

Selfhood, Love and Responsibility:
Film Stories of the Everyday and Crisis within the Couple and Family Unit.

Volume 1 of 2

Submitted by Jane Devoy to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

Selfhood, Love and Responsibility: Film Stories of the Everyday and Crisis within the Couple and Family Unit.

This is a film practice PhD investigating how selfhood, love and responsibility within couple and family units are conveyed, imagined or problematized in contemporary cinema and how the properties of screen fiction can be used to explore contemporary parental experience. The research project incorporates an original feature screenplay (*Nuclear*) and short film (*Inhabit*) which were developed in parallel to, and informed by, the theoretical research in the accompanying critical thesis. Chapter One explores how parenthood, with an emphasis on motherhood, might be imagined by non or aspiring parents, and what anxieties or desires are expressed through these imaginings. Miranda July's *The Future* (2010) and Joanna Hogg's *Unrelated* (2006) are placed in dialogue with *Inhabit* (2014) in an examination of the slippage of generational identity experienced by the characters as they struggle with the prospect of impending or denied parenthood. Chapter Two concentrates of evocations of the everyday as it intersects with stories of family life. Drawing from cultural theorists of the everyday including Giard, de Certeau and Highmore, I examine why and how we might attend to the everyday on screen. Taking Henri Lefebvre's notion of 'rhythm-analysis' as a tool with which to analyse Michael Winterbottom's *Everyday* (2012), Joanna Hogg's *Archipelago* (2010) and *Nuclear*, I explore how rhythm and patterns of repetition and difference can embody and communicate experiences of domestic relationships and the everyday. In Chapter Three, I analyse spectator engagement via character, and look at how Asghar Farhadi's *A Separation* (2011), Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) and *Nuclear* utilise a multi-protagonist structure to create a democracy within the narrative. Through a symbiotic approach to theory and practice and a focus on British middle-class subjects, I have sought to investigate parallel drives within couple and family units and to accomplish a balance between the demands of drama and a desire to describe the everyday.

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Submission Components:

The component parts of this film by practice thesis are:

1. Critical thesis (Vol. 1 of 2)

2. Feature screenplay: *Nuclear* (Vol. 2 of 2)

3. Completed, produced short film: *Inhabit*
 - secure access web link: <https://vimeo.com/114592756>
 - password: inhabit2014

Component 1 should be read first.

Components 2 and 3 can be read/viewed in either order.



Fig. 1: Family Portrait 1

Introduction

This research project investigates how experiences of parenthood are conveyed, imagined or problematized in contemporary cinema. This interest stems from my practice as a filmmaker, my responses to other film works, my own experiences as a parent, and my desire to stimulate a dynamic relation between practice and theory, in this case focusing on twenty-first century film texts and recent theoretical approaches to the theme of parenthood. As a parent and a filmmaker myself, I acknowledge the multi-faceted inspiration and challenge that these two roles place on my work and life. Analysing films about artist mothers (Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, 1979, and *High Tide*, 1987) and feminist documentaries about mothers (*Finding Christa*, 1991), Lucy Fischer notes a similar dichotomy in her own work as a cultural theorist, though there are traces of embarrassment and reticence (denoted by my italics) in straying towards her '*autobiographical musings*':

If truth be told, this struggle has bedevilled me as well, as an author/mother (*and high melodramatic protagonist*) who has tried to calibrate both aspects of her life. Paradoxically, the tension has been both a stimulus and a challenge to my work.

(31)

Being an involved parent of young children, whether mother or father, biological or non-biological, has an undoubted affect on one's work. Time is limited, energy is depleted and anxieties multiply so there is an imperative for productivity to increase and for good use to be made of available resources. There can also be a powerful injection of resources in the form of a surge of compassion, born out of the (temporary) subjugation of self and ego that accompanies caring for babies and young children. This compassionate sensibility may extend beyond one's own experience to a global sense of parenthood and the value of children. This is not to claim that these sensibilities are unique to parents (this same sensibility could be experienced by anyone in a caring role), or indeed present in all parents, but how practically and conceptually to harness this particular type of compassion and

transform it into cultural artefact and wider theoretical debate is a primary motivating force behind this research project.

Research Questions and Research Methodology

My primary question is: how do I, as a creative practitioner, balance the needs of a dramatically and narratively engaging screenplay/film with a desire to investigate and describe tensions between selfhood, love and responsibility in everyday life within domestic relationships. I will break that question down in reverse.

The domestic relationships I am interested in are located within the couple and the family unit with a focus on attitudes towards and experiences of parenthood and, in particular, motherhood.

The 'everyday lives' that are dealt with by five of the six film/screenplay texts selected, are located within a Western geographical and cultural context, and all six place educated, middle-class characters as their protagonists. I look at how love might be expressed through the mundane within the context of domestic relationships and explore the crippling effects of choice within Western, capitalist culture. By assigning film practice (writing and making) as the primary mode of enquiry, I wish to harness cinema's particular qualities of scale in time and space to focus on the details of other people's everyday lives.

Selfhood, love and responsibility are central themes in the six texts which I encounter as simultaneous forces present in the shift from individual to couple to parent. My desire to investigate and describe these forces within the co-ordinates of parenthood and the everyday, stem from my own experiences of this journey and from observations, anecdotes, readings and viewings around these themes.

Developing from my previous practice, which was predominantly narrative fiction film, and from my tastes as a critical consumer of cinema, I embarked upon a brief to write two films which would be located within the narrative, realist fiction film tradition rather than experimental film. I am interested in how classical storytelling models within fiction film might be manipulated to explore these themes. In the feature screenplay, I experiment with the use of a multi-protagonist, chapter structure in order to create a multiplicity of voices whilst analysing the effects of this approach creatively and critically as the project develops. Although, as a creative practitioner I have also created theatre, performance, prose and poetry, my creative activity within this project is screenwriting and filmmaking. That practice has been informed and limited by practical resources: no provision for budget or equipment from the governing institutions thereby requiring independent resource facilitation. As such, I found ways to locate equipment and raise a very small budget for the short film, but having to balance my own parental responsibilities with a PhD project and being without alternative financial means, the limitations on time and money have been significant. Parenthood and everyday life have, themselves, mediated my research and my creativity has strayed beyond screenwriting and filmmaking into a wider strategy for balancing life, work and art.

The 'I' in the question is me. I, like several of the main characters in the film texts that I have engaged with in this project, creatively and/or critically, am a parent, female and white. Like some of the characters and unlike others, I am in my forties, from an educated, middle-class social background, British, a participant and product of Western society and culture. Each of these identity markers, inform my make-up as a person and as an artist and the cinematic context within which I work. Interestingly, I share the experience of parenthood (at the time the selected films were made) only with the male filmmakers (Winter-

bottom, Farhadi and Baumbach) which, I believe, is not a co-incidence. The difficulties of balancing creative practice with motherhood inspire me to keep writing and making films and to discuss the subject. This tension is currently, at the time of writing, being voiced more widely along with a renewed call for sexual equality within the sector, for example in the UK an intervention and research initiative: raisingfilms.com which aims to raise the profile of and support for parents and carers within the UK film and TV industries.

I have used a partially auto-ethnographic method in my practice, partly because it is an important element of my creative process and partly because of a distinct wish to voice the subject of motherhood, parenthood and its effects on self-identity and relationships, I have sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, married personal experience (direct or indirect) with imagination and observation in order to produce and develop material. This has been an ongoing process throughout the research project: as my everyday life as a mother, parent, offspring has continued and developed so too has my engagement with critical and film texts and, in particular, so has my feature screenplay organically developed right up until the final polish of the final draft. By using my experiences of childhood, motherhood and parenthood within a context of the everyday, the creative product and the encounters with other film texts and theorists bring a plurality of voice and voice the often unheard within the patriarchal systems of the media industries and the resulting cultural product.

My creative and critical approach is inspired by Steven Connor's call for the practice of 'cultural phenomenology':

Instead of readings of abstract structures, functions and dynamics, it would be interested in substances, habits, organs, rituals, obsessions, pathologies, processes and patterns of feeling. Such interests would be at once philosophical and poetic, explanatory and exploratory, analytic and evocative. Above all, whatever interpreting and explications cultural phenomenology managed to pull off would be

achieved by the manner in which it got amid a given subject or problem, not by the degree to which it got on top of it.

(Connor: 18)

Talking about the style of language that might suit cultural phenomenology, Connor writes that he 'hoped...for muckier writing, more mauled by doubt and discovery...that one might write in more excitable, inflammatory absorbed and perplexed ways' (Connor: 2). In response to Connor's summons, I have sought to discover my subject, both creative and critical, *through* the acts of writing and filmmaking, as well as viewing and reading, rather than seeing these processes as supporting previously devised arguments or artefacts.

I have employed a parallel, dynamic synergy of theory and practice to develop artefacts and argument simultaneously. The creative practice elements have developed over the duration of the research period and the theoretical terrain has developed in response. Equally, my developing relation to the theoretical material I have encountered has affected certain creative choices in my screenwriting and filmmaking. Much of the filmic material I am dealing with (both my own and the films I analyse) privileges experience of everyday life therefore artefact and argument development needed to happen simultaneously because both are part of my protracted engagement with everyday life as it coincides with the thematics of motherhood and parenthood.

All films that contain a human character have, by implication, parental figures within them (whether present or absent, dead or alive) and through this research project, I investigate how cultural theory and recent examples of cultural production have treated family relationships. Given the breadth of this subject, I am employing certain parameters in order to delimit the project and to provide the opportunity for productive dialogue between the theory and practice elements of the project. I acknowledge that the couple and family units I examine, and the film texts themselves, are from a primarily Western, white, middle-class social and cultural context.

I am responding to the limits of this project in certain scholarly and practical ways. I do not attempt to produce a survey of the treatment of family life in cinema historically nor to address all generic embodiments of the subject. I have selected and created films within an independent/arthouse tradition. I concentrate on twenty-first century films in order to gauge the pulse of recent cinematic treatment of (prospective) parental and family stories and to enable my own practice to stand against and within contemporary filmmaking. I will give a close reading of several films, selected because they resonate formally and thematically with my own films and with the thematic terrain of parental experience and inter-relations.

The films I have written/made centre on British/European, middle-class (though not necessarily economically buoyant) protagonists. Since my introduction to arthouse cinema in my teens, I noticed that whilst European, and in particular French, cinema portrays the bourgeoisie without reticence or embarrassment, British non-mainstream cinema has shied away from this strata of society with creative attention and critical acclaim directing itself instead towards representing the working class in the social realism for which our national cinema is renowned (Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Shane Meadows, Andrea Arnold, Lynne Ramsay, Clio Barnard). Portrayals of the British middle-classes have resided more readily in period dramas, literary adaptations and mainstream RomComs designed for worldwide audiences such as *Four Weddings And A Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001). Notable exceptions are Mike Leigh's *Another Year* (2010) which takes a compassionate look at a middle-class, liberal family and the films of Joanna Hogg, which due to their precise depiction of middle-class family life and domesticity (though in this case specifically upper-middle class life), I have chosen to include for close reading. It is the combination of emphases on contemporary middle-class characters, non-main-

stream filmmaking and themes of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood that characterise both my own practice and my selection of film texts for analysis.

In this introduction, I will identify key critical writers on representations of the constituent elements of family relationships in cinema, before identifying some recent work on parenthood in the cinema and outlining the three chapters where I also include wider theoretical approaches (feminist, narratological, everyday, screenwriting studies, film studies). I will then go on to draw from these arguments and observations in my close textual readings and in relation to my own practice.

Inhabit, *Unrelated*, *Everyday*, and to a certain degree, *Nuclear* focus primarily on experiences of motherhood: desired; imagined; thwarted; actual; frustrated. There is a close link thematically between *Inhabit* and *Unrelated* in terms of the central character's inner turmoil caused by her thwarted desire to have a child and the physical realities of their bodies. The daily routine of caring for children is highlighted in Winterbottom's *Everyday* and I have taken inspiration from this focus on the repetition of mundane tasks and injected elements of this into the screenplay of *Nuclear*. This focus on motherhood in the film/screenplay texts is underlined by drawing on elements of feminist film and cultural criticism in this critical component. In feminist theory, there is a body of work which has described the experience of the everyday for women in Western culture. This type of discussion has been absent, by and large, from other bodies of work, though theorists of everyday life, such as Ben Highmore, have begun to draw from feminist theory. In contemplating parenthood in film fiction from a critical or creative perspective, inevitably its constituent parts must be considered - motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood – as well as its relational term, 'family'. In different parts of this research project, whether in a cited theoretical or film text or in a scene from one of my screenplays, one or other of these terms may seem

more appropriate at certain times. In contemplating parenthood in film fiction from a critical or creative perspective, inevitably its constituent parts must be considered - motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood – as well as its relational term, 'family'. In different parts of this research project, whether in a cited theoretical or film text or in a scene from one of my screenplays, one or other of these terms may seem more appropriate at certain times. My explorations of (imagined and actual) motherhood share territory with feminist theory: maternal desire, pregnancy, childcare; sexual and professional identities in parallel with motherhood. I have also felt the limitations of engaging with certain aspects of feminist thinking whilst creating these stories, namely a prevalence of suspicion surrounding maternal desire and the lack of attention towards men's experiences of parenthood. In my own practice components, I explore the tensions between bearing, caring and sharing children alongside notions of selfhood from a primarily maternal perspective, though I have found it stimulating to develop my work alongside encounters with films which explore the shared difficulties of the parental journey (*The Future, The Squid and The Whale, A Separation*).

Betty Jay's *Weird Lullabies* is a recent work examining the social, cultural and historical contexts of mother-daughter relationships in films from the 1990's onwards. Jay situates her book in relation to influential feminist film theorists Mary Jacobus, E. Ann Kaplan and Barbara Creed alongside literary critics including Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Abel. Jay sees, in the films she analyses, 'the mother-daughter relationship as a powerful site where the idealism of feminism and its attempts to negotiate forms of loss, absence and lack are articulated' (10). In my feature screenplay *Nuclear*, I chose to present two mother/daughter relationships: Marion and her teenage daughter, Tess; and Marion and her romantic, adventuring mother, Cathy. By placing Marion as both mother and daughter, I sought to explore how Marion's experiences of being a parent and being parented affect her self-identi-

ty and behaviour. Family and motherhood have been discussed widely in relation to 1940s and 1950s melodrama films and TV soaps (Kaplan, Gledhill, Ang) but, as Lucy Fischer points out, less attention has been given to the representation of motherhood in other genres (6). Fischer goes on to address this gap in relation to maternity, by attending to horror, crime, comedy, thriller, postmodern, documentary and experimental films. Continuing Fischer's expansion beyond mid-century melodrama, I have concentrated on 21st century art house films. Annette Kuhn, in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, takes an autobiographical approach tracing her relationship with her parents through 'memory work' which she applies to personal and public photographs from her past. Kelly Oliver and Pamela Thoma have written on representations of pregnancy in film and Andrea O'Reilly's *Twenty-first Century Motherhood* brings together a collection of essays on new forms and understandings of mothering as applied both to film and a wider social and cultural context, including observations of certain male forms of parenting which have fed into the father figures in my screenwriting. Stitt and Powell's volume, *Mothers Who Deliver*, argues for the transformative possibilities of empowered motherhood within a variety of cultural contexts. Basin, Honey and Kaplan in *Representations of Motherhood* cite literary critic, Susan Rubin Suleiman, as introducing 'an important new element in visions of maternal subjectivity: that of the playful, laughing mother. I have taken this idea of play and placed it within the character of Angelos in *Nuclear*. Angelos is, from various viewpoints within the narrative: non parent; surrogate parent; and biological parent. It is his capacity to be playful that makes him so attractive to each member of the family. Suleiman argues that play is the activity through which people most freely and inventively constitute themselves' (20).

There is less critical material on fatherhood in film. Notable work in this area includes that by Stella Bruzzi, Katie Barnett and Hannah Hamad though, like much of the work on

motherhood in cinema, they explore representations of fatherhood in Hollywood rather than independent cinema. Bruzzi notes that 'within Film Studies the father is...omnipresent but rarely talked about' (viii). During the course of this project, I have created and analysed various father figures, noting that their manifestations are often more emotionally opaque or absent than their maternal counterparts. The two potential father figures in *Inhabit* take contrasting approaches towards the notion of becoming a parent, as discussed further in Chapter One. In *Nuclear* the playfulness and confidence of Angelos, surrogate/interloper father, contrasts with the self-absorbed, fearful Ed. By giving both fathers chapters of their own within the narrative structure, I provide them with a voice and space to see how they relate to Marion and the children, as well as how the children relate to them. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

There is a growing body of literature on children in film (Lury, Wilson, McMahon, Aitken) from which I draw ideas of authenticity and approaches to practice in my analysis of representations of parenthood and family in independent film. Whilst my primary focus across the selection of film and critical texts in relation to my practice, is on adult figures, *Nuclear* was deliberately designed to give voice to the child characters also. It seemed, by the point at which I was writing *Nuclear* (after completing *Inhabit*) that it was impossible to write about parents if I didn't also write about children and the relationships between them. By giving the children their own chapters, I was able not only to suggest what they might individually be feeling, but also to shine a mirror on the parent characters. As well as embedding an equality of voice into the narrative structure of *Nuclear*, I also incorporated the needs of parents and children from the cast and crew into my production methods when devising the shooting schedule for *Inhabit*. Although this was partly born of the low budget (if cast and crew had been more conventionally contracted then there would have been less likelihood of requests to bend the schedule around childcare or school events), it was

something that I embraced because, like the team behind 'raising films', I too wish to normalise discussion around family-friendly working practices within the film and TV industries.

