed... I'd planted it for Theo
          and Penny, to settle their spirits
          into one and other and now disturbed
          it's affecting all the family - it
          must be redressed. We must go.

                     LIBBY
          Where are we going?

                 MADAME REVERIE
          To the foot of the bearded tooth.

They both leave.

66.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Many people sit busily talking in a large town hall.

Penny sits sheepishly at the front, at the end of a row
containing her wind farm colleagues.

She wearily walks to the centre and begins addressing the
audience.

                    PENNY
          Thank you for coming her today. It's a
          momentus day for us certainly on what
          we see as a firm step forward in the
          times we live in. A positive step
          forward for renewables and the self
          sufficiency of this valley and the
          country as a whole. Understandably
          there are some concerns which we are
          here to address today. This meeting
          has been organised so you can hear
          first hand, the development of an
          environmental impact assessment.

                    JOE
          What are you doin' with the mushrooms?

                    SUITED MAN
          We are not aware of any threatened
          species this will effect.

                    JOE
          The bearded tooth.

                    SUITED MAN
          I'm sorry are you referring to my
          beard?

Mixed laughter.

                    AUDIENCE MEMBER
          I am from the society of
          ornithologists and I am very concerned
          about the vibrations and the recent
          upsurge in barn owl population, and
          how that will be effected.

                    SUITED MAN
          I quite agree which is why we have
          agreed to spend over three thousand
          pounds on building owl boxes in

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               replacement for potentially lost
               habitats.

                         JOE
               The bearded tooth.

                         AUDIENCE MEMBER
               Thank you that is very good news to
               hear.

Penny stares at Joe in fear and sits staring in to space. She
looks down at her phone. There is a message from Theo:

INSERT TEXT MESSAGE:

"I've got the samples."

INT. CANAL BOAT – DAY

Theo puts his mobile phone down and puts the lid on the jar
of mushrooms.

There is a knock at the door of the canal boat.

Theo answers it. He is dressed very out of character, wearing
english country gent atire, complete with red trousers.

                         THEO
               Ah, Diego, thank you for coming.
               Welcome to the palace...

He invites Diego on to the canal boat.

Inside there is a table laid out in the centre complete with
pristine white table cloth and silver service items.

Sitting round the edge are all of Theo's students not quite
sure what to do with themselves.

There is an ornate tea set and small plates with traditional
english cuisine.

                         THEO
               We have traditional English dishes;
               Cream tea, Yorkshire pudding, Fish and
               chips, Cornish pasty, English trifle
               and a special ancient recipe of
               Lancashire hotpot made with foraged
               ingredients from all around the area.

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Theo's phone rings, he picks it up.

                    THEO
          Hello?

                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
          Hello Theo its Jon. The call has
          started so we're just wondering if
          you're about to log on?

                    THEO
          Sorry what call?

                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
          The China recruitment call, it's just
          started.

Theo starts to hyperventilate.

                    THEO
          Oh my god, I forgot.

                    ADI
          Meester Theo, toilet?

                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
          I beg your pardon?

                    THEO
          Toilet. I'm sorry I mean I've been
          quite nervous. I'll be on in a minute,
          I was just running some last minute
          numbers.

                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
          Well if you could hurry it up, I
          appreciate its nerve racking, but
          there comes a time when we've got to
          flush it out.

                    THEO
          Absolutely. Well I'll get it flushed
          out and wash my hands and be sure to
          jump on.

                    JON SMALLS (O.S.)
          Thanks that would be appreciated.

                    ADI
          Toilet paper?

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                         JON SMALLS (O.S.)
               What?

                         THEO
               I'm doing a white paper.

                         JON SMALLS (O.S.)
               Let's not over complicate things, this
               isn't war and peace, we just need to
               close the deal.

                         THEO
               All clear, see you in a second.

The toilet flushes.

A loud noise comes from the toilet. The sound like a lot of
things have fallen at once. Theo knocks on the door.