There is little material dedicated specifically to parenthood in relation to film studies or cultural studies, despite parenthood being a perennial theme of film and fiction. This may be due in part to the shift towards less rigid demarcations between maternal and paternal roles, within Western societies, being a relatively recent phenomenon. As Rachel Bowlby notes, the notion of 'parenting', where both father and mother participate, is a 'telling new word' (6). Perhaps also, for the purposes of scholastic delimitation, critical attention has tended to separate the constituent elements of parenthood in film studies rather than embrace the wider and messier notion of parenthood and its inherent struggle to negotiate a path between two or more people in relation to bringing up a child or children. Inspired by Miranda July's *The Future* alongside my own observations of contemporary, Western, often male, reticence to commit to having children, I developed the screenplay for *Inhabit* and, as in Joanna Hogg's *Unrelated*, I was interested to focus on a 40-something female protagonist negotiating conflict between her body, her relationship and her maternal desire. With the screenplay for *Nuclear*, as mentioned above and discussed in more detail in chapter three, I wished to equalise the voices of the parents and children within the narrative structure so that sympathies for each member of the family would ebb and flow and the relationships between them would begin to layer for the reader/spectator as subsequent chapters play out.

Ellen Spitz's *Illuminating Childhood*, despite its title, presents an investigation into how the arts can expand our understanding of parent-child relations. Her methodology, as well as subject matter, are pertinent to this research project. She takes art works as primary

sources of psychological knowledge starting 'with the premise that a gifted writer, filmmaker, painter, or sculptor has the ability to teach us as much in one scene or vision as a therapist can in a session or a theorist in a treatise' (3). In readings of her selected texts she warns, 'characters are allowed to come to life when they seem to do so; I refuse to be embarrassed to accept them, from time to time, as real, for this is, after all, the way art works its magic' (4). In a similar vein, I will respond to the characters within the texts I have selected (my own and other filmmakers') as psychologically real within their fictional worlds whilst, through attention to script and directorial choices, maintaining an awareness of these characters as cinematic constructs.

Two recent volumes that directly address parenthood, though in relation primarily to literature, are *Precarious Parenthood: Doing Family in Literature and Film* (eds. Pusse and Walter) wherein the influences of feminist critics, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Adrienne Rich are considered and *A Child Of One's Own: Parental Stories* by Rachel Bowlby. Bowlby traces the evolution of parenthood through recent decades and illuminates the ramifications of technological and social advances. Challenging Freud's approach to parenthood, Bowlby notes:

Throughout his writings, Freud sidelines parents and parenthood in favour of his focus on the feelings of children, or on those of adults as ex-children. He is writing in a post-Romantic tradition in which childhood comes to be seen as a state of passionate intensity with irrevocably formative effects on the adult the child will turn out to be.

(105)

Redressing this side-lining in her examination of parenthood in literature, Bowlby observes:

Unlike other elementary human experiences, and for all its importance as a daily occupation and preoccupation in people's lives, parenthood has often tended to go without saying: as if we know the story and the story is not very interesting. Compared to the passions of childhood, parenthood appears as just the counterpart or background: where there is a child, there are or were parents.

(2)

In this project, I continue Spitz and Bowlby's attention to the theme of parent-child relationships within cultural works. Whilst I commend and echo Spitz's identification of art works as primary sources of knowledge, I will not limit this to psychological knowledge and include the expansion of sensory, poetic and philosophical understanding, or questioning, as potential effects of film-viewing.

My research shares thematic territory with the critical texts above in regard to representations of (actual and prospective) mothers, fathers and children and the social and emotional units they exist within. However, this project will focus on independent / arthouse twenty-first century cinema as opposed to Hollywood or twentieth century cinema (to which many of the theorists above apply themselves), or to literature (in the case of Bowlby and Puisse/Walter). I acknowledge that these tropes are present in a wider, world cinema and critical discourse and I am conscious that my practice and critical interactions, within this research project, are delimited by a primarily Western perspective.

As well as drawing from cultural, literary and film studies material on parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood, I also include work on the everyday, narrative structure and feminist theory. It is through this multi-disciplinary approach, that I have identified and created screen fictions of (pre)family relationships which coalesce around the idea of an extraordinary everyday; texts which constantly negotiate and balance qualities of drama or comedy with those of the quotidian.

Chapter one, 'Family Planning,' looks at aspiring parenthood and the interior conflicts (psychological, emotional and physical) of potential parents, in particular mothers. It examines how the fears and desires of imagined parenthood are shown in the selected films

and what they say to us about our ideas surrounding parenthood. I place two films, *The Future* by Miranda July (2010) and *Unrelated* by Joanna Hogg (2006) in relation to my own short film *Inhabit* in order to investigate how the medium of cinema is used to explore selfhood and responsibility. Focussing on characters who are experiencing a sense of inter-generational, identity, between child/adult and non-parent/parent states, these films explore the prelude to parenthood and its associated imaginative landscapes.

In chapter two, 'Family Life' I investigate how the everyday and routine aspects of familial experience can be expressed in cinema and to what effect. Cinema tells its stories through a dramatic mode and relies on conflict, frequently between characters, to provide tension and hold its audiences. In contrast to high-concept, highly externalized conflict narratives prominent in mainstream Western cinema, I wish to pursue inherent tensions of parenthood prompted by the simultaneous drives of selfhood, love and responsibility within film fiction and apply ideas by cultural and everyday theorists (Giard, de Certeau, Lefebvre, Highmore, Connor and, in relation to child performers, Lury) and narratologists (Berger and Lanser) to the films *Everyday* by Michael Winterbottom (2012), *Archipelago* by Joanna Hogg (2010), *Inhabit*, and my feature screenplay, *Nuclear*.

In the third chapter, 'Discordant Families,' I examine stories of parental discord and the portrayal of resultant parent/child relationships in ensemble narratives incorporating multiple viewpoints. This chapter places *A Separation* by Asghar Farhadi (2011) and *The Squid and The Whale* (2005) in dialogue with *Nuclear* to examine different approaches to multi-protagonist narrative structure and consider what this relatively unusual feature film narrative form can offer to the cinematic expression of family relationships.

The component parts of this project, in dynamic relation to one another, address the relatively unexplored critical dialogue on representations of parenthood in recent independent cinema and provide two original cultural artefacts to complement that debate and contribute to the cannon of contemporary British, independent cinema. I hope the project, in its combined or individual parts, will also speak more widely to filmmakers, film viewers, parents and offspring about the transformative encounters which can form the experience of parenthood.

Chapter One: Family Planning

Film Stories of Imagined Parenthood

Parental feelings may be at their most intense in situations where in reality there is no child: whether because... the child has died; or because there has never yet been one, though there has been a wish for one.

(Bowlby 103)

I begin my investigation into the rendering of parenthood in cinema by looking at stories where a child does not actually exist, or does not yet exist, for the potential parent/s. In an era, within Western culture, where having children is becoming increasingly a conscious choice (whether to, when to, how to, how many to) stories of pre-parenthood or imagined parenthood are an illuminating place to untangle contemporary ideas and myths of parenthood. I examine the aesthetic and narrative treatment of this subject in the films, *The Future* by Miranda July (2010) and *Unrelated* by Joanna Hogg (2006). I go on to consider my own short film *Inhabit* (2014) (see Appendix 1 for film synopses), and its development journey, which deals with similar thematic terrain, and reflect upon the confluences and departures between the three films. The focus in this chapter on the thoughts, emotions and bodily experience of individuals contemplating parenthood, as expressed through the selected film texts, provides a springboard for the subsequent two chapters wherein I focus on stories of parenthood in practice.

The fact that *The Future* and *Unrelated* are feature-length films and *Inhabit* is a short film impacts on the narrative possibilities and thematic breadth of each. Where *Inhabit* deals specifically with one evening and the theme of desiring/fearing parenthood, both *The Future* and *Unrelated* have more expansive temporal and thematic frames. *The Future* encompasses ideas of ontology, technology, mortality, love and loss as well as parenthood,

whilst *Unrelated* speaks about sexuality, class and power as well as maternal desire and takes place over the duration of a summer holiday. I nonetheless find enough similarities between these films to stimulate a dialogue and my readings of *The Future* and *Unrelated*, thereby, consciously focus on these films as they speak about imagined parenthood.

My choices of films in this chapter, whilst stylistically and tonally very different, are both products of independent, auteur, arthouse cinema. They are also films written and directed by (white, Western, middle-class) women. Therefore, thematically, formally and in social reference and production terms they share territory with *Inhabit*. I will look at each film separately whilst also drawing links between them and my practice within the context of (re)presenting pre and non-parenthood states.

The central characters in each of these films have strong feelings about the prospect of becoming parents (or in the case of *The Future* metaphorical 'parents' of a cat). Anna and Melanie acutely desire a child, whilst Andy is terrified of the idea. Sophie and Jason both desire and fear the idea of their prospective charge arriving into their lives, though each goes on to respond differently.

The act of imagining parenthood is functioning on three narrative levels in these films: the writer/director has imagined a particular example of parenthood; she has imagined her characters imagining parenthood; and the characters themselves imagine parenthood. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein argues that, 'The questions of why children are wanted, and who they are seen to be are intimately enmeshed' (xiv). She cites Stephanie Dowrick and Sibyl Gundberg as arguing, from a feminist perspective, that this "'wanting' of children [by women] can in no way be, politically and ideologically speaking, a ('free') 'choice'" (xvi). Laurie Taylor and Matthew Taylor identify lots of reasons why people might decide not to

have children but find it difficult to articulate why they might want them. Lesnik-Oberstein cites Taylor and Taylor: " [o]ne plausible answer...is surely "to grow into adult friends, and to give us the pleasure of being grandparents" (xvi). As Lesnik-Oberstein notes, this does not address 'the question of what the pleasure of grandparenting may be seen to be and how it might be a distinct motivation for the having of children as compared to, for instance, the pleasure of being parents' (xvi). This difficulty in articulating the worth or reasons for having a child, is embodied by Andy in *Inhabit* and to an extent by Sophie in *The Future*. Whilst Melanie is in the process of going upstairs to inseminate herself with Danny's sperm, Andy talks anxiously with his friend and host of the party, Wilf, about this dilemma. A likeable though egocentric actor, Andy cites upcoming professional engagements as barriers to imminent parenthood but Wilf, a man comfortable in his role as parent of two children, sees these as excuses for a deeper reluctance: 'You're just scared,' he chides light-heartedly (*Inhabit* 2014).

The idea of female desire for parenthood is problematised, in a contemporary Western context, due to the legacy of feminist dialogue in the 1970's and 80's. Bassin, Honey and Kaplan summarise second wave feminist thinking on motherhood:

To be a person, for the most part, meant to be a person like a man. Personness and subjectivity necessitated moving beyond, or avoiding altogether, home and motherhood. Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique' (1963) deemed home "a prison." Juliet Mitchell (1971) saw child rearing as an "instrument of oppression," and Shulamith Firestone (1971) went so far as to entitle a chapter "Down with Childhood" and called for a total severance of the tie between women and motherhood.

(6)

Each of the three films discussed in this chapter finds its unique and contemporary way to explore parental desire, and in *Unrelated* and *Inhabit* specifically, a woman's desire to become a mother. These films move beyond second wave feminist criticism by placing fe-

male characters who desire to become mothers in thoughtful, non-mainstream film narratives and by refusing to judge them for this desire.

Unrelated

When I first saw *Unrelated*, I was excited and inspired by many of its qualities: contemporary maternal desire and frustration being explored within a feature film; a middle-aged and complex female protagonist; a provocative narrative structure with only one scene providing psychological context and exposition; a focus on middle-class Britishness and its subtle gradations; the uncompromising attention to everyday moments; and the understated, hyper-naturalistic performance style. This cocktail of ingredients stayed with me and proved to be part of the inspiration for both the practice and critical elements of this research project.

Unrelated, *The Future*, and *Inhabit*, in their unique ways, deal with the slippage between generational identity that occurs when an adult considers, fears, desires or rejects parenthood. I wish to concentrate firstly on how the character interactions in *Unrelated* explore inter-generational identity in the context of Anna's repressed desire to become a parent, as well as how family and parenthood are represented within the extended family of the holidaying group.

Although invited by her peer and friend, the matriarch Varena, Anna is immediately more drawn towards the 'yongs'. This functions to complicate Anna's identity generationally. She is the same age as the 'olds' but not having a parental role as they do within this situation of a family holiday, she feels more connected to the childless, young adults.

The motif of smoking functions to signify youth and distance from the older generation and traces Anna's relationship to the 'yongs'. During Varena's limp yet humiliating story of Anna being unable to tolerate smoking at school, Oakley is sensitive to his mother's clumsy treatment of Anna and to Anna's dignified response thus introducing an alliance between Oakley and Anna. This alliance is emphasised visually by placing Oakley and Anna within the same frame, apart from Varena and the 'olds' (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: *Unrelated*: Anna and Oakley during Varena's anecdote.

Soon after, Anna defies Varena's portrait of her by accepting and coolly smoking a joint with the 'yongs' on a Tuscan hillside (Fig. 3). Each of them watches her with stoned concentration and, from this point on, she is accepted into their group.



Fig. 3: *Unrelated*: Anna smokes with the 'yongs'.

Anna's willingness to smoke, quietly demonstrates her allegiance to the 'yongs' and her shared rejection of the values of her own generation, a rebellion which is further born out

by sharing car rides with the ‘youngs’, listening to blaring dance music and temporarily keeping the secret about the car crash.

Generational dislocation is subtly depicted in a later scene in Verena’s bedroom when Verena challenges Anna asking ‘why don’t you talk to me, want to be with me?’ Whilst Anna skulks in the doorway, non-communicative in a teenage kind of way, Verena busily applies moisturizing cream to her mature forearms – a gesture performed in a way to suggest an acceptance of middle-age and a woman comfortable in her own, ageing, skin (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: *Unrelated*: Verena, unlike Anna, comfortable with middle-age.

Anna’s identification with the ‘youngs’, and in particular with Oakley, embodies an erotic energy which initially liberates Anna, but soon leads her to a position of vulnerability. After the holidaying group have jumped into the pool one evening in various states of undress, Anna is the last woman to leave the pool, watched intently by Oakley and Verena’s two sons (Fig. 5). The youngest Archie (Harry Kershaw) is a teenager and, despite having watched Anna himself, accuses the other two of being ‘perverts’ because they ‘are still looking’. His sense of perversion perhaps stemming from a recognition that Anna is the same age as his mother and thereby suggestive of inappropriate adult/child relationships. However, Anna is not a mother herself so, from both the young men’s and her own per-

spective, she inhabits uncharted territory between child/parent generations (in a similar way to Sophie in *The Future* and Andy in *Inhabit*).



Fig. 5: *Unrelated*: The young men watch Anna exit naked from the pool.

Hogg notes that Anna feels safer allying with the youth than with her own generation, enjoying a teen rebellion that she did not, for whatever reason, have in her teens but she doesn't realise how dangerous this liaison actually is (Hogg. Interview *Unrelated* DVD).

After a day excursion where Oakley flirts with Anna and she gears up for an erotic encounter by purchasing lacy underwear, Anna's brave invitation to Oakley to come to her room that night results in a downplayed, yet humiliating rejection. Soon after this rejection, Anna betrays the trust of the 'youngs' by telling Varena about the circumstances of the car crash. Consequently, she is rejected in full by the youngsters when Jack yells at Anna to 'fuck off!' after she ventures into a remote part of the grounds to apologise to Oakley. Emotionally battered by the vehemence of their hatred for her, she stumbles out of the field now lost in a void between the generations, belonging to neither of them (Fig. 6). Her

posture and her costume, viewed from behind, suddenly highlight her age and further underline her vulnerability.

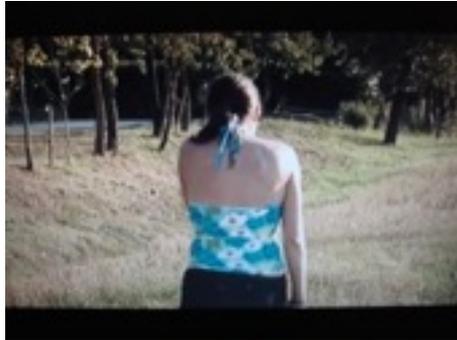


Fig. 6: *Unrelated*: Anna stumbles out of the field rejected by the ‘yongs’.

Throughout *Unrelated*, Anna ricochets inter-generationally between the parents and children in the film, unable to fully relate to either of them. This vulnerable state is triggered by her own, as yet incomplete, journey from childhood to adulthood (according to Hogg in the DVD commentary) and by her attempts to suppress her yearnings to become a parent herself. It is this conflict between acting in some way like a child (Anna, Sophie, Andy) as a response to fearing/desiring/avoiding having a child of one’s own that interests me and has inspired the development of the stories and characters in my own work.

Anna’s desire to be a mother is not broached until thirty-eight minutes into the film. The group sit in a Piazza, Anna sitting next to Oakley whilst Verena and her husband sit some distance away. Oakley begins to probe Anna with highly personal questions about the state of her sex life with her husband and about her situation regarding children.

Oakley: What about kids?

Anna looks away and her eyes fill with tears. She recovers her composure.

Anna: Well we don’t have them.

Oakley: Any reason? What, does he not want them or something? Is he just one of those people who's just not interested in children?

Anna: No.

Oakley: How's that make you feel? Did you ever want them? (He notices that Anna is upset). Sorry.

Anna: Erm...

Oakley: Lets have some beer. I'm sorry, that's between the two of you.

Anna: What and our sex life isn't?

They both laugh.

(Unrelated)

The fact that Anna manages to push back her tears and even make a joke, both suggests Anna's problem and demonstrates how determinedly she is attempting to repress it. Dramatically, this pays off when Anna finally reveals her despair to Verena in a hotel room (fig. 7). With the structural placing of this scene three quarters of the way through the film and with such economic storytelling prior to this point, Hogg has deftly built up the emotional intensity to enable a powerful, cathartic release in this scene.

Amongst Anna's sobs and Verena's caring attempts to console her, Anna's regret at not taking her 'opportunities' to have children, as Verena did, concludes the scene:

Anna: ... no matter what happens you will always have your children. Your children love you and I look at you and I look at them and you're so secure in their love.

Verena: It's not as simple as that. It looks like that from the outside but it's not as simple as that.

Anna: But it is. I don't mean to argue with you but it is. You're surrounded by your family. You belong somewhere. I will just now forever be on the periphery of things.

(Unrelated)

The locked-off camera allows the performance to create the dramatic rhythm and emotional intensity of the scene. This is supported by economic and subtle use of mis-én-scène: the hotel room is sterile like Anna's body and yet with ironic contradiction she wears a '70's dress which resembles a maternity dress.

What we [Hogg and production designer Collonge] thought was poignant about that dress was that it looked like she's pregnant but her big problem is that she can't have children.

(Hogg in Titze)



Fig. 7: *Unrelated*: Varena comforts Anna in a hotel room.

As Varena briefly mentions, family life and parenthood are not as secure and ideal as Anna imagines. The difficulties and complexities of parent-child and parent-parent relationships are represented within the interactions of the holidaying families. Varena herself is separated from her sons' father and is in a relatively new relationship. George, Varena's cousin, is sharing the holiday with them because he is not getting on well with Oakley's mother and the bitter relationship between Oakley and his father George is demonstrated in two scenes: when George aggressively accuses Oakley of stealing his vintage wine ; and after Anna has let the secret out about the car crash, there ensues an intense row between Oakley and George, which is depicted only aurally from a visual viewpoint outside whilst Anna and the rest of the family group sit by the pool and listen, horrified but powerless (Fig. 8). Oakley challenges George 'if you hit me, I will hit you back. I'm not scared of

you' suggestive of a long-standing hostile and possibly violent relationship between father and son.



Fig. 8: *Unrelated*: Oakley and George row violently indoors as the group listen outside.

Relations between the generations finally cool down at the end of the holiday, with instead the suggestion of slight rifts emerging amongst the 'yongs' as Jack and Badge reject Oakley's invitation to continue drinking. Having returned to the villa and struggling to sleep with the usual noise from the 'yongs' by the pool, Anna finally asks them to be quiet. She inhabits her own skin and her own generation, parent or not. This growth towards an acceptance of herself and her situation allows her to make amends with her partner Alex over the phone. In the final scene in a taxi on her way to the airport, Anna laughs and jokes with Alex on the phone and the gulf between them seems to have diminished. Anna's sorrow about not being pregnant seems to have begun to subside. Rachel Bowlby compares the processes of coming to the end of childhood and parenthood:

Childhood is a temporally bounded state, which ideally just passes, as the individual moves on into whatever forms their adulthood may come to take. But the ending of parenthood, through a child's death or its loss in other ways, has a quite different kind of significance from the natural sequence that is supposed to take the child beyond childhood. In its own ways, this may also be true of giving up a wish for parenthood: acknowledging, with pain, that it is not going to happen, and hopefully imagining a different life.

(Bowlby 104)

The ending is not closed, we do not know how things will continue for Anna: whether she will end up having a child; whether she will patch things up with Alex; whether she will continue to invest in her renewed friendship with Verena; or whether she will come to an acceptance of a childless life. But there is a note of hope in these final moments of the film and Anna seems to have re-inhabited herself with an adult identity distinct from either the ‘youngs’ or the ‘olds’, distinct from childhood and teen rebellion as well as (potential) parenthood.

There is resonance in this ending with the endings of both my own films, where I strive similarly to balance subtle character transformation with narrative openness. In addition, aside from the common theme of desiring parenthood, I share Hogg’s interest in focussing on the British middle-classes and on portraying the everyday within a domestic sphere. These parallels are examined in more detail in later sections on *Inhabit* and *Nuclear*.

The Future

The Future is perhaps not the most obvious choice of film to examine in relation to parenthood and the family (there are no actual parents or children) but the way in which the cat functions, prompting the responses it does from Jason and Sophie, suggests a metaphorical offspring-parent relationship and is the source of both the humour and the pathos in the film. July, in her first book *It Chooses You* refers to the cat as being ‘like a newborn baby...[that] will need around-the-clock care’ (7). As such, I find several overlaps with *Inhabit*: thematically, a couple struggling with the prospect of parental responsibility and the tensions this causes within their relationship; and stylistically, the lyrical, thoughtful, quietly comical tone is a quality that I aspire to in my own work. I wish, also, to dedicate attention to July’s correlation between time and parenthood in *The Future* and the unique ways in which she represents these ideas cinematically.

Paw Paw (the baby) is cited as narrator of the film, realized using a low-tech puppet and voiced (by Miranda July) with a croaky, pathetic tone, at once both child and oldster. Paw Paw's monologues, whilst morose, provide a dynamic element to the film. On the one hand the talking cat character provides a morbid humour which lifts the film from veering too far into indulgent self-reflection. On the other hand, he provides a kind of choric comment on the spirit of eternal disappointment and struggle encountered by the human couple, his potential adoptive parents. July remarks that the Paw Paw character has continued to be controversial in the reception of the film, yet she feels, that like it or not Paw Paw is the soul of the film 'and you can't take out the soul' (July, DVD interview) indicating that, for July, the film isn't just about the contemporary, existential struggles of an urban couple but that their relationship with the character of Paw Paw, their symbolic and unrealised child, is central to the film.

Sophie and Jason's initial decision to adopt the cat/child appears based on the understanding that it is temporary (unlike actual parenthood) and therefore palatable. Prior to their visit to the animal adoption agency, Sophie and Jason brace themselves for what they are about to do:

Sophie: I think we're ready.
 Jason: Ready for...hey well you know I think we are.
 Sophie: Anyways it's just for six months, then we can do whatever we want,
 for the rest of our lives.

(The Future)

There is a dry comedy to this exchange: it has the romance of a couple daring to commit to one another sufficiently to take on the responsibility of parenthood together, yet includes an incongruous get-out clause and refers to a cat rather than a human child (although plot-wise this hasn't been revealed explicitly yet). Despite their mutual trepidation about the commitment, when faced with Paw Paw, Jason seems more at ease with the prospect of

adopting him than Sophie does:

Jason: We are going to take you home and adore you for the rest of your life.
 Sophie: He might be wild. We don't know.

(*The Future*)

Jason's commitment to loving Paw Paw and Sophie's reticence and fear of potential wildness mirror the dynamic of their relationship with each other and foreshadow the conflict that will later transpire between them. Their ability to love the cat and commit to it, and by association their ability to imagine being parents, is closely linked with their ability to love and commit to one another, thereby linking the nature of romantic with paternal love.

When they are told by the vet that if they treat Paw Paw well and if he 'bonds' with them 'he could last...maybe five years', they look horrified. Given the extended period of their commitment they are now both anxious about its implications for their own lives and its impact on their sense of ambition, identity and mortality.

Sophie: One of us always has to be here now.
 Jason: So I always have to be home? What if I don't want to be doing tech support for five more years?
 Sophie: We'll be forty in five years.
 Jason: Well forty is practically fifty and after fifty the rest is just loose change.
 Sophie: Loose change?
 Jason: Like not enough to get anything you really want.
 Sophie: God so for all practical purposes, in a month, that's it for us.

(*The Future*)

Although both of them are uncomfortable with the new time-frame of responsibility, Jason's language is more low-key and resentful whereas Sophie's is melodramatic and catastrophic. For Sophie, the idea of becoming the adoptive 'parents' of Paw Paw is equivalent to death: 'If we were dying, we'd definitely reprioritize' (Sophie in *The Future*). Parenthood and mortality become intrinsically connected and as such, references to time become heightened.

In her novel *It Chooses You*, July reveals the links between time and prospective parenthood in the genesis of *The Future*:

I didn't set out planning to write a script about time, but the longer it took to write it and get it made, the more time became a protagonist in my life...and then...it began to dawn on me that not only was I now old enough to have a baby, I was almost old enough to be too old to have a baby. Five years left.

(112)

This increasing awareness of time dovetailed directly into anxieties about fertility and potential parenthood during the financing period of film.

...all my time was spent measuring time. While I listened to strangers and tried to patiently have faith in the unknown, I was also wondering how long this would take, and if any of it really mattered compared to having a baby. Word on the street was that it did not. Nothing mattered compared to having a baby.

(July, *It Chooses You* 112)

Here, with characteristic self-deprecating humour, July is negotiating her identity as artist and possible mother and the tensions this creates feed directly into the formation of characters and narrative in *The Future*. The fact that Miranda July writes, directs and performs in the film further blurs the boundaries between autobiographical and creative impulse.

In my own work, anxieties I have observed both first and second hand regarding the prospect of parenthood fed into the conception of *Inhabit* and tonally I have aimed for a dynamic interplay between pathos and dry humour which parallels July's work, though its detailed manifestations betray a British, and in particular London, context in contrast to July's West Coast sensibility.

July recalls during the lead up to making *The Future* a sense that 'the only thing between me and death was this child. If I delayed having the child, then I could also delay death, sort of. So I was in a hurry...[to]...make the movie so I could have a child before it was too late – and I was also, secretly, not in a hurry' (113). July's ambivalent feelings towards becoming a parent are separated and embodied within the characters of Sophie and Jason.

Jason embraces life in a way that seems to be preparing him for commitment to parenthood whilst Sophie's terror of this commitment compels her to make destructive, egocentric choices and fall into a state of creative paralysis. July's method here chimes with Charlie Kaufman's, where he calls for writers to find that in themselves which 'makes you weak and pathetic. It is the thing that truly, truly, truly makes loving you impossible' (screenwriting lecture) because that is where one will find rich material for filmmaking. In *Inhabit* Melanie is 'unlovable' for the spectator, and beyond the end of the story potentially for Andy, because she deceives him and does a reckless thing. In *Nuclear* the characters of Ed, and to an extent Marion, are difficult to love because they aren't very good at loving each other, which leads them to look for love in inappropriate and destructive places.

This difficulty in giving and receiving love appropriately for the characters in both my own and July's work is fuelled by fear, including: fear of living an unsatisfactory life; fear of loving; fear of dying. These fears are fanned by the character's attitudes to time. Time is both contracted and expanded in *The Future*. It is contracted by the elderly man, from whom Jason buys a second-hand hairdryer, as he muses on his long relationship with his late wife, telling Jason, 'you're just in the middle of the beginning right now'. Also, in the metaphorical fantasy sequence when Sophie becomes a receptionist at the dance centre (Fig. 9). Her female friends come in pregnant, then with babies, then children, and finally their adult children, now orphaned, appear at the desk ready to enrol their own child to ballet class.



Fig. 9: *The Future*: Time contracts in pregnant friends sequence.

Sophie's fantasy shows her life standing still whilst other people's, her women friends', lives move on through procreation and parenthood. The repetition of costumes worn by the mothers and their children adds to the fantastical nature of the sequence and the generic notion of parenthood imagined by Sophie.

The idea of stopping time plays a key narrative role in the film. In the first scene Jason and Sophie play a game of pretending that he has managed to stop time (Fig. 10). This shared humour and sense of play suggests a closeness and intimacy between them.



Fig. 10: *The Future*: Jason and Sophie play at stopping time.

However, later when Sophie is about to tell Jason that she is leaving him to go and live with Marshall, he can't bear it. His pain is so acute that he stops time in order to avoid this moment happening (Fig. 11). This time, the time-stopping is treated narratively as real.



Fig. 11: *The Future*: Jason stops time to stop his heart being broken.

Stopping time is something adults know they can't do but something that children or child fiction often contemplates or plays out, for example in the classical fairytale *Sleeping Beauty* and in Penelope Lively's *The House In Norham Gardens* (95) . When Jason stops time, he becomes, in some way, a child too and as such is in need of a parent to support and advise him. The moon becomes this parental/father figure as the moon literally speaks to Jason about the inevitability of time. It is only when Jason realises that the day has arrived when they are due to collect Paw Paw (and become parents) that he summons the courage to re-start time (fig. 12) and face his romantic heartbreak in order to embrace the next stage of his life, that of becoming 'parent' to Paw Paw.

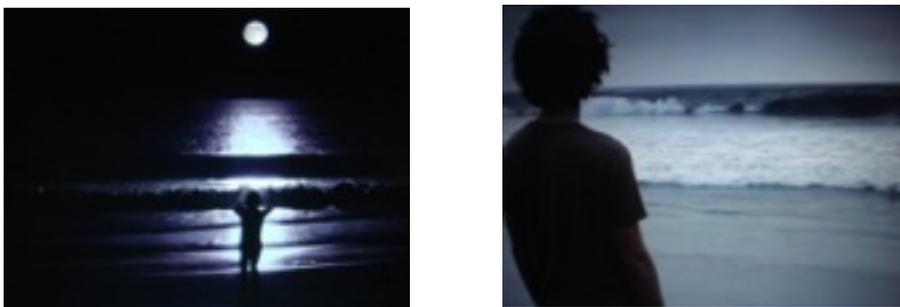


Fig. 12: *The Future*: Jason beckons the ocean and re-starts time.

Like Anna in *Unrelated*, though here treated with humour, Sophie has childlike qualities, such as a comfort object called 'Shirtie', and refers to herself as 'wild' like the cat and, by association, like a baby or child who has not yet been socialized. Andy, of *Inhabit*, similarly has childlike qualities (cheap fancy dress costume, fun-loving, self-centred) which create barriers to committing to parenthood.

Sophie's new role as step-mother to Marshall's daughter blurs the boundaries between child and adult. Although reticent about the girl burying herself in the garden, Sophie allows her to do it. It is only when the girl comes into the house in the night shivering that Sophie takes on an adult, parental role, giving her a hot bath to warm up. When Sophie hears that Jason had told the girl she was 'his cup of tea' Sophie is shocked (*The Future*). The subject of paedophilia is rendered comical because of the misunderstanding: Jason had made this remark innocently in an attempt to salve the girl's feelings after a derogatory comment from her father. This merging of adults and children is a recurring theme in July's films. In *Me, You and Everyone We Know* the female director of a prestigious art gallery unwittingly forms a sexual Internet relationship with a young boy. Julia Bryan-Wilson observes that Miranda July here has written 'a romance between an adult and a child that isn't offensive' (193) and notes that July 'recognises that the boundaries between children and adults are blurred' (190).

In a magical realist sequence, Sophie's comfort object independently seeks her out, creeping into Marshall's house. Reunited with 'Shirtie', Sophie is finally able to create and perform a dance. In this mysterious dance inside Shirtie, the character of Sophie merges with the performance artist Miranda July, as she becomes simultaneously an embryonic form and a disconcerting image of a bound adult (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13: *The Future*: Sophie's dance inside 'Shirtie'.

The transformation she undergoes through this dance, finally having become creative, is to have the courage to leave this suburban fantasy life and return to collect Paw Paw and take on the responsibility it will entail. Unfortunately, she is too late. Paw Paw 'died waiting'. Humour, irony, poeticism and pathos combine in this, and many other sequences in the film. Like Anna in *Unrelated*, Sophie slips unsteadily between childhood and adulthood as each imagines (differently) the relationship between self and parenthood. This tension between self-identity and parenthood is something that I have consciously injected into the adult characters and story design of *Inhabit* and *Nuclear*.

Inhabit

Inhabit is a short film about the emotional landscape of imagining parenthood, imagining the future, imagining what we are and what we might become should we make more new people, a little like us. *Inhabit* is set in the anxious and egocentric world of middle-class, arty Londoners and centres on a 40-something woman, Melanie, who desires to enter the realm of parenthood. Her actor boyfriend, Andy, egotistic and not yet forty, is terrified of the idea of becoming a father but doesn't want to lose Melanie.

Similarly to *The Future*'s Sophie and Jason, Melanie and Andy could be described as an 'under-achieving' couple: non home-owning, living in a council flat amongst neighbours they have little in common with except bug infestations. Murray Pomerance argues that 'the family... is a tiny factory' which supports 'unquestioning devotion to both capitalism and the wage economy' (2). However, by centring on middle-class characters who are located outside of traditional, respectable capitalist identities, *The Future* and *Inhabit* explore both desire for and resistance to creating a family within contexts which challenge conventional models of the nuclear family in relation to capitalism. These films are populated by characters who are educated but not wealthy, including dancers, actors, artists and grown-ups who dress up. The family models are ironised (Sophie and Jason's potential 'baby' is a sickly, stray cat) or queered (a three-way triangle of potential parentage between Melanie, Danny and Andy).

In her investigation into the way men 'mother' (parent), Andrea Doucet examines how men approach the three demands of mothering (parenting), as defined by Sara Ruddick (cited by Doucet, 170): preservation; growth; and social acceptability. Doucet found that men attended to each of these responsibilities, though frequently in different ways: prioritizing fun, outdoors, physical activity and risk-taking. This approach is glimpsed in Andy, as a would-be, could-be dad when he jokes with Frank and Clara as they enter their friends' house (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14: *Inhabit*: Andy having fun with the party hosts' children.

Melanie sees Andy being playful with her friend's children and recognises a disjunction between Andy's fear of becoming a father and her perception of his potential to take on the role positively. Andy doesn't see this fracture. Whilst I would agree with Doucet on the need to cast off 'the maternal lens' when assessing men's parenting abilities and to value their unique parenting strategies on their own terms, in Melanie and Andy's story, I highlight the counter-side to Doucet's observations and propose that men's understanding of the expectation (both their own and others') that they would be much more involved in parenting than their own fathers had been, may create a reluctance to take up the role. This is the situation Andy and Melanie find themselves in at the beginning of *Inhabit*. Ironically, men's increased share of the parenting role in recent decades, coupled with women's increased presence in professional domains, has caused new difficulties for women in relation to becoming parents. A single woman or a lesbian woman can utilize assisted reproductive technologies to have a baby right up to, and in some cases beyond, her natural fertility window, but a woman, like Melanie, in a heterosexual relationship can find herself in a very modern kind of stalemate when she wants a baby but he doesn't. This is the dilemma I wished to explore in *Inhabit*.