                         THEO
               Adi are you alright?

                         ADI (O.S.)
               Omo mi!

Theo is approached by the immaculately dressed Chang.

                         CHANG
               I very disappointed, in my country
               this very rude.

                         THEO
               So soon?

                         CHANG
               I cannot put up with people manors.

                         THEO
               Perhaps a drink, some english
               sparkling white wine?

                         CHANG
               I no drink alcohol.

                         THEO
               Well at least have the hotpot,
               especially foraged freshly this
               morning.

Theo's phone starts ringing again and he shepherds the Chang
to the table, sitting him down in front of the hotpot.

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70.

INT. VILLAGE FETE - DAY

The two men are sitting at the side. This time they are
approached by youths.

                    YOUTH 1
          Yo grandad have you got some blow?

There is a pause. We're not sure how this is going to go.

                    MAN 1
          I'm sorry are you talking to me?

                    YOUTH 2
          Yo of course he's talking to you, you
          got no hearing aid?

                    MAN 2
          Yes, it's firmly in there. Just
          replaced the batteries this morning.

                    YOUTH 1
          You got some blow?

                    MAN 1
          Certainly, but I've only enough for
          myself I'm afraid. Do you have some
          blow?

                    YOUTH 1
          Nah I've smoked it.

                    YOUTH 2
          Smoked it, all night long...

                    MAN 2
          Lovely, best way.

                    MAN 1
          Well if you find any let us know, we'd
          be interested to see it. Nothing too
          strong of course.

                    YOUTH 2
          Yeah whatever.

They walk off.

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I/E. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Theo's phone is ringing off the hook as he runs outside. He
see's Joe and sprints over.

                    JOE
          ... but I hope I die before they kill
          me.

                    THEO
          Joe! Do you want to earn fifty pounds?

                    JOE
          I didn't take it.

                    THEO
          What?

                    JOE
          Your fifty quid.

                    THEO
          No, I want to give it to you.

Joe is surprised and looks around as if this is a set up.

Theo thrusts notes in to the air in front of him.

                    JOE
          Here, take this. Take these students
          foraging up the hillside for a couple
          of hours will you. They're in the
          boat.

                    JOE
              (still suspicious)
          Oh I, and what you going to be doing
          then?

                    THEO
          I've got to present on a call to
          China.

                    JOE
          I don't like the sound of this.
          They've technology to read your brain
          cells.

                    THEO
          It's a recruitment event, I've double
          booked myself. <u>Please</u> Joe!

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Joe, still suspicious, looks around in case anyone can see.
Then quickly takes the money.

                    JOE
          Carl'll have to come.

CARL stands next to Joe. Small, wearing fingerless gloves. He
holds out a hand.

Theo digs in to his pocket and hands him more notes.

                    THEO
          That's everything I've got.

                    JOE
          Foraging?

                    THEO
          I'll send them out now! Thanks Joe.

Theo begins shepherding students out of the canal boat.

Joe stands in front of them, Carl behind him.

                    THEO
          He's an absolute expert, you're in
          safe hands.

                    CHANG
          I feel strange.

                    JOE
          Right. Empty your pockets. I'm not
          havin' any security issues on this
          hunt.

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Theo manically gets himself online.

When he gets in to the breakout room, Jon Smalls is already
presenting.

                    JON SMALLS
          And so the way we see it, if we can
          increase this partnership then it will
          be an excellent experience for
          students and staff. Ah-- here is Theo
          now. Welcome Theo.

73.

                    THEO
          Hello Jon. I have my chop sticks
          ready, I mean my notes.

                    JON SMALLS
          Excellent. Well I think we're ready.

We see a slide of an apple next to a globe.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Joe is making his way up the hillside alongside Carl. Chang
hurries to the front.

                    CHANG
          I sorry I no feel good.

                    JOE
          Me neither.