Emily Jackson, a professor of law and medical science, makes a similar point in regard to the practice of egg-freezing:

Most women don't freeze their eggs because their workplace is insufficiently flexible – much more commonly, women are freezing their eggs because they do not have a suitable partner, or they have a partner who claims to be not ready for fatherhood.
(cited in Wiseman)

Although a different story, the same problem could arise for a man if the desires were reversed, though the biological co-ordinates would obviously be different: he doesn't have the same degree of fertility decline, yet he is incapable of parturition.

Andy's feelings are not explored as fully as Melanie's in *Inhabit* because I took the choice to make this Melanie's story and, being a short film there is less opportunity to give screen time to non-protagonists. Nonetheless, Andy's fear and egotism are suggested in the scene where he talks anxiously to the party host Wilf (Fig.15) and when he resists Melanie's sexual advances.



Fig. 15: *Inhabit*: Andy talks to Wilf anxiously about fatherhood.

Andy's comment, 'we don't want to mess up our habits,' whilst functioning as a weak joke about their costumes aimed at deflecting the situation, also refers sub-textually to his wish to maintain the status quo and habitude of their current, child-free lives. Fleeing to the party, Andy shoots a red light on his bike in his eagerness to escape from Melanie's request and the idea of parenthood (Fig.16).



Fig. 16: *Inhabit*: Andy shoots a red light.

Melanie and Andy both imagine the other life they could have, as parents, and have conflicting responses to their fantasised other self. Until the end of the film, this imagined other life is impossible because it brings forth a clash of wills between them regarding an act

that demands to be mutually decided upon and is impossible because of the limits of their imagination. Melanie can only imagine the arguments for why she feels she must conceive which lead her to consider an alternative way of attaining her aim to become pregnant, without Andy's consent or knowledge. Andy cannot imagine that what he could gain from becoming a parent would outweigh what he perceives he would lose. This viewpoint was in evidence during the casting session for Andy where two actors improvised a conversation around the prospect of becoming a father. The actor who was actually a father, broke the improvisation to joke that all the negatives were in fact true. Despite his reticence, over the evening Andy makes a shift towards Melanie's imaginative terrain and finally wishes to have (potentially procreative) sex with her (Fig.17).



Fig. 17: *Inhabit*: Andy finally comes around, but it may be too late.

The setting of *Inhabit* on a night when the couple are attending their friends' satirical 'tarts and vicars' costume party, engages the characters' performance of identity as well as contributing to the comic tone. Melanie has chosen a nun's habit as her costume and has styled herself carefully by hiring a convincing outfit. Unbeknown to Melanie, Andy has also gone for a clerical look with a joke-shop Franciscan monk outfit. In contrast, Andy's costume is cheap and unconvincing with a plastic cross and skullcap through which his hair shows (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: *Inhabit*: Andy and Melanie's clerical costumes.

I have utilised the theme of chastity, suggested by their costumes, to lend both irony and pathos to the characters' mutual struggle regarding potential parenthood. Ann Kaplan traces the longstanding tropes of angel/witch within cultural representations of motherhood (*Motherhood and Representation* 9, 12, 13, 24, 45-46, 48, 81, 107, 111, 117, 120, 127, 179, 181, 183), a tension which is held ironically within the representation of Melanie's character. Her nun costume is suggestive of the angel mother whilst her self-insemination of solicited sperm evinces both virgin and whore mother imagery. My intention in juxtaposing these divergent discourses on motherhood within one character is to prompt humour and pathos simultaneously whilst debunking this reductive, yet pervasive, dichotomy. Andy, meanwhile, is comically de-sexualised by his costume and by Melanie potentially becoming pregnant without him.

Stella Bruzzi argues that whilst in life 'the father is often considered the make-do parent, the lesser parent', in Hollywood this is not the case (xvii). Citing Ted Kramer in *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979) and Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), she states:

Hollywood is supportive of fathers in a way that it is not supportive of mothers; it is a patriarchal institution and it respects the patriarch.

(xviii)

Although each of the three films discussed in this chapter are non-mainstream, it is notable, in relation to Bruzzi's argument, that it is in *The Future* (U.S.) where positive father

roles are present (Jason is more willing and able to commit than Sophie, and Marshall performs the day to day care of his daughter whilst the mother is an absent 'free spirit') and in *Unrelated* and *Inhabit* (UK) where (potential) father figures are aggressive (Charlie in *Unrelated*), absent (Alex, and the biological father of Varena's sons in *Unrelated*) or ineffectual (Andy initially agrees to try for a baby and then back-tracks in *Inhabit*).

My approach to exploring this subject within a fiction film was inspired by elements of both July and Hogg's work. *Inhabit* uses humour to deal with its subject (cf. July) but the issue is still given serious attention (cf. Hogg). Whilst in mainstream cinema, issues of conception, fertility and child-rearing are often addressed through a broader comedy (*Parenthood*, 1989; *Conception*, 2011; *Three Men and A Baby*, 1987; *Life As We Know It*, 2010; *Baby Boom*; 1987; *Nine Months*, 1995; *Knocked Up*, 2007; *Baby Mama*, 2008; *The Switch*, 2010; *Starbuck*, 2011; and its US remake *Delivery Man*, 2013) where the problems tend to be belittled through the humour. In Miranda July's work (and other independent films such as Lynn Shelton's *My Sister's Sister* (2011) and Jason Reitman's *Juno* (2007)), and I hope to an extent in my own work, a more understated and poetic humour resides and I seek to blend this with some of the delicate attentiveness I recognise in Hogg's work. An example of how I seek to achieve this mix in *Inhabit* is the use of understated humour in the 'DNA' close-ups of Danny, (see page 51), and the detail of Andy leaving Melanie behind as he shoots the red light: a small moment which tells much about their relationship.

Susan Rubin Suleiman argues for the transformative and progressive qualities of the playful mother in art, both as a subject and as creator, relating her idea as close to 'Freud's notion that humour is both pleasure producing and rebellious' (Suleiman cited in Bassin: 279). Miranda July engages in transgressive play in her work; in *The Future* she creates and performs the soon-to-be-mother-of-PawPaw as playful (Sophie dances and makes

strange shapes in her comfort object; she makes self-ironising jokes, for example, stating that her dancing class was cancelled ‘on behalf of my being over-qualified’ and that ‘the president was there’ - Sophie in *The Future*). Whilst July was not a mother herself at the time of making *The Future*, she was considering it and her thoughts about prospective parenthood surrounded and occupied the film (*It Chooses You* 112). After making *The Future* she spent three years writing her first novel *The First Bad Man* during which time she also became a mother.

I seeded this idea of a baby in the book. I had the idea before I was pregnant, I knew I was like “I’m 37, I want to have a baby, chances are over the course of this book I’ll learn a lot about babies and become a mother.” I knew my protagonist would end up with a baby at the end, but I had nothing to say about that for the whole first draft when I was pregnant. That changed, and I think having a baby kind of reset me to zero, I felt like new in the world again.

(July quoted in Siddall)

Across a trajectory of these two projects of July’s, both the artist and the subject engage

Suleiman’s idea:

...that playful inventions of avant-garde writing, starting with surrealism and continuing to present work, can provide an impetus, perhaps even a metaphor or model, for reimagining the mother in her social and child-rearing role. This reimagining takes the form of a displacement, from what I call the patriarchal mother to the playful mother.

(Suleiman in Bassin: 273)

Humour, surrealism and fantasy are tools that are present in *The Future* and across July’s canon of work in her writing and performance as well as her films.

I have sought, similarly, to employ ironic humour and elements of fantasy into *Inhabit*: a story about a woman’s solution to a situation of fracture between her biology, her maternal desire and her relationship with her partner. The fantasy element is suggested by the heightened production design of the party house location and the fancy-dress costumes (Fig. 19) as well as the impulsive action Melanie takes.

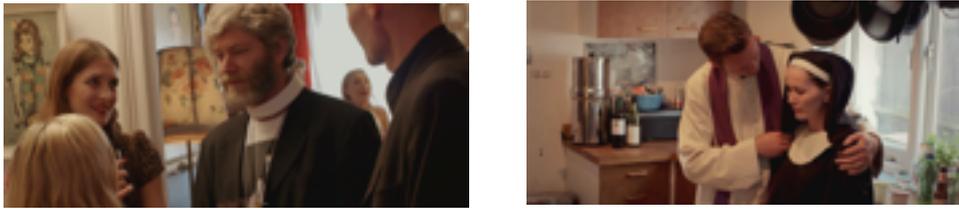


Fig. 19: *Inhabit*: Kitsch party house and fancy dress costumes.

The cinematography embodies tension between internal and external worlds combining an objective viewpoint of wide and medium-wide shots (Fig. 20) with moments of subjective, close-up framing: the opening shot of mascara on Melanie's eyelashes; the drip of wine crawling down a wine glass; the tarmac on the road as she cycles home after the insemination; and details of Danny's face as she contemplates combining her DNA with his (Fig. 21).



Fig. 20: *Inhabit*: Wide shots.



Fig. 21: *Inhabit*: Close-ups.

The 'DNA' close-ups of Danny's face produce a humorous effect (for me the first time we cut the sequence together and as witnessed in the audience at the premiere screening at the London Short Film Festival in January 2015) because Melanie is so brazenly objectifying Danny and making judgements about the suitability of his genes for her child-to-be. Similarly, in clinical (commercial) cases of sperm and egg donorship donors are checked for desirable qualities, but by transferring this genetic judgement process to a low-tech, informal and unplanned situation in a kitchen with a plastic syringe, humour is generated. I have noted readers (at script stage) and spectators being appalled and/or applauding of Melanie's actions and the strength of her desire to reproduce. This ambivalence speaks

from a history of feminist thought about motherhood and from a post-feminist, emergent sense of the rights and responsibilities of fathers.

There were more close-up or 'macro' shots in the script which didn't make it into the final cut (see *Inhabit* shooting script in Appendix) including: a woodlouse (14); a pregnant beetle (3); and highly magnified sperm (16). These images were intended to suggest the interior world of Melanie, both physical and psychological but once in the cutting room, I judged the demands of narrative alongside my interest in more poetic/philosophical material. This was a key moment in deciding between narrative/dramatic demands and more experimental forms. Due to the brevity of the short film format, I decided to use the close-ups that functioned *both* narratively and reflectively. I cut the shots of the woodlouse and the pregnant beetle because they held up the narrative and didn't support the emotional truth of the drama. The microscopic 'sperm' shots (actually tadpoles filmed in a pond and transformed into negative during post-production) appeared too symbolic when cut into the bike journey home, as planned in the script, so instead I overlaid them onto the final credit sequence so that the sperm swim through the white letters of the credits; an image of what was happening inside Melanie's body beyond the end of the film. This is a very subtle effect which is only perceptible in a theatrical projection setting but it felt more fitting to my taste. These developments from shooting script to final cut encapsulate the dynamic process of filmmaking whereby, through collaborative engagement, the blueprint for the film (the screenplay) continues to be re-written and re-imagined until the absolute last technical detail is applied. In the colour grade, I worked with the colourist and the DoP to create a summer evening look linking back to the original intention of the script despite, through practical necessity, the shoot having been scheduled in the daytime. With the sound designer/editor, we re-recorded the sound of the make-up bag being unzipped and the mascara 'popped' open several times before we got a sound that felt right for the open-

ing of the film. This technical trajectory accompanies the conceptual trajectory that evolves from initial idea, through the writing and during production and post-production. It takes time for the ideas, sounds and images to consolidate. Time is also an idea held within the subject.

As in *The Future*, notions of time in *Inhabit* cross-fertilise with ideas about parenthood.

Time is an issue for both Melanie and Andy but they assimilate its relationship to imagined parenthood in opposite ways. Andy is fearful of losing his freedom to use his time as he wishes, for example to go on tour with a theatre show. Desiring 'a child of [her] own' (Bowlby: 2013, Lesnik-Oberstein: 2008), Melanie fears the approaching loss of her fertility and feels time to be of the essence, lamenting to her friend Danny: 'we've been "not trying" for one and a half years' (*Inhabit*). Andy's reluctance to become a father has manifested not as direct refusal but as acceptance followed by evasion as he avoids sexual contact with her when she is ovulating without voicing his continued resistance to parenthood. This unspoken back-tracking is felt profoundly by Melanie, prompting her to take the radical action of inseminating herself with her friend's sperm.

In 'From Rambo Sperm to Egg Queens,' Bryld, Mette and Lykke compare two versions of a documentary originating from material by Lennart Nilsson, *The Miracle of Love* (Sweden, 2000) and the US remake, *Life's Greatest Miracle* (2001). Whilst the Swedish version portrays a heteronormative story of the pro-active sperm seeking out and penetrating the passive ovum and parallels this narrative with a framing story of a couple who similarly play out these traditional roles, the US version uses the same Nilsson material but presents it with a different slant via the voiceover, editing and framing story: here it is the woman's body that guides the sperm towards the active egg and the couple in the accompanying macro story similarly challenge traditional stereotypical roles. I would argue that *Inhabit* also queers the heteronormative narrative of sperm meets egg, though in a different way: it

is 'gay' sperm from a platonic loving friend that offers Melanie the potential for procreation as opposed to the withheld 'hetero' sperm of her boyfriend and Melanie takes an independent and active decision about her body when faced with the indecision and paralysis demonstrated by Andy.

Danny's readiness to donate sperm suggests impetuosity as well as compassion. He seems not to have considered the implications for Melanie and Andy's relationship or his own relationship with his partner. Yet he and Melanie have talked about this over several years during their enduring friendship so, outside of the impact on their respective partners, he has given thought to the consequences. Danny remarks that their options can be discussed and settled during the pregnancy, 'we've got nine months to sort that out', suggesting he is capable of envisioning a non-nuclear family, non-traditional parenthood set-up. His use of the word 'we' shows that he considers himself involved rather than simply providing an anonymous sperm donation. He is being active and responsive to Melanie's desire. The fact that he doesn't know what the children's medicine syringe is tells us he is inexperienced with children yet he has the faith and courage to try it, unlike Andy.

During the insemination, Danny waits nervously outside the bathroom. Directorally, I was making a parallel to the anachronistic role of the nervous father-to-be waiting outside the delivery room (Fig. 22). A photograph of the party hosts' daughter is positioned in the background on the wall, suggestive of a thought bubble.

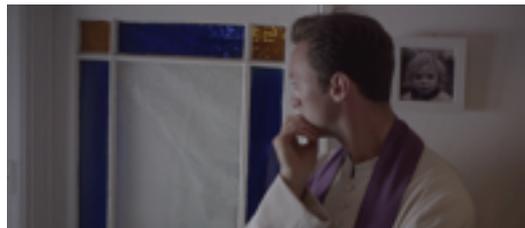


Fig. 22: *Inhabit*: Danny, nervous father-to-be.

Following this scene, Danny's lie to Andy in the corridor, after Melanie has just left, betrays the deception of his actions and a rare moment of sympathy is invited towards Andy at this moment: poor, stupid, frightened Andy who has no idea what his lovely Melanie and this man have just done. His masculinity has been diminished. With his wigged, bald head, he personifies the sperm that was beaten in the race to the ovum. Meanwhile Danny's masculinity has been bolstered through his active physical and psychological shift towards potential fatherhood. It is precisely through the attack on the heteronormative nuclear family model, generated by their actions, that both Danny and Melanie's identities have been asserted and emboldened. In discussion after screenings of *Inhabit*, three audience members called for a sequel and two for a feature-length version. As well as being a response to the open ending, this perhaps also indicates a desire to see disruption of the heteronormative family model played out.

In developing the screenplay for *Inhabit*, I tussled between two scenarios: one where Melanie goes through with the insemination; and the other where she decides against it and flushes her friend's semen down the drain. I was aware that the 'insemination' version was likely to be more dramatic and entertaining but finally decided that the 'flush' version was more authentic and believable given the magnitude of the possible consequences if she went through with it and that these notions needed to be digestible within the short film form. Whilst I was interested in making a short film where something big almost happens but in the end doesn't, much like much of everyday life (see Chapter Two), I was also still intrigued by the idea of this woman taking decisive, if ill-advised, action to transform her circumstances. This assertive, vigorous and active development of her character appealed to me. Finally, the shooting script contained two versions of the key scene in the bathroom and I proceeded to film both versions (see video link '*Inhabit* - flush version' Appendix 3, p. 164). As soon as each version was assembled during the edit, it became clear to me which one to choose: the insertion version. In the flush version, whilst narratively more

everyday and more believable, the final scene (when Melanie is in bed and Andy comes home and apologises, finally ready to become a father) seemed like too much of a closed, romantic ending suggesting that they will finally have procreative sex and live happily ever after. Also, Melanie appeared too passive having, effectively, taken no action to change her circumstances. In the insertion version, the final scene was immediately shot through with increased depth: ethical doubts potentially felt by both Melanie and the spectator; the inter-relational complexity between Andy and Melanie given that both of them have shifted positions in their attitudes and actions towards becoming parents; and the narrative ramifications. What will happen now? Are they going to have sex? Will she become pregnant? If so, whose will it be? Will she tell Andy and how will he respond? And in the far future, how will her actions affect the child, if one is created?

This end to the story also seemed right due to the style of the film. The kitsch production design at the party location, along with the fancy dress costumes, countered by the measured performance style of the actors, resulted in a poignant tone that I felt was served better by the complex ramifications of insertion version than the flush version. Through making *Inhabit*, and placing it in context with the films selected for analysis throughout this project, I understood more pronouncedly than I had making my previous films, the importance of marrying the style of narrative with the style of filmmaking. In *The Future*, the humour and lyricism set up early in the film allows for a fantastical action like the stopping of time to be an indigenous and authentic part of it, whereas in *Unrelated*, with its hyper-realist and understated style, a character leaning over another to take a cereal packet at the dining table is enough to suggest a charged, erotic alliance.

The challenging process of finding the seed of an idea for a film (or any creative work) and using imagination, intellect and physical sensibility to produce and nurture something new

into existence, presents a poetic echo of the experience of reproduction and parenthood. As Lucy Fischer observes, many female authors 'come to see their creation in human reproductive terms' (216) and she cites the poet Denise Levertov comparing the process of writing to childbirth:

The poet is in labor. She has been told that it will not hurt but it has hurt so much that pain and struggle seem, just now, the only reality. But at the very moment when she feels she will die, or that she is already in hell, she hears the doctor saying, "Those are the shoulders you are feeling now" and she knows the head is out then, and the child is pushing and sliding out of her. Insistent, a poem.

(Levertov in Fischer 216)

Whilst this experience of 'birthing' a creative work could arguably be felt equally by practitioners of all genders, parents, and non-parents, in the context of this chapter and the three films I have discussed, it seems particularly pertinent that all three writer/directors/conceivers are women who have negotiated a personal route through imagining and becoming, or not, parents in actual life whilst creating film fictions that explore the terrain of imagining parenthood. Hogg says, of the relationship between parenthood and filmmaking:

I would be unlikely to be making the films I have been making if I had had children. I see my films as a way of creating something. Which is to say I don't think they are entirely dissimilar. At least, I know that I would be caught up and worried about my children constantly in something like the same way. That doesn't mean I am happy not to have had children. The feelings of sadness about not having children never go away. Well, they come and go. I am already anticipating what life will be like not having grandchildren. And imagining the pleasure that I will not have then.

(quoted in Adams)

Here Hogg is comparing a projected future for an imagined self without children with a parallel trajectory for one that had children and grandchildren. This structure of parallel narratives is similar to those played out literally by July in *The Future* so whilst tonally very different films, they share, along with *Inhabit*, ideas of imagined futures in relation to selfhood, love and responsibility in relation to notions of parenthood.

The characters of Anna (and through conjecture her partner Alex) in *Unrelated*, Sophie and Jason in *The Future*, and Melanie and Andy in *Inhabit* each, to a greater or lesser extent, negotiate a route through lingering childhood states and through a shift in their imagined futures: as parents or otherwise. Each film ensures there is space at the end for the audience to imagine the future for these characters and this is one way in which we perceive the characters as 'real' (Spitz: 4). Anna and Alex may or may not go on to have children together but, crucially for Anna, she has begun to dare to imagine that a childless future with Alex is possible. Sophie and Jason are distressed that they have lost their metaphorical child, Paw Paw, and that their relationship has foundered in the lead up to the adoption, but amongst the sadness of the ending is a lingering hope that perhaps they will be able to re-unite as lovers and continue into a future together. For Melanie and Andy, there is a sense that whilst the situation between them has potentially become highly problematic (if she is in fact pregnant), they have also moved forward: she has taken action towards motherhood and he has accepted the idea of fatherhood. The complexities of imagined parenthood are embodied, in different ways, in each of these couples' stories.

In each of these three films and (looking forward to the following chapters) in all the films I look at, there is the question of where lie the limits of parenthood. In the case of a childless woman passing the age of fertility or a couple terrified of the prospect of responsibility, does the aspiring parenthood taper off as the desire to have a child transforms into new desires and new preoccupations? Or does that trauma reside somewhere never to wholly disappear? In the case of men and women who have children, do they have them forever and are they forever parents? I would argue that yes, once a parental relationship is established (either through 'traditional' biology, reproductive technologies, adoption or a group parental set-up) it lasts for as long as they and the child survive but the nature of

that parental role must constantly transform and is, ultimately a journey from nurture to relinquishment.

There always is, or was, or will be, another person or institution or social world in the life of the child, with whom or with which it has been or will be divided. With relief, with grief, or with pleasure; sometimes with all of these. There is never, once and for all, a child of one's own.

(233)

Bowlby's reference to 'grief' and 'pleasure' suggest the ambivalence of parental experience as it manoeuvres between the, sometimes, competing drives of selfhood, love and responsibility.

But if people do go on to become parents, what then? What changes to identity, interactions and relationship to time might they experience? The next two chapters look at films telling stories inspired by these questions and investigate the ways these films use film form to tell those stories.

Chapter Two: Family Life

Everydayness on screen

In this chapter, I look at films depicting families in the midst of their everyday lives and how the mundane and routine aspects of parenting and family life can be expressed in cinema and to what effect. I investigate how the everyday can be expressed within the contexts of the film and theoretical texts examined, and in relation to my own practice. Key to looking at elements of everydayness on screen, is the question of why might we bother to attend to it within the medium of cinema.

Ben Highmore's work on everyday life features prominently in this chapter due to the expansive way in which Highmore relates historical and contemporary thought on the everyday which I have found useful, and because, like Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Georges Perec before him, his trust in the worth of attending to the everyday is particularly resonant to me as a filmmaker and screenwriter. I will also be applying Henri Lefebvre's notion of 'rhythmanalysis' to the selected films and charting its confluence with my own films. Henri Lefebvre developed his notion of *rhythmanalysis* as a means to attend to the everyday through the analysis of biological, psychological and social rhythms and their relationship to time and space. For Lefebvre, 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is **rhythm**' (2).

After applying Lefebvre's concept of rhythm to the selected films and my feature screenplay *Nuclear*, I investigate what screenwriting and filmmaking methods have been employed to express the everyday within a context of independent, twenty-first century cinema.

Looking at the intersection with narratology, I bring in the work of Arthur Berger and in discussing authenticity and the use of non-professional actors, I refer to the writing of Karen Lury. Stephen Connor's call to cultural phenomenology is also referenced, relating to a more expansive application of the everyday to encompass an approach to academic writing, which I extend to practices of screenwriting.

Whilst my emphasis is still on how sensations of parenthood are or could be evoked through the cinematic medium, the concentration on the familial everyday inevitably brings up the interaction between parents/carers and offspring (both child and adult). Therefore, I wish to open this chapter up a little to examine cinematic (re)presentations of family life to describe these interactions between parents and children, parents and parents, children and children within the context of everydayness.

In this chapter, I have chosen to place *Everyday* by Michael Winterbottom (2012) in dialogue with the second film by Joanna Hogg: *Archipelago* (2010), because both films give serious attention to the everyday within a domestic, family situation which intersects with my own practice in *Nuclear* and to a certain degree my short film *Inhabit*. I will examine how the selected films and my practice intersect with Berger's distinctions between the everyday and narrative. I make additional references to other films where the domestic and the everyday are prominent including Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* (2014), due to its conceptual and practical similarity to *Everyday*, and the significant antecedent of cinematic scrutiny of domestic routine, *Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975). Through my encounters with the selected films and critical writings, I assess the ways in which my own film practice resonates and diverges and analyse how these texts have affected my practice process.

Attending to 'parenthood' and the 'everyday' is effectively attending to everyone and everything: we all come from parents of one type or another and we all have our own everyday experience. To delineate, I wish to investigate intersections between cinematic attention to the everyday and the demands of story. I will examine how stories involving interactions between parents and offspring can be specifically explored in this hinterland between cinematic dramatic form and a desire to describe, picture and sense certain versions of everyday experience.

The everyday exists in relation to the exceptional. Georges Perec considers the human tendency to focus on the exceptional:

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extraordinary...Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist... as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal...

(Perec, 1997: 205. Originally published, 1973)

However, what is exceptional for one person may be everyday for another so in an attempt to define the everyday, the question of whose, where and when must be taken into account. Clearly, the contemporary everyday experience of a child in Syria will be very different from the everyday of a banker working in the City of London, or a pensioner living in Athens. Beyond this, endless further distinctions of everyday existence occur for each individual dependent on specific identity-defining perimeters (ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexual-orientation, life experience etc.). However, if these limitations of application are acknowledged, the everyday can be located in the residue, once the exceptional is taken away. Perec asks:

What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?

(Perec, 1997: 205-6. Originally published, 1973)

When the children in *Everyday* brush their teeth or eat their cereal, when the characters in *Archipelago* sit fiddling with their virgin marys during an awkward silence that lasts thirty-two seconds, and when Marion folds the family laundry, it is 'all the rest' that is being described.

The challenges I have had developing my feature screenplay, *Nuclear*, centre around finding my personal line between an urge to describe the ordinary, a specific ordinary, and the demands of a dramatic form. Finding that line is difficult and I have been inspired by Hogg's and Winterbottom's films for navigating a personal and original path along it.

Nuclear tells the story of a family fractured by the arrival of a stranger, whom each member becomes charmed by in turn (see Appendix 1 for film synopsis). Whilst it is the fracture and the charm aspects of the story that provide its narrative backbone, the screenplay is permeated by the everyday. We see the characters shopping, cooking, washing-up, dressing and urinating. Ed's work as an artist centres around the placement of domestic appliances in incongruous natural landscapes (a washing machine on a beach; fridges in fields). At a talk to art students, he cites his work as being about 'the rhythms of everyday domestic life' (*Nuclear* 45) yet this provides an ironic tension to his character in that his engagement with domestic life is fractured itself. Whilst Ed cooks, it is event-cooking that he performs: elaborate recipes that beg praise and leave disarray in the kitchen. When he puts his son to bed, he reads old classics that he himself read as a child, rather than stories that Sam would prefer. Although Ed makes his physical presence known, he is emotionally distant from his wife and children. In this sense, the everyday provides both texture and narrative drive, and indeed functions usefully to conflate the two.

A prime question that arises when considering renderings of the everyday in cinema, and when encountering *Everyday* and *Archipelago*, is: why bother? The film critic, Lisa Mullen, in her review of *Everyday in Sight and Sound* echoes a common response:

The bare details of everyday life are just not that interesting - if they were, we wouldn't need cinema.

(92)

Yet, for me, and presumably Hogg and Winterbottom, it is precisely the application of cinema as a tool for looking at these details that re-invigorates both the actions themselves and the tool of enquiry. Although cinema is a potent medium for escapism and fantasy, it also has a tremendous capacity to focus on the smaller, more recognisable moments of life. De Certeau, Lefebvre, Perec, Conner, Merleau-Ponty and Highmore, amongst others, have claimed the aesthetic, political, humanistic and philosophical merits of paying serious attention to the everyday.

Political aesthetic inquiry into the ordinary has a responsibility to try and understand the way that the opaque and oblique machinations of global politics (economic, environmental and cultural) punctuate and syncopate the rhythms of ordinary life. Yet perhaps the bigger obligation is to understand and champion forms of ordinary culture that are generous and world-enlarging but that also maintain the securities of habitual life that are a necessity for any ordinary life.

(Highmore, 2011: 20)

A distinction should be recognised here between Highmore's call for such an 'obligation' to be applied to cultural theory, and how that obligation might relate to a creative film-work. Too prominent a sense of political purpose would lead to didactic, propagandist cinema, yet simply by choosing to make the everyday prominent within a fiction film, the filmmaker speaks politically as well as aesthetically.

Ben Walters, in his article on *Weekend* (2011), *Keep The Lights On* (2012) and *I Want Your Love* (2012), argues that these films represent a political stance giving worth to the everyday lives of gay men (Guardian 2012). This demonstrates how the promotion of the everyday lives of particular demographics, traditionally under-represented in mainstream

cinema, to a position deemed worthy of cinematic representation is in itself a political act.

Whilst not so overtly political, screen representation of the mundane, repeated routines of parenthood similarly give currency to that which is more commonly invisible.

In *Everyday*, Karen provides 'securities of habitual life' for her four children despite feeling deeply lonely. In *Nuclear*, Marion occasionally misses her son's bedtime in order to write and, ultimately, risks her relationship with both her husband and daughter through a sexual encounter with Angelos, yet alongside these exceptions, she consistently shops and cooks for her family, cares for her ageing father and fits the school run around her work. Daniel Miller has written of the love and care that are inherent in acts of shopping (in particular food shopping for family members):

...shopping does not merely reflect love, but is a major form in which this love is manifested or reproduced...As long as it is clear that we understand by this term 'love' a normative ideology manifested largely as a practice within long-term relationships and not just some romantic vision of an idealised moment of courtship, then the term is entirely appropriate.

(18)

The qualities Miller attaches to shopping could be extended to other acts of domestic and parental routine, such as putting a child to bed or hanging out the laundry suggesting that, in some senses, the word 'love' can be used almost interchangeably with 'everyday' when applied to repetitive routines conducted for and between family members. Seeing Karen toil relentlessly to provide a stable environment for her children despite her husband being absent suggests that, *Everyday*, like Italian neo-realist films before it, offers a cultural artefact which contributes to a language of love and kindness.

The work of an aesthetic politics of the ordinary may be to produce imaginative acts for thinking the seemingly impossible: a culture that encourages habits of generosity and world-enlarging improvisation and adaptation, while also maintaining habits of comfort and stability.

(Highmore. 2011: 171)

This sounds very close to the aspirations many parents have for bringing up their children and for the more positive experiences children might have of existing within a family.

However, these aspirations, for real-life parents are impossible to maintain without interruptions. Similarly, within narrative and drama, there is the demand and expectation of conflict. Standard screenwriting practice and industry screenwriting figures, including Robert McKee and Linda Seger amongst others, have developed Aristotle's argument that drama is dependent on conflict, particularly within Western culture, and the assertion that there is no story in watching people exist without conflict. So, is Highmore's seductive call to aesthetic politics incompatible with filmic representations of everyday life? Or is it rather a matter of scale and sensitivity to detail? If a film character shoots another or gets embroiled in a car chase, then the conflict is evident and the dramatic tension is felt. However, if the register is pulled right back to the quotidian, then smaller actions and interactions have equal, or for some, greater dramatic tension. As Chantal Akerman said of the mother character in *Jeanne Dealman*....

When she bangs the glass on the table and you think the milk might spill,
that's as dramatic as the murder.

(quoted in Margulies, 65)

Indeed whilst the glass on the table, along with the peeling of the potatoes or the filtering of the coffee, are invested with the tension of potential, the actual murder at the end of the film is downplayed, almost as if it were a logical conclusion to her afternoon's activities - a part of her everyday life - just as Marion's heart failure whilst she is washing up is the next, and final, moment in her everyday life. By placing these juxtapositional moments within a film narrative, the mundane and the exceptional co-exist simultaneously within the everyday that are described. Death is not treated dramatically in *Jeanne Dealman* or *Nuclear* but matter-of-factly: it happens suddenly and from the everyday. However, there is an engagement with dramatic tension in both films. In *Jeanne Dealman* there is a growing sense that something terrible is going to happen, as in *Everyday*, but we don't know what. In *Nuclear* the death of Marion is foreshadowed at the beginning thereby imbuing the portrait of this family with a tension of anticipated tragedy. Inspired by Ackerman, Hogg and Winter-

bottom, I have consciously sought to draw out dramatic tension from the everyday and, conversely, to downplay the dramatic treatment of the exceptional moments in the action.

In *Archipelago*, tension manifests in the minutiae of the characters' behaviour, such as when Edward leaves the restaurant table or Cynthia the dining table. In the scene in *Inhabit* where Andy shoots a red light on his bike leaving Melanie alone at the traffic lights, much is intimated about their relationship by this very ordinary, traditionally un-dramatic moment. It is a matter of tuning an audience in to the pulses and significances of small moments - something that cinema has a wonderful capacity to do, and as such, is perfectly placed as the medium within which to create these 'imaginative acts'.

The films discussed in this chapter provide spaces within film narratives for small things to happen within the domain of parent/child interactions. Like Michael Winterbottom, Joanna Hogg and, before them, Chantal Ackerman, amongst others, I wish to reassign value and meaning to these moments, these gestures and actions through both my critical reflections and my own practice. In practical terms, during the production of *Inhabit*, I actively facilitated the inclusion of parents within the cast and crew and, where necessary, worked around the demands of parental responsibilities whilst maintaining focus on achieving the highest possible technical and creative standards of work within the given budgetary, time and equipment constraints. I strive to bring filmmaking into the realms of the everyday, both in terms of content and production, so that it may both speak to and be articulated by a more diverse range of people.

Everyday, like *Boyhood*, documents the experiences of parent/child characters as they muddle through their lives, almost as a diary might do. Talking of journals and diaries, Berger comments, 'there is no plot to these texts, though after a number of years writers may be able to detect threads in them that they did not notice while writing them' (167). A

process similar to this occurs in *Everyday* and *Archipelago*: there doesn't seem perceptibly to be a narrative as it goes along but afterwards the film leaves a trace that connects its fragments. Through the different drafts of my scripts, I have sought to balance the accidental and the incidental with narrative cohesion: this became particularly central to the development of the *Nuclear* screenplay (see Chapter Three).

In considering what constitutes the everyday, Berger defines the differences between narratives and everyday life as follows:

<u>Narratives</u>	<u>Everyday Life</u>
Have beginning, middle, end	All middle
Focused	Diffuse
Conflict intense, continual	conflict muted, random
Each story different	repeat performances
Curiosity and resolution	vague goals
Eventfulness basic	eventlessness basic

(Berger 162)

In fiction films that attend to the everyday, there is an immediate conflict, for the filmmaker, between which side of the list to draw from. The films I have selected to discuss in this chapter evoke elements on the 'everyday' list more prominently than those from the 'narrative' list. Whilst useful for selecting films and for highlighting the tensions inherent in portraying the everyday in cinema (particularly in the feature-length film), this binary is too reductive if applied in isolation. As such, it is also necessary to consider the nuances of cross-over between the elements on each side of the list as they are applied in practice.