                    CHANG
          I can see strange things.

                    JOE
          So you can see them too.

                    CHANG
          My head feel funny.

                    JOE
          You can see the light my friend,
          you're on the other side...

INT. CANAL BOAT - DAY

Penny arrives on the boat, to deadly silence. She walks
through it and it creaks like the Mary Celeste. There is
perfectly laid out British cuisine and barely a sign of any
of it being eaten, bar the hotpot.

For the first time Penny is worried about Theo.

She tries his phone, he is not answering.

She puts on her anorak and heads out.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

A storm is gathering on the hillside as Reverie and Libby
head up. Madame Reverie has the gun cocked over her arm.

Libby stops and doesn't want to go any further.

                    LIBBY
          I don't really know where we are going
          or what we are doing.

Thunder sounds out.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          The buried rune stones need re-
          setting. The gods of lightning or
          taking us north.

                    LIBBY
          Right.

They come to a cliffside quarry edge looking out over a large
view.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          They're hidden at the lightning spot
          known for magical properties...
          Flaming wave view.

                    LIBBY
          I saw the certificate on your wall.
          You were a champion.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          What of it.

                    LIBBY
          That's why I did the stupid race. I'm
          totally failing at school. I haven't
          passed any of my mock exams. Mum is
          freaking out, so's Dad.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          You should talk to them.

                    LIBBY
          I try to, but they're always so
          distracted and thinking about work.
          I'm sort of obsessed with not knowing
          who I am. And yet I don't know how to
          find out. I don't think I'm okay. I

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                                 think I have OCD, or Autism or ADHD. I
                                 don't fit in with friends and I even
                                 started to enjoy hanging out with
                                 Clarence.

Madame Reverie looks out over the cliff edge. She steadily
walks over to a rock overlooking a large view.

                                    LIBBY
                                 I mean what if I end up in a shit
                                 mundane job, in a suburban semi,
                                 drinking cheap white wine every night
                                 through my 20's and die by tripping up
                                 the stairs and smacking my head on the
                                 banister, with only my cat meowing his
                                 sorrows for my loss? A life
                                 unfulfilled, then I look down at my
                                 rotting body front the heavens,
                                 thinking - she never really lived,
                                 never really fulfilled herself because
                                 she didn't know who she was or what to
                                 do with her life, what if that's what
                                 I've got to look forward to?

                               MADAME REVERIE
                                 There's a very, <u>very</u> simple solution
                                 to all this.

                                    LIBBY
                                 There is?

                               MADAME REVERIE
                                 Come and join me.

Uncertain but trusting, Libby scrambles up the hillside to
join Madame Reverie.

                               MADAME REVERIE
                                 Are you ready?

                                    LIBBY
                                 I think so.

Madame Reverie draws back her coat, like a cape flailing in
the wind. She takes a large in take of breath and...

                               MADAME REVERIE
                                 AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
                                 AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
                                 AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!

She YELLS at the top of her voice down the valley, echoing all around.

Libby stands dumb struck.

Madame Reverie takes her by the hand. They both intake their breath together and...

                    REVERIE AND LIBBY
          AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
          AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
          AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

This time they both crouch as they yell. Wildlife is disturbed, trees sway, their voices seems to echo in to eternity.

                    MADAME REVERIE
          Now, about those Runes.

Madame Reverie marches off in to the distance. Libby's face is shocked, yet now alive.

                    LIBBY
          Runes, what runes?

I/E. REVERIE HALL - DAY

Penny arrives at Reverie's house. The door is open but nobody is there.

She pokes around for clues as to where they might be.

She finds Libby's compass.

She finds a post-it note; "Thursday 5pm - the gun".

Her phone rings, it's Theo, finally.

                    PENNY
          Where have you been?

                    THEO
          I've been on a recruitment call for
          two hours trying desperately to speak
          mandarin, that's where. I've done so
          much nodding and smiling I feel like a
          marionette.