Berger notes:

...narratives are made-up stories that unfold over time. Everyday life is real; it is the basic stuff, we might say, of our lives. And it goes on, more or less automatically, until we die. We can see, here and there, sequences and narrative elements in our everyday lives, but that is not the same as saying they are narratives.

(161)

Yet, as soon as those everyday actions become selected, ordered and represented on screen, they become a narrative. In Winterbottom's *Everyday*, we watch the minutiae of Karen's everyday life with her children and, as we see them grow, there is a sense of almost having lived with this family over these five years. Yet it is also a story about how a family endure separation. Equally, 'real life' whilst appearing to be full of 'diffuse', 'random' and 'eventless' elements is also infused with the narratives we tell ourselves in order to make sense of our lives and decide how to behave and what to believe.

Cinema tells its stories through a dramatic mode and traditionally, within Western culture, relies on conflict between characters, to provide tension and hold its audiences. Over this chapter, I look at the ways in which the filmmakers (including myself) work within a dramatic medium whilst also incorporating the everyday.

Winterbottom's solution is to be true to the domestic realities of the family's everyday life but to give potency to this material by placing it within an extreme situation: the family are separated whilst the father is in prison for five years. The couple in *Inhabit* are not facing tragic (dramatic) infertility, as far as they know, but dealing with a more diffused (everyday) conflict: the inability to decide together whether and when to try for a baby. Andy's indecision becomes Melanie's problem, along with her ageing body. Some of the humour of the film also derives from blending the everyday with the exceptional: Melanie and Andy trundle along on their bikes through the city wearing monk and nun costumes; Melanie's self-insemination is an exceptional act performed within an everyday context (on a bathroom floor with a medicine syringe). In *Nuclear*, Marion's day job, as a registrar, blends the

mundane (the repetition of administrative tasks) with the exceptional as her 'clients' report the exceptional joys and tragedies of their lives (births, deaths, marriages). *Archipelago* and *Nuclear* each tell the story of a family at breaking point, which on the surface appears to be a more traditional dramatic narrative but the way the stories are told evokes the rhythms of everyday life: *Archipelago* engages with a mode of hyper-realism deployed to create a sense of authenticity; *Nuclear* spreads identification across the characters, thereby resisting a traditional dramatic structure with a central protagonist and inviting a messier, more everyday, set of allegiances (see Chapter Three).

The texts I am examining question the hierarchy inherent in notions of the everyday i.e. what constitutes an everyday activity or image and what constitutes a non-everyday activity or image. Ben Highmore notes that 'the non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday' (*Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* 3). In Michael Winterbottom's *Everyday*, the majority of the scenes show the daily domestic tasks that must be performed within a family: preparing meals, eating, brushing teeth, walking to school. The depiction of these mundane actions as well as the long, arduous journey the mother, Karen, and her children endure to visit their father in prison, express the woman's stamina and the couple's enduring commitment to one another. An exceptional stoicism and bond of love are revealed amongst the rubble of everyday existence.

Talking about representations of the everyday, Highmore points out that '...boredom could... be used as an index of unfulfilled desires and unnamed anxieties' (*Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* 11). Winterbottom uses the narrative and cultural expectations of the feature film form, to create tension between showing the mundane and uneventful ('boredom') and anticipation that something big or bad will happen (desire and anxiety). On a first viewing of *Everyday*, growing concern is generated, that something terrible might hap-

pen to these children as a result of parental neglect or frustration due to the father being imprisoned. Whilst watching, one wonders if this apparent rejection of classical Hollywood narrative structure will suddenly rupture and a tragic event will crash through. But it doesn't. In a screentalk accompanying a screening of *Everyday*, Winterbottom referred to this sense of foreboding:

When you are making a film where nothing happens, the best you can hope for is that the audience will be worrying that something bad is going to happen and then, if it doesn't go on too long, be glad at the end that it didn't!

(Screentalk)

It is largely these (undelivered) narrative expectations that suffuse the film with a compelling tension. However, expectations can only be confounded on the first viewing. On subsequent viewings tension is dissipated and the depiction of the mundane becomes mundane to watch. Stephen Clucas identifies this problem asking, 'how can we represent the banal and the insignificant without succumbing to banality or insignificance (and thus retiring it to the realm of inattention and boredom)?' (27). Most spectators will only view *Everyday* once but the effect of repeated viewings demonstrates how and why the presence of tension within a film is useful for maintaining attention to the quotidian. Yet by enlisting tension, there lies the problematic question of whether this inherently changes the nature of that quotidian. Highmore articulates the difficulty of attending to the everyday without changing its very essence:

Can domestic routines become precious moments snatched from more thoroughly exhaustive work practices, or do their rhythms constantly signal their lack of value? And how, supposing we wanted to, would we call attention to such 'non-events', without betraying them, without disloyalty to the particularity of their experience, without simply turning them into 'events'?

(Highmore. 2011: 1)

Winterbottom allows the everyday to permeate his film, but he does so within a narrative framework of conflict. My question is: does this compromise commitment to presenting the realities of his characters' everyday lives or does it, rather, provide a means by which to allow this material onto the cinema screen and still be an engaging experience for an au-

dience? For me, it was compelling (on a first viewing) to watch Karen carrying out the daily tasks of taking care of the children alone over an extended duration precisely because the material is contained within a fictional holding form, which, as well as generating tension from narrative expectation, also creates an emotional context for the action. However, it was, partially, the realisation that this method of generating tension only works for a first viewing that caused me to introduce the flash-forward of Marion's death to the beginning of *Nuclear*. By presenting the thing that goes wrong at the beginning, the focus in *Nuclear* is on the texture of the journey rather than the arrival point.

Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman*, follows three days in the life of a Belgian woman who lives with her teenage son and works discreetly as a prostitute to make ends meet. The vast majority of the 201 minute film is Jeanne carrying out the domestic tasks of cooking, cleaning, tidying and shopping. Luce Giard cites Akerman herself explaining:

Jeanne Dielman is a hyperrealistic film about the use of time in the life of a woman bound to her home, subjected to the imposed conformity of everyday gestures...I thus revalued all these gestures by giving back to them their actual duration, by filming in sequence and static shots, with the camera always facing the character, whatever the character's position. I wanted to show the right value of women's everyday life. I find it more fascinating to see a woman – who could represent all women – making her bed for three minutes than a car chase that lasts twenty.

(155)

This re-valuing of the gestures of everyday life is what I find compelling in both *Everyday* and *Archipelago* and I have sought to inject this quality of special attention into my own filmmaking/screenwriting. Where I have included 'bigger' moments of action, I have treated them in such a way that they are reigned in to the realm of the everyday: we see Marion washing-up before her heart attack and unconscious on the floor afterwards but the moment of death is not shown; similarly we see Marion and Angelos hurriedly getting dressed after a sexual encounter but we don't see the sex. From the ordinary, cinema is able to shine a light on that which is usually unseen, unnoticed, un-included, and often intimate.

In discussing intimacy in relation to the everyday, Highmore defines intimacy as having two meanings: on the one hand referring to that which 'is materially closest to us' and, on the other hand, that which has 'connotations of emotional, sexual and psychological closeness' (2011: 15). Despite the relentlessness and monotony of domestic and parental tasks, there is also pleasure and satisfaction born of the durational contact between parent/carer and child: Marion is able to share a moment of humour with Sam in the supermarket over the smuggled biscuits because the joke rests on previous interactions in similar circumstances, whereas Ed misjudges the choice of bedtime story because he isn't familiar with Sam's preferences resulting in an awkward interaction.

The effects of sustained, durational contact between parents and children sharing everyday experiences are tangible, though often unconsciously arrived at. In the *Practice of Everyday Life: Vol. 2*, Luce Giard describes beautifully how, throughout her childhood, she had shunned her mother's attempts to teach her to cook but when faced with independent living, the affective nature of proximity and repeated witnessing were revealed to her:

From the groping experience of my initial gestures, my trials and errors, there remains this one surprise: I thought that I had never learned or observed anything, having obstinately wanted to escape from the contagion of a young girl's education and because I had always preferred my room, my books, and my silent games to the kitchen where my mother busied herself. Yet, my childhood gaze had seen and memorized certain gestures, and my sense memory had kept track of certain tastes, smells, and colours. I already knew all the sounds: the gentle hiss of simmering water, the sputtering of melting meat drippings, and the dull thud of the kneading hand. A recipe or an inductive word sufficed to arouse a strange anamnesis whereby ancient knowledge and primitive experiences were reactivated in fragments of which I was the heiress and guardian without wanting to be. I had to admit that I too had been provided with a woman's knowledge and that it had crept into me, slipping past my mind's surveillance. It was something that came to me from my body and that integrated me into the great corps of women of my lineage, incorporating me into their anonymous ranks.

(152-153)

Given Giard's warm and expansive language, she seems both surprised and galvanized by the realisation that her mother's domestic wisdom had, despite her resistance, found its way through to her. Here, the intimacy of daily life has connected the generations.

A similar ambivalence towards domestic responsibility is found in the characters of Marion and Karen. We sense the competing pulses of responsibility and frustration in these women's lives. Marion loves her children and provides them with practical care and affection but she also feels a lack, both in her professional life and in the quality of her relationship with Ed and, as a result, jeopardises the family unit by having an affair. Karen will not fail to provide daily care and love to her children but she takes on a lover to counter the loneliness. The relative absence of narrative consequence to this plot line (she later admits the affair to Ian, he is angry but then accepts it) results in a refreshing absence of moral judgement, either negative or positive, of her choice. By employing a narrative structure that adheres more closely to Berger's 'everyday' list of qualities than those on his 'narrative' list, the film *Everyday* gives the spectator the freedom to make their own judgements in this instance, or indeed not to make any moral judgements. Similarly, the would-be mother in *Inhabit* and the mother in *Nuclear* act in ways that muddy moral judgement. Melanie's actions can be regarded as deceitful and selfish, on the one hand, or as resistant and transformative, on the other. The open ending of *Inhabit* encourages a spectator to determine his/her own response. In *Nuclear*, Marion's encounter with Angelos again could be interpreted as moral weakness and selfishness, or as a natural consequence of Ed's stilted emotional and sexual communication skills. This moral ambiguity is a factor that I am attracted to in the films I have selected and that I seek to weave into my own work. This aspect of characterisation will be explored further in Chapter Three.

In *Archipelago* the relationships between the siblings, and between the family members and the hired cook and painting teacher, are given as much importance as those between parent/s and children. However, to an extent the cook, Rose, takes on some traditionally maternal characteristics as the provider of food and emotional warmth for Edward, and

Christopher, the painting tutor, acts as a surrogate father to Edward when he offers advice, in a similar way that Angelos in *Nuclear* provides the attention and warmth to Sam that isn't forthcoming from his father. In Hogg's, *Winterbottom's* and my own films, the relationship between the mother and father is put under strain by various forms of absence of the father. In *Everyday* the father is serving a five year prison sentence and though the film gives a taste of everyday life in prison for the father, it centres primarily on the everyday life that the mother is left to deal with alone at home. In *Archipelago* the father is due to arrive at the holiday home but, after stilted and finally hostile telephone conversations between the mother and father, he never shows up. In both films the father's absence becomes normalised into the everyday despite, at the same time, causing negative feelings for the mother (loneliness for Karen in *Everyday* and bitter resentment for Patricia in *Archipelago*). In *Inhabit*, the potential father figure of Andy avoids taking up that role and is replaced biologically by Danny, the platonic friend of would-be/may-be mother, Melanie. In *Nuclear*, the father's absence is emotional rather than physical. Sharing some of the loneliness of Kate and some of the anger of Patricia, Marion finds intimacy with an outsider and solace through sexual and emotional escapism. However, not wanting fathers to be too absent from *Nuclear*, I was keen to maintain the importance of Marion's relationship with her own father, Jack. Initially, Jack is physically and emotionally distant, living in a remote, semi-derelict cottage on the moors, still angry with Marion's mother for leaving him several decades ago, and spurning Marion's attempts to offer practical care. By the end of the film, Jack's love for his daughter and grandchildren is glimpsed through his interaction with them in relation to material things: he shares his house with them; he collects eggs with Sam; cooks an omelette; and builds a makeshift football goal.

In considering objects in relation to the everyday Highmore writes:

It is not that the 'thing itself' cannot be separated from its context in everyday life,

rather the thing itself *is* the context of everyday life in which objects and their practices exist.

(Reader 296)

Applying this idea to the film texts, reveals how objects function within and beyond the *mise-en-scène*. The syringe in *Inhabit* connects with parenthood in two ways: firstly as a functional object that is designed, and has previously been used, to administer medicine to children; secondly as an object which has the potential to be used as, and will soon be used as, a means of inseminating Melanie in an attempt to pro-create a new child. It is this dual resonance of association bringing forth an incompatible coupling of images (a child's mouth and a woman's vagina) that creates comic tension in this scene, underlined further by the 'popping' sound as Danny tries out its pump action. The humour is a release from the discomfort of associating this one object with these two contexts, yet each imagined scenario is embedded within a trope of parenthood: creating and caring for a child.

Finding a moment of psychological respite by watching a drip of wine run down the side of a glass, Melanie both looks at and avoids looking at the party hosts (the parents) as their dancing image distorts through the wine. The drip, shot with a macro lens, is a less literally contextual object (fig. 23).



Fig. 23: *Inhabit*: macro close-up of a drip of wine.

I intended the drip to read in a number of parallel ways. On one level as symbolic of bodily fluids: a tear that Melanie is managing not to shed; the fluids Melanie and Andy didn't exchange before they left for the party; those that this flirty, flouncing host couple might exchange later; or the fluids that will be transported via the medicine syringe in a few minutes time between Melanie and Danny. Yet, this object also functions non-symbolically. It is just a glass and just a drip which Melanie is holding as she sits on the sofa in a nun costume at a party. An ordinary, eventless moment. At the same time, this combination of objects suggests an emotional state: isolation; loneliness; sadness; thwarted desire. So the glass is both a thing that plants Melanie in that moment in that place, and a thing that suggests other things and other actions. In *Archipelago* the pheasant, plucked by Rose, contextualises Rose as a nourishing (surrogate) mother figure and the lobsters she drops into boiling water contribute to a sense of violent energy bubbling beneath a repressed veneer of calm amongst this family group. Particularly in a film that is lean on narrative plot, objects and mise-en-scène become exceptionally potent signifiers, whilst simultaneously providing affective properties simply as things to be sensed, both by the fictional characters and by the spectator.

Repetition and Difference

Lefebvre's idea of rhythmanalysis, though initially developed within the context of social science, offers a productive tool with which to examine film-works and in particular those which give prominence, narratively and formally, to everyday life and weave elements of rhythm, repetition and difference into their structure. Lefebvre notes:

When it concerns the everyday...there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference.

(*Rhythmanalysis* 6)

Archipelago, *Everyday* and *Nuclear* all utilise motifs of repetition within their formal and narrative design. *Archipelago* centres around a series of mealtimes, whilst *Everyday* is

structured around several prison visits as well as family mealtimes and journeys to school. *Nuclear* repeats certain dramatic and temporal beats from different characters' perspectives and each of the films discussed deal with the interface between linear and cyclical rhythms.

As Lefebvre observes, the recurring gestures of everyday life involve actions which re-produce, re-commence and re-assume 'or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications' (Lefebvre. 1971: 18). In other words everyday life involves repetition and difference.

In *Archipelago* the seven meal scenes provide Hogg with a vehicle through which to employ the effects of repetition and difference to suggest repressively combustible family relations (figs. 24-30). The meal scenes predominantly use a locked-off camera and medium-wide framing with one set-up: meals 1, 2 and 4 (figs. 24, 25, 27). When this stylistic signature is broken, for example in the restaurant scene (fig. 28) which uses five different set-ups and thirteen cuts and the final meal scene which includes a rare close-up of Edward (fig. 30), there is a powerful sense of fragmentation within the family group with the visual treatment paralleling the psychological fracture within and amongst the characters.



Fig. 24: *Archipelago*: Meal 1



Fig. 25: *Archipelago*: Meal 2



Fig. 26: *Archipelago*: Meal 3



Fig. 27: *Archipelago*: Meal 4



Fig. 28: *Archipelago*: Meal 5



Fig. 29: *Archipelago*: Meal 6

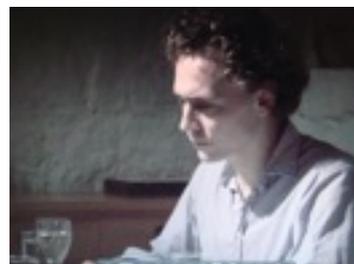
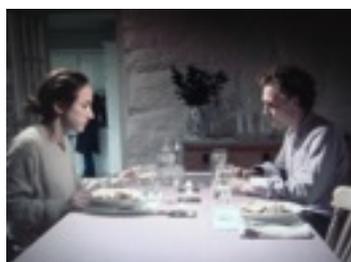


Fig. 30: *Archipelago*: Meal 7

The locations provide rhythms of repetition and difference in tone: where the interior meals are fraught, the exterior meals (figs. 25, 26) have a much less formal and more relaxed atmosphere and the non-family members, Christopher and Rose, are incorporated successfully into the group. The repetitions within the action create an opportunity for comparison: twice Cynthia has trouble with her food, resulting in firstly Edward and later Cynthia breaking the unspoken code of middle class manners by leaving the table during the meal. Where Edward expresses his emotions by leaving the restaurant in response to Cynthia's complaints about the food, Cynthia displaces her rage towards Edward by leaving the dining table with an excuse of physical pain after biting on a piece of lead shot in her pheasant.

The pared-down use of sound directs focus onto the conversation and the sounds of cutlery in the moments of no conversation. This creates a stark contrast when conflict is openly expressed during the last mealtime where Edward and Cynthia sit silently opposite each other whilst Patricia yells off-screen at their father on the phone for not turning up for Edward's send-off. Similarly to the treatment of previous arguments Hogg stages this one off-screen with the focus dwelling upon the reactions of those left listening in a different space. When Patricia returns to the table Cynthia doggedly re-establishes the repressive manners of their everyday life with a chirpy comment that the 'Lasagne's delicious' before only briefly acknowledging her mother's distress with 'Alright?'. Patricia nods despite her previous off-screen line to their father, 'You deserve all their hatred!' still resonating in all our memories. As Lefebvre states, on the perception of rhythms:

No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart. A memory? Yes, in order to grasp this present otherwise than in an instantaneous moment, to restore it in its moments, in the movement of diverse rhythms.

(Rhythmanalysis 36)

Each time we watch these characters carry out the everyday routine of eating together, it is both the dynamics of the individual scene, plus the comparison with previous mealtime scenes lodged in our memory, that reflects the shifting tensions and affiliations with this family group and informs our intellectual and emotional responses to them.

Mealtimes in *Archipelago* feature as a repetitive beat within the film, a signature of everyday life and a mini-amphitheatre that magnifies the details of this specific family at this specific time. Whilst the holiday location has taken each of the individuals away from their regular everyday lives, it serves to re-create an everyday life from the past when the children were young. One senses that the dynamics occurring on this holiday, between the siblings, between the parents and between the individual parents and children, emerge from long-established, repeated, family narratives with each member performing their role.

Repetition in *Everyday* is used through a depiction of everyday routines including: teeth-brushing; mealtimes; journeys to school; part-time jobs; but also in the overall structuring of the film around the eight times the family have contact with the father character.



Fig. 31: *Everyday*: Different prison environments.

The journey to the prison, with the early morning starts and several modes of transport suggests tedium in its duration and repetition but the differences between each visit (different prisons, different configurations of the family visiting) are what mark the overall trajectory towards re-unification of the family (fig. 31). The concept of the prison visit as a

scene within cinema culture is, as Winterbottom remarked (Screentalk), potentially a cliché given the quantity of prison visit scenes throughout film history. Winterbottom wished to resist the cliché of the prison story by setting it within a rural location as opposed to the more common urban location (Screentalk). Although Ian's prisons are located in urban places, the family live in rural Norfolk so the journey to and from the prison and the life led in-between the visits takes place in attractive countryside. Along with Michael Nyman's score, the lingering shots of the Norfolk landscape at different times of day and year, create a romantic layer to the film in contrast to the social realist tone of the interior scenes (fig. 32). The use of landscape to conjure a poetic rendering of emotion, and to provide an expansive contrast to the confined interior locations, is effective visually though, as critic Catherine Shoard observes, when combined with Nyman's score, it 'bangs the drum at times a touch too hard, giving already active heartstrings a mighty strum' (2012).



Fig. 32: *Everyday*: Rural Norfolk landscapes accompanied by Michael Nyman score.

In a sense, Winterbottom's use of repetition and difference incorporates how *Everyday* compares and contrasts with other prison stories in cinema. As film critic, Peter Debruge, in the industry journal *Variety* comments:

Commissioned by Film4 as a look at the British prison system, Winterbottom's verite-style treatment yields something resembling the deleted-scenes reel from a more sensational treatment of the same subject emphasising routine over landmark events.

(Debruge 21)

It is precisely the moments that would ordinarily be deleted (either in the script editing stage or in the cutting room) that Winterbottom invites *Everyday* to be about.

In *Inhabit*, the setting of a 'tarts and vicars' fancy dress party, facilitates an element of repetition and difference within the film's visual grammar, providing connections and distinctions between the three central characters, as well as some of the humour suffusing the film. Melanie, Andy and Danny have each chosen ecclesiastical rather than 'tart' costumes, a similarity which foreshadows the triangle they become bound up in and the different qualities of chastity in their relationships: between Andy and Melanie it is unwelcome (for Melanie) and enforced through a broken agreement of Andy's; between Melanie and Danny it is required (because they are friends and Danny is gay). The costumes also provide useful character distinctions between the two men through their different takes on the same theme: Andy's monk's habit is a tacky, synthetic costume from a joke shop, whilst Danny's bishop costume is an elegant cotton gown carefully hired for the occasion (like Melanie's costume). These details parallel Melanie's view of the two men's capacity to become parents: Andy's broken promises are messy and lack commitment whereas Danny is willing to translate the depth of his friendship into the serious matter of becoming biological father to her child.

In the screenplay for *Nuclear*, I sought to integrate patterns of repetition and difference more obliquely into the characterisation. The story charts the breakdown of a family as each of its members becomes charmed, one by one, by the qualities of a stranger. Each character is attracted to the same person, providing repetition, yet each character interacts with him differently: Marion has an active sexual encounter; Ed enjoys intimacy with Angelos through his work; Tess endures unrequited love; and Sam is filled with admiration and

affection. The different qualities of interaction with Angelos speak of the differing dissatisfactions each character feels about their everyday lives.

Sound is also used within a scheme of repetition and difference. Each chapter ends with a sound that is similar to and segues into a sound beginning the next chapter, such as the 'bumph' of the door closing as Marion fails to retrieve Tess from Jack's (the end of Tess' chapter) mixing into the 'bumph' of Sam kicking his football (the beginning of Sam's chapter). The sounds are created by different actions/objects but are aligned to spotlight their similarities. In the finished film, it would be my intention to treat the recording, editing and mixing in such a way that the similarities are as pronounced as possible. The sounds between chapters create a link between the characters but it is meant more as an expression of co-existence and multiplicity than a psychological commonality.

This pattern of dual-context sound is broken before the final chapter where there is silence between the end of Sam's chapter and the beginning of Angelos'. The variation is prompted by the need for a beat after the death of Marion and by the narrative shift from one family to another. Parental relationships themselves are repeated and different across families.

Lefebvre distinguishes between cyclical and linear rhythms and the contrasting associations with both:

The cyclical is perceived rather favourably: it originates in the cosmos, in the worldly, in nature. We can all picture the waves of the sea - a nice image, full of meaning - or sound waves, or circadian or monthly cycles. The linear, though, is depicted only as monotonous, tiring and even intolerable.

(Rhythmanalysis 76)

Lefebvre notes also, however, that the cyclical and linear have 'an antagonistic unity... the repetitive tick-tock of the clock measures the cycle of hours and days and vice versa' (*Rhythmanalysis 76*). In *Archipelago* there are both cyclical and linear rhythms

working with and against each other. The linear rhythm of duration is present during meal-times and food preparations (plucking a pheasant feather by feather, waiting for water to boil) and the countdown to Edward's departure to Africa, whilst cyclical rhythms occur visually and aurally (day/night, fine weather/stormy weather) and structurally with the arrival and departure of Edward by helicopter at the beginning and end of the film. In *Everyday*, the cycle of the seasons is set alongside the linear growth of the children, and the prison visits are cyclically repeated but involve tediously long journeys.

An ambivalent clash of the cyclical and linear is at the heart of the tensions within the story of *Inhabit*. Melanie's monthly menstrual cycles are in conflict with the linear rhythm of time passing, ageing and the advancement towards infertility, yet it is the attempt to coalesce these two types of rhythm that is her goal. 'We have time - in fact it's a good time,' she says to Andy, signalling that it is the time in her cycle (cyclical rhythm) when she is ovulating and that they have enough time (linear rhythm) before the party to have sex. I underlined this sense of urgency relating to linear time by embracing a suggestion by Therese Bradley, the actress playing Melanie, to re-state 'now is the right time,' when talking to her friend Danny, referring both to the moment in linear time, the present, and the stage of her monthly cycle. Whilst the cyclical rhythm presents the opportunity of becoming a parent (a desire for Melanie, a fear for Andy) and the linear rhythm is the antagonistic force in the narrative (the ageing of Melanie and the subsequent reduction of procreative capacity), it is the collision of both rhythms through action (Melanie inserting the syringe of semen) that results in dramatic and narrative consequence (she may be pregnant secretly by a man other than her partner). Furthermore, it is the relative shifting of emotional/intellectual/physical rhythms between the three characters that provides the framework of the story. Initially Andy is not aligned with Melanie's eagerness to become a parent whilst Danny is happy to align himself physiologically and emotionally with Melanie by offering to repro-

duce with her. By the final scene, Andy has shifted his position in an attempt to align himself with Melanie's rhythms (emotional/intellectual/physical) and shows her that he is ready to try for a baby but it is potentially too late and, unbeknown to him, he is still out of kilter with Melanie who may be about to enter a new rhythm: the trajectory of pregnancy.

Linear and cyclical rhythms also feature prominently in *Nuclear*. The decision to structure it in chapters charting the story from the perspective of each character, one by one, was an element present in my earliest planning for the film (fig. 33) but which I dropped for the first two drafts within which I attended more to the demands of drama than to rhythm and the everyday, for example by introducing a traffic accident where Angelos and Sam are hurt and a physical confrontation between Ed and Angelos

Individual Chapters/Character Arcs				
Marion	Ed	Tess	Angelos	Sam
Watching Tess grow up	Troubles at work	Riddled between childhood + adulthood	A skilled (over-qualified) worker.	All boy
Struggle to connect with Ed.	Is kind to Angelos		Charming	Football - wants his dad's att
Attraction to Angelos	Feels sympathy for Chinese man	Falls in love for the first time - with Angelos	He seduces Marion knowingly +	Fights with sister - w
Betrayal of Ed + Tess	Tries to re-ignite love with Marion		Tess/Sam/Tara unknowingly	Sam's att
Reunion with Tess	Finds she loves Angelos	Keeps her love secret from all incl. Tara	He is casual + follows his heart	Can't explain his feelings but is very familiar
Split from Angelos	And so does Tess	Discovers Marion with Angelos	to want Marion, + we want him to have her.	Enjoys Ang is very
Split from Ed	Tries to keep hold of Marion but loses her.	Leaves home to Jack's house.	His workaholic + inability to	the man
Surviving alone				

Fig. 33: Early planning of character chapters from notebook

Through a critical interaction between close analysis of the selected film texts and a growing sense of connection with Lefebvre's work, I was keen to re-introduce the chapter structure from the third draft onwards as an apposite way to tell the story. The chapter

structure employs both the linear and cyclical: the chapters progress linearly through the characters one by one telling the story predominantly chronologically but with moments of foreshadowing and repetition that create a cycle of returning to a moment. For example, at the end of Marion's chapter we jump forwards in time to see her adjusting Sam's jacket in a poignant moment of maternal care (after Marion has left Ed to live at Jack's) and return to this scene in Sam's chapter, which serves both to contextualise it temporally and spatially within the narrative as well as to give the moment emphasis: this turns out to be the last time Sam will see her alive. The opening scene is a flash-forward to after Marion's death with the following material leading up to this moment so creating a cyclical structure to the narrative, as in *Archipelago*. However, unlike in *Archipelago*, by adding Angelos' chapter after Marion's death, a new cycle begins following a new family with a different experience of the everyday. Life, death and life again.

Other cyclical motifs permeate *Nuclear* including the waves of the sea and the moon, which are physically presented and evoked through Ed's artwork, along with the mechanical cycles of domestic appliances (washing machines both in the home and in Ed's work), again suggesting that everyday life goes on, and on. The negative association of the linear provides different levels of antagonism permeating the family: Ed's professional tension as he approaches his exhibition; Ed's hypochondria suggesting an acceleration towards death; Tess burgeoning forward into womanhood, yet unsure how or where to attach her desires; and Marion experiencing a shift in her sense of femininity as she ages, which prompts her to reassert her sexuality through her affair with Angelos. As in *Inhabit*, *Nuclear* forges an 'antagonistic unity' between the linear and the cyclical throughout the fabric of its narrative structure, aural landscape and mise-en-scène.

Authenticity and technique

I now wish to look at how the selected texts, including my own, employ specific techniques in their practice in order to create a sensation of ‘authenticity’. I refer to authenticity within the context of creative practice as it engages with variant forms of realism. Through my practice and encounters with the selected works, I have investigated the ways in which filmmakers and screenwriters manage the tension between reflecting aspects of everyday life, within the form of a fiction film, and engaging an audience sufficiently to make them want to watch, or read, through to the end. It is this tension which, particularly in films concerning themselves with family-centred stories, is very interesting to me and which has been a consistent driver of my own creative practice during this research project.

Firstly, I will track how this tension between everydayism and entertainment manifested through the development of different drafts of *Nuclear* in order to analyse the discoveries and decisions I have made in developing a reflective mode of practice in relation to a context of critical ideas and film works.

The first draft of *Nuclear* spent most of the first half of the screenplay setting up the world and furnishing a sense of this family’s everyday existence (the intensity of which is underlined by the presence of a demanding newborn baby). The second half became more dramatically driven:

Plot Summary - First Draft:

FIRST HALF:	PAGE NO.
Martin fishes dragonfly out of pond.	2
Marie enjoys being with her family in France	3

England: They return. Dog Corby pleased to see them.	5
Marie has a baby. Jim misses the birth.	11
Juliette has her first period.	17
Marie struggles to look after baby. Jim is not present	23
Juliette escapes to Tara's, fancies Gary.	38
Corby the dog is jealous	44
Tara and Juliette fall out over Bobby Bullcock	52
Corby becomes threatening towards Elodie	54
Jim leaves to live in flat in Manchester	56
Juliette becomes close to Gary	60
SECOND HALF:	
Marie invades Jules' refuge by kissing Gary	75
Marie has sex with Gary	82
Juliette sees Marie naked with Gary and runs away	83
Juliette goes to find refuge with Jim in Manchester	85
Juliette asks if she can live with Jim but he refuses	90
Tara has sex with Bobby	93
Juliette comes home to Marie who apologises	98
Jim loses the job and goes to a strip joint	99
Juliette sees from text that Marie has gone to meet Gary	108
Furious Juliette leaves house. Corby alone with Elodie.	109
Juliette spies Marie drive off with Gary.	110
Gary almost rapes Marie in ice-cream van	112
Marie discovers that Corby has attacked Elodie	115
Juliette arrives at her reclusive dad's	116
Marie takes bleeding Elodie to A&E	117
The police interview Marie regarding child neglect	119
Jim asks if Marie will have her back but she says no	120
Martin brings Juliette back home	121
Juliette and Marie make up. Marie is ready to be a mother.	123
Marie, now reliable mother, takes J&E to France to father's funeral	125

As such this draft felt unbalanced (the first half too uneventful and mundane and the second half too eventful and melodramatic) and the problem of dramatising the character of a baby prompted changes which manifested in the following draft.

In the second draft, I was consciously encouraging the drama to play out more fully and see if it were possible to still retain a significant sense of the everyday whilst the family went through a number of transformations. For this draft, the baby became an eight-year old boy (Sam) which served to open up greater complexity within the relationships between parents and children, particularly between Marion and her children, and facilitated the exploration of cross-gender parent/child relations. The threat to the child (provided by the dog in the first draft) was re-invented as a stranger (Angelos) who was simultaneously a threat to each member of the family given his ability to both charm and destroy the family. Whilst I still wished to retain a sense of everydayness, the newly-introduced dramatic turns in the story became dominant: Angelos and Sam suffer a road traffic accident; a fight between Ed and injured Angelos; and Marion's studio burning down. Finally, I felt that in this draft the screenplay had swung too far towards the dramatic. For the third draft of *Nuclear*, I planned to create a more even balance of the everyday and the dramatic throughout the screenplay and a more conscious use of rhythm within my story design. Whilst working on the third draft, I listed cyclical and linear elements that might have a place in the film:

Cyclical:

- working days and procedures
- night and day
- moon cycles
- washing machine cycles
- birth, life and death cycles (ageing, immortality)
- emotional cycles (attraction, action, repulsion)

Linear:

- ageing
- Ed working towards his show
- football match/league
- sex
- school day

This rhythm brainstorming led to various new elements in the third draft such as changing Marion's job to a registrar of births, deaths and marriages. In turn, in order to maintain contrast, Ed became an artist and his work incorporated domestic appliances. These new el-

ements greatly advanced my quest to balance the everyday with audience engagement: they simultaneously furnished the script with a texture of the everyday whilst increasing the opportunities for empathy, particularly with Marion (she does the sensible, routine job in order to provide for the family whilst Ed follows his creative ambitions). These new elements also contributed to the aural and visual grammar of the screenplay: the sounds of a washing machine turning and the lighting effect of Ed's 'fridge moon cycle' installation.

In the fourth draft, I expanded the everydayness giving more screen time to domestic tasks (folding laundry, getting dressed) as well as to the repetitive nature of Marion's job by adding more scenes in the registry office. My process of evaluating this draft was affected by my analysis of the ending of Winterbottom's film. In *Everyday* the verité style of filmmaking contrasts with the romantic arc of the story: Karen manages family life alone and they maintain their relationship, despite all the strains, to emerge as a sturdy family unit. The final crane shot of the re-united family strolling on the beach, away from camera towards the sea, is reminiscent of the happy endings of romantic melodramas. This romantic urge seems to be in conflict with the otherwise realist aesthetics of the film, or at least it deviates from its commitment to reflect the everyday. Despite a brief affair, ultimately Karen stands by her man and the film ends in romantic narrative closure. The ending of the fourth draft of *Nuclear* suggests that Marion and Ed will get back together and, after considering this ending in relation to the ending of *Everyday*, I found it too romantic and Marion's character too passive. Sabrina Broadbent's novel *Descent: An Irresistible Tragicomedy of Everyday Life* (2004) is autobiographically inspired by the break down of her marriage to Winterbottom, which she describes as being caused largely by his long absences when away filming. The film is, perhaps, Winterbottom's re-rendering of some of his own experiences of the everyday: a film about separation and its effects on family relationships, though in the fiction of *Everyday* love triumphs. In my screenplay, I was looking

for an ending which suggested change for the characters but remained anchored in the everyday.