                    THEO
          Where are you? I just got back to the
          boat.

                    PENNY
          I'm at Reverie Hall.

                    THEO
          Is there a tasting happening, why
          didn't you invite me?

                    PENNY
          No it's Libby, I think she's flown off
          with Reverie, and god knows what.
          There was a gun and a note.

                    THEO
          I'm on my way...

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Joe leads the weary foreign students up the hillside.

From beneath his tatty coat he brings out a hip flask and
takes a swig.

                    JOE
          So the old borage lined trees lead to
          many foraging berries, flora and
          fungi. Which really mark this area out
          as an exceptional spot for foraging.

He looks at his watch to check how much longer he has to do
this. Carl is looking freaked out, like he is about to bolt.
Joe holds the lead of small bedraggled dog he has running
arounds in the woodland.

In front of him the Chang is now HIGHLY STRUNG OUT.

                    JOE
          You, Tahini. Pack it in!

Chang is obsessively feeling a tree as if it is alive an
hugging him. He is talking to it in Japanese.

                    JOE
          I said pack it in!

Joe's dog now starts to bark and run up the hillside.

              CARL
      Come 'ere you beggar!

Joe chases after it up the hillside.

He runs through trees, falling over through shrubs, only to
find a SHOT GUN POINTING AT HIS NOSE.

He looks up. There is a tree with an inscription reading
"North" as at the start of the film

He goes unsteadily to his feet. It is Reverie. She waves him
to his feet.

Penny and Theo appear, out of breath through the opposite
side of the action.

Joe stands there, spreads out his arms like a crucifix.

              JOE
      At last... redemption.

              THEO
      Stop! I know this man. He would never
      do anyone any harm.

              JOE
      Would you let her finish!

              MADAME REVERIE
      Step away from the bearded tooth.

The dog, sniffing, starts digging.

      Control your hound!!

              JOE
      I can't, he's a mongrel. Get out yer
      bastard!

The dog continues to dig.

              MADAME REVERIE
      If those runes are disturbed – these
      two
        (Penny and Theo)
      will certainly fall apart from each
      other and even die!

              THEO
      Marguerite please let's put the gun

                    down.

Madame Reverie turns the gun on Theo, but only because she is
talking to him.

                         JOE
               Would you point it back at <u>me</u>!

                         MADAME REVERIE
               What? I'm not going to shoot you. Just
               get your dog off my runes!

The dog has now come to a velvet bag which is quickly
empties. Reverie falls to her knees, dropping the gun. Theo
slides in and takes it safely away.

                         MADAME REVERIE
               Noooooooo!!!!!

She clasps her ears.

ABSOLUTELY NOTHING happens.

She looks up.

                         JOE
               Jesus Christ and I was almost there.

Penny goes to comfort Reverie.

                         PENNY
               It's okay, we're still here. You were
               protecting us?

Reverie nods her head.

                         THEO
               It's okay Aunty M, we're all here,
               nothings going to happen.

                         MADAME REVERIE
               You are? I'm so pleased.

She hugs them both tight.

OUT OF NOWHERE, Chang stumbles in, choking, and (ala Bottom
in a Midsummer Night's Dream's OTT Pyramus & Thisbe death);
flails, spirals and LANDS ON THE RUNES UNCONSCIOUS, face up.

                         JOE
               He's been moaning all the way up here,

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                    if you asked me he's had one to many
                    liberty cap.

                              THEO
                         (having an epiphany)
                    OH NO. The hotpot! I must have mixed
                    them up. Ah, ah, holy crap I've killed
                    him!

                              DIEGO
                    What has he eat?

                              LILJA
                    No fish chips.

                              WAHLID
                    The bef kill man.

                              ADI
                    He no like English fud.

                              THEO
                    Ooooh no I was in a rush, I had all
                    these recruitment calls, I was trying
                    to make an impression
                         (nodding)
                    Neen-how. I have lost my face, and
                    I've mixed my mushrooms and poisoned
                    the man!

                              PENNY
                    Where's Libby?

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Libby HURTLES down the hillside, jumping and running like the
wind.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

Libby bangs on the door of an ornate house.

There's nobody home.

She SPRINTS out in to a garden, and bangs on a shed door.
Clarence opens it.

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81.

> CLARENCE
> I know, you took the moon stone. You
> can have it.

He goes to close the door.

> LIBBY
> Clarence we need <u>charcoal</u>, NOW!!

Clarence is taken aback.

> CLARENCE
> Carboniferious?

EXT. FLAMING WAVE VIEW - DAY

Chang lies prostrate over the runes.

Theo haphazardly attempts CPR.

> JOE
> His eyes a' rolling, he's goin' I'm
> telling ya.

> PENNY
> That is not helping Joe!

EXT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

Libby and Clarence frantically SMASH up the charcoal in to
bits with mallets.

Clarence laments this.

> CLARENCE
> Three million years gone to waste...

They spin the charcoal in water and shake in a water bottle,
before hot footing out of the shed.

EXT. FLAMING WAVE VIEW - DAY

Libby runs with the liquid, Clarence bumbling behind.

She SPRINTS up to Chang, pushing her Dad out of the way.

                    LIBBY
          Clarence, hold him up.

Clarence hoists Chang up so he is sitting and holds open his
mouth.

Libby chucks the liquid in to his mouth.

Chang splutters and coughs and comes back to consciousness.

                    CHANG
          Oh got.

He holds his stomach.

                    JOE
          He's back, he's back, he's seen the
          other side that one.

                    THEO
          Oh my god he's back, he's back. Oh my
          god.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - MORNING

The two guys sit at the station drinking a cup of tea from a
flask.

                    MAN 1
          Well that was very nice, we'll have to
          do it again next year.

                    MAN 2
          Yes lovely to get out and get some
          country air.

The youth comes by with his friends again. They look
threatening.

                    MAN 1
          Ah. Just the man

He hands the youth a small something in a small brown
envelope.

                    YOUTH 1
          Yo how much.

                    MAN 1
          Think nothing of it. On the house.

                    YOUTH 1
         You for real?

                    MAN 2
         Very real, very real.

                    YOUTH 2
         Yo he's sick man.

                    YOUTH 1
         You're both sick!

The train arrives, and they all depart.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

On the board, Mr Bruce has the quote:

"Jack shall have Jill, nought shall go Ill"

                    MR BRUCE
         And so your homework now for the
         weekend is to buddy up and look at
         places where we can find the enchanted
         forest elements Shakespeare talks
         about. It's wild plants and flowers,
         representing the untamed nature and
         magic, contrasting with the civilized
         world. Wild thyme, oxlips, nodding
         violet, woodbine, sweet musk-roses,
         eglantine... let's see what you can
         find!

                    GIRL 1
         So Libbs if you go with Helen.

                    LIBBY
         Actually, I'm already going to go with
         Clarence.

                    GIRL 1
         Clarry? Good luck!

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Libby and Clarence roam looking for wild flowers. Libby holds
per pink compass. Clarence holds a book.

                    LIBBY
         Which way?

84.

                CLARENCE
Due east headed towards the beck.

                LIBBY
They were on the south slope I think.

                CLARENCE
Great, let's see if we can get there
through the mill field.

                                FADE OUT

The End.

As the credits roll, an answer phone message can be heard.

                LADY (ANSWER PHONE)
Hello? Penny? It's Judith Johnson's
Mother. Now what on earth all this
nonsense about the bearded tooth? And
why is John being investigated by the
environment agency? They're here
asking about some mushroom? Poor
Judith has fainted and I've no idea
who's going to take the food delivery
at eight o'clock. This has completely
stumped us. Hello? Hello?

                                FADE OUT