It was around this time in the development of the screenplay that my own mother suffered sudden and severe ill-health. This abrupt and upsetting personal experience fed into my creative practice. In the final drafts of *Nuclear*, I introduced Marion's death forcing a significant transformation in the everyday lives of the remaining Elder family. This answered my search for an ending that was born of the extraordinary everyday and would force change upon the remaining characters. Although the death is announced narratively at the beginning of the film, it still appears sudden when it happens. Within the context of industry/mainstream film practice, this death may be considered a *deus ex machina*, being previously unseeded within the story. However, it was the brutal suddenness and randomness of an unexpected death that I wanted to convey as well as the sense that only once one's everyday is taken away is its value truly felt. Also whilst the previous draft used a chapter on Angelos to bookend the beginning and end of the screenplay, now I was able to wrap the script around with Marion's death instead which both felt more appropriate, in that the film is primarily about Marion's family not Angelos', and it allowed a new cycle to begin.

In the relationship between authenticity and performance, there are both similarities and digressions between Hogg's, Winterbottom's and my own approach to casting and directing actors. The mix of professional and non-professional actors was similar to Hogg's and Winterbottom's in *Inhabit* where the main adult roles were played by professional actors, background actors were played by non-actors and the children were played by non-drama-trained children from a local school. I specifically sought to cast non 'stage school' children to play the child parts because I wanted to achieve a similar sense of authenticity that Winterbottom had in *Everyday*. However, I was particularly keen to put in place working

methods that protected the children as fully as possible whilst also striving to extract a convincing performance. I arranged rehearsals where the children could become familiar with the main actresses and myself and, like Winterbottom, I cast real siblings so that they would already feel comfortable with one another. As an added measure, I lessened the pressure on the children by casting two pairs of siblings. Although, in production-terms this doubled elements of organisation (two chaperones, two transport arrangements, two sets of costumes etc.) it built into the shooting a safety net that would protect both the children and the film: if a child became ill or reluctant during filming, there wouldn't be the same pressure to try and extract a performance from that child regardless. In the event, none of the children were ill or became upset and both sets of siblings were filmed in turn doing the same two scenes which generated a sense of play to the proceedings. Along with David Scott, the DoP, we designed the cinematography to be discreet in the children's scenes in order to put them at their ease and allow for improvisation. We filmed the scene in one shot, using a long lens and positioned the camera in the bathroom looking towards the hall through an open door (fig. 23, p.43). As such, I was able to direct the adult actors to improvise around the children facilitating a natural and engaged performance. Although having to shoot the children's scenes twice increased pressure on the shooting schedule, it gave me increased options in the edit to use the performances that best served the story whilst, at the same time, embedding an emotional security for the children which I (and the children and their parents) felt comfortable with.

Both *Archipelago* and *Everyday* used improvisation based on a story outline rather than a traditional screenplay. In Hogg's case, she wrote a full screenplay for her first film *Unrelated* (though allowed for improvisation around this) but for *Archipelago* she wrote what she calls 'a novella illustrated with photographs' as her text. Winterbottom similarly had a loose story outline around which the actors improvised, scene by scene.

The writing process I have undergone with *Nuclear* has reflected some of this sense of improvisation. For the second draft I wrote the script in non-consecutive 'clumps' which I then placed together, shuffled around, and began to blend into a whole with new writing where needed. Strangely, however this still resulted in a fairly plot-driven outcome with the following as the emergent story structure:

1. Family Life with(out) Ed
2. Family Life with Angelos
3. Falling in love with Angelos
4. Becoming risky and getting caught
5. Confronting Jack
6. The accident
7. Sam dying
8. Angelos betrayal
9. Marion blames herself, burns studio and wants to change
10. Marion and Tess reunite
11. Marion chooses new life with Ed and Tess

(Nuclear Second Draft sequence order)

In the third draft, by consciously engaging the sequential character chapter structure, I presented myself with new, enjoyable, limitations - this part of the story can only be told from this person's perspective - which by dint of its restrictions suggested new material and helped me in my intention to shed the third draft of the melodrama in the second draft. For example, where in the second draft Marion confesses her affair with Angelos to a furious Ed in a hospital room over their unconscious son, by the third draft this confession was dealt with more implicitly (echoing Hogg's treatment of violent arguments in *Unrelated* and *Archipelago*):

EXT. HOUSE. DAY.

Sam plays football alone, whacking the ball against the side of the house.

His parents are arguing inside the kitchen. He can hear his father yelling close to the door but his mother's replies are muffled and mostly inaudible. He uses the football to try and drown out their words:

(scene from Nuclear, Second Draft)

The structure also allowed the story to become an ensemble rather than purely Marion's story. It was now the nuclear family unit that was under threat by the outsider and by the individual member's responses to that outsider. The question of whether and how the family would survive or change as a result of that interaction became the story.

In considering the development of the short film *Inhabit*, it was during the shoot and the edit that the most significant shifts of direction took place. Initially *Inhabit* was designed to have several macro close-ups throughout but some of these were cut out (the woodlouse, the beetle, the journey through drainpipes - see *Inhabit* screenplay in appendix). In the final edit, I chose to cut them in order to follow the drive of the narrative and give a sense of truth to the performances. For example in the script, whilst Melanie waits for Danny to produce his sperm sample, she becomes fascinated by a woodlouse crawling along the skirting board. Whilst shooting this scene and after having wrangled the woodlice, I felt strongly that this didn't make narrative or emotional sense so I did another take without the woodlice moment sensing, correctly, that this would be the version that would make the final cut. Hence the final outcome was more 'realist' than the script had been. Yet something new emerged and that was a distinct drive of humour which provided an antidote to the film being too 'issue-led' for my taste. I am interested in the subject of a couple trying to come to agreement about becoming parents and what they do if they can't, yet I also wanted the film to stand beyond and apart from a social rendering of these issues: hence the kitsch decor of the house, the ironic party hosts' 'tarts and vicars' fancy dress theme, the everyday moments and the more poetically resonant/non-narrative moments such as the eyelashes being mascara-ed and the drip on the glass. Deciding how many and which of the originally scripted macro moments to include was a major part of the process I undertook to find my own balance between a creative rendering of the everyday and the demands of drama.

Whilst for Murray Pomerance, the family is a site of patriarchal, consumerist repression (2), there is also the possibility that the family can be a safe space within which its members can test boundaries, try out roles, define desires and make active transformations. Highmore's considerations of the agency of the everyday can be applied to considerations of the family and power.

Does the everyday provide the gaining ground for conformity, or is it rather the place where conformity is evaded? Or to put it slightly differently: is the everyday a realism of submission to relations of power or the space in which those relations are contested (or at least negotiated in relatively interesting ways)?

(Reader 5)

In *Archipelago* the characters are oppressed on a variety of levels within their family: by the etiquette of their class which demands emotional repression and proscribed manners; by the socio-economic pressure to conform to the capitalist system (Cynthia's criticism of Edward for giving up his job); and by the influence the father holds over the family despite his absence. Yet despite social expectations and repressed emotions, Edward finds a space within his family to experience doubt and break with capitalist pressure to climb the career/economic ladder (though to a large extent it is his economic security that allows him this liberty) and Patricia expresses support for Edward's voyage of self-discovery and continues to love him unconditionally. In *Everyday* the children are liberated by the emotional and practical security Karen manages to provide for them despite Ian's imprisonment, yet the character of Karen seems bound by the demands of her parental role and the film's resolution suggests that the power of the family as a structure is stronger than individual liberation. In *Nuclear*, the family is the site of crisis, ignited by a stranger, and it is only through loss that the potentially transformative and liberating aspects of familial relations are evoked.

By tailoring methods of writing and filmmaking towards creating a sensation of authenticity Hogg, Winterbottom, and in response I, have endeavoured to express the everyday within

screen fiction whilst maintaining engagement with the spectator. In the next chapter, I look further at relationships of engagement between text and spectator as mediated by narrative structure and characterisation.

Chapter Three: Discordant Families

In this chapter, I investigate the dynamic interrelation between character, narrative structure and audience reception in three stories of parental discord and ask how these texts explore the tensions between selfhood, love and responsibility within family units in crisis, whilst balancing emotional engagement with critical thought in their relationship with the spectator. I investigate two completed films, *A Separation* (2011) by Asghar Farhadi and *The Squid and The Whale* (2005) by Noah Baumbach, and my feature screenplay *Nuclear* (see Appendix 1 for film synopses). I have selected these two films to place in relation to my feature screenplay because of their thematic link (families at the point of breakdown) and their approach to character and narrative structure (multi-protagonist). In the case of *Nuclear*, where relevant I will refer also to my plans for shooting should the script go into production.

In this chapter, I will look at how the textual elements of these two complete films and one screenplay invite distinct modes of engagement with the spectator in their presentations of domestic familial collapse. *A Separation*, *The Squid and The Whale* and *Nuclear* address the effects on both the adults and the children of the crumbling family relationships by adopting a multi-protagonist structure. I have taken inspiration particularly from Farhadi's commitment to an active relationship between filmmaker, film and spectator which I see as an extension of the collaborative relationships that form the process of filmmaking as actors interpret parts and designers create a visual environment etc. There is inevitably a difficulty in comparing two finished films (AS and SW) with a screenplay (*Nuclear*) as these aspects of collaboration have not yet taken place for the screenplay. However, given that AS and SW have writer/directors at their helm, and I intend to direct *Nuclear* in the future,

this disjuncture between script and final film is reduced. The process of developing a screenplay within the context of a research project is that a constant dialogue, a form of interior collaboration, between my own and others' creative practice and critical thought, has provided a dynamic to the evolution of the screenplay which is distinct from a purely practice or industry model. The process of screenplay development within an industry context would involve collaboration with producers, development executives, financiers, and in some cases starring actors, but whilst cultural and film references may feature in discussions, there wouldn't be the same attention given to stimulating a dialogue with other film texts or critical thinkers as is possible within a research context.

Creating Character

Writers often talk of reaching a point where their characters begin to write themselves and directors and actors commonly use Stanislavskian-inspired methods to merge the identities of character and actor for the purposes of realism in performance. For example, Asghar Farhadi when working on the character of Razieh in *A Separation* (AS), required the actress Sareh Bayat to walk the streets for several weeks wearing a chador in order to experience living as a devout person. Farhadi uses his unusually extended rehearsal period to improvise around the script and bring the actors to a point where they 'gain ownership of their roles' (Farhadi in Hassannia 21). In writing both screenplays, *Inhabit* and *Nuclear*, I sensed reaching this point where the characters appear to speak and act for and of themselves. This is an illusion that occurs when the writer or actor constructs and accumulates sufficient detail about a character to facilitate increasingly sophisticated improvisation, thereby producing the effect of the character having a momentum of their own.

Whilst high concept Hollywood movies tend to favour clearly identifiable moral orientations towards characters, the texts I am examining in this chapter (and throughout this project)

assume a less-polarised and more muddled moral landscape. Film critic James Bell notes of AS:

A Separation shifts our sympathies between the various characters, but without ever allowing us to draw simple conclusions. No character is given the moral high ground - except perhaps for the daughter Termeh who, as witness to her parents' sometimes dishonest actions, emerges as the film's moral centre.

(Bell 2-3)

Similarly in *The Squid and The Whale* (SW) and *Nuclear* all characters are implicated in the messy chaos of their everyday lives, though the youngest child (Frank in SW and Sam in *Nuclear*), like Termeh, emerge as relative innocents.

This approach to character is achieved through the creation of balanced and conflicting motivations for each character which, in turn, are treated with a kind of democratic humanism by the writer/directors involved. Farhadi notes of his approach to his characters:

...anybody in any situation has a reason for everything they do, and as a filmmaker, I have no right to stand on a character's side and judge the rest from that point of view.

(qtd. in Hassania 23)

So this approach to character is both an artistic and a philosophical one.

When I say I don't have negative characters, it doesn't mean that they all do good things. They make a lot of mistakes, but somehow in some place they show something of themselves that proves to us that they are human too and have emotions and justifications.

(qtd. in Hassania 24)

Farhadi provides each of his characters with a rationale. For Nader, his dilemma is whether to be a good parent or a good child to his Alzheimers-suffering father. In the opening court scene where Simin is filing for divorce, his dilemma is brought to the fore sharply by simple, yet profound dialogue which embodies the dynamic tension between love and responsibility:

SIMIN: His father is his excuse.
 NADER: He's not my excuse. He's the reason.

SIMIN: Does he even know you're his son?
 NADER: I know he's my father.

Similarly, Razieh's piety presents her with a series of dilemmas: whether or not to help Nader's father when he soils himself as she fears it will be a sin to see him naked; and whether to lie about the cause of her miscarriage (and so get relief from debt) or not (because her religion causes her to believe that some harm may come to her daughter if she lies). Termeh is faced with the dilemma of whether she should lie to the judge or put her father in prison and finally she is forced to choose which parent she wishes to live with. In AS it is the women who have the most difficult choices and the poorest woman has the hardest of all. As such, Farhadi brings in to his story of family breakdown the themes of justice, freedom, gender and class.

The reason I spend so much time working with the subject of marriage is that I love making films about relationships between people, and family is a very rich source of relationships between people. In a family, you have women, men, old people, young people, kids, everyone. It's a vast ocean. When you write about family, you write about marriage, you write about a couple, which is the oldest relationship between humankind. But even though it is the oldest type of relationship in the world, its problems are always fresh....It's a very good tool that allows me to talk about deeper things about people. It's not just about marriage and man and woman. It's an excuse to talk about everything else regarding people.

(Farhadi qtd. in Hassania 27)

An examination of the effects of class are born out through the characters and their interactions. As Rahul Hamid points out, AS is based on doubles: 2 x fathers, 2 x mothers, 2 x daughters which emphasises the social and material differences between each family (Hamid 41) and their class distinctions are poignantly demonstrated towards the end of the film when the two daughters - Termeh and Someya - are playing in the garden whilst their elders confront one another inside, before being required to join their parents, sit separately and act within their class. In the scene where Nader and Hodjat must argue their case against each other according to Sharia law, Hodjat becomes heated and frustrated at the system:

HODJAT: I can't talk like this guy!

(A Separation)

Lower-class Hodjat's inarticulacy puts him at a legal as well as material disadvantage.

Similarly, in *Nuclear* class also has an influence on character though it is less obviously apparent. Marion is from a Northern, lower middle-class family and Ed is from a Southern upper middle-class family. These social backgrounds affect their sense of freedom as Ed assumes the right to be an artist despite economic difficulties, whilst Marion funds the family with a day job as a registrar and writes in her spare time.

The character dilemmas appear starker in AS due to the repressive political backdrop and religious pressure, but Farhadi makes the point that in the West different types of pressures arise from the freedom to choose, which he suggests can cause much personal anguish (Hamid 42; Hassania 14). In *Nuclear*, *SW* and *Inhabit* the characters are not bound by political, religious or strict social mores, as in AS, but within their global-capitalist socio-cultural/political context they struggle to make choices.

In my quest to explore ways parents might negotiate choices pertaining to selfhood in relation to parenthood, I approached character creation through the developing drafts of *Nuclear* by:

- creating a situation that could be used to test this conflict out (a family is fragmented by the arrival of an attractive stranger whose effect dismantles the status quo)
- formulating a structure that would embody and interrogate ideas of democracy, tolerance, responsibility and love
- developing story and characters in parallel to the above

The character motivations and conflicts which developed as a result were:

Marion:

- wants to provide a secure home-life for her kids,

- wants a fulfilling sexual/emotional life
- wants to have fulfilling work
- no longer loves Ed but wishes to avoid divorce

Ed:

- wants external validation for his work (like Bernard in SW)
- fears mortality
- loves his wife but fears she doesn't love/desire him
- as a result he tests her and steals her body

Tess:

- starting to be a woman but wants the security of childhood
- hates her mother for stealing her love and betraying Ed
- feels threatened by more accessible romantic options e.g. Ahmed

Sam:

- wants to feel loved and secure but doesn't
- loves football as it gives him a distraction from insecurity
- values attention from Angelos to make up for lack of attention from Ed

Angelos:

- loves his wife, broken-hearted that she left him and took their son
- a sensualist able to seize the day
- his power over the Elders contrasts with his feelings of disempowerment back home
(Leda has left him, the economic situation of no job or money)

The parental characters I created in *Nuclear* have contrasting trajectories. Ed has a rising action arc: he begins by being self-obsessed and uncaring and ends up, through the loss of Marion, with greater potential to become a caring father. Ed's professional bravura recedes and his priorities shift: his relationships with his children and wife become more im-

portant than artistic success (hence telling the art dealer that the fridge installation wasn't his idea and deciding to drive back to Jack's to get Marion). Marion has a downward arc: at the beginning she is muddling through, trying her best to juggle her roles, but isn't satisfied and so succumbs to temptation which leads her, metaphorically, to become a child again (she goes to live with her father) and finally she dies. Ed's unfounded fear of physical illness and death contrasts ironically with Marion's unexpected and fatal heart attack and there is a symmetry, by the end, between her physically dysfunctional heart and Ed's emotionally broken one.

In SW, the writing and the actors' performances contribute to a sense of each character having their own truth. The character of Bernard in SW is painted as miserly (he allows Walt's girlfriend to share in the restaurant bill and, according to Joan, he only wanted joint custody 'because it's cheaper') and misogynist (he flirts with his students and encourages Walt to sleep around) but when he expresses his pain it has an integrity to it: 'it was fucking torture Joan. Fucking torture.' (Bernard in SW). As Eric Hynes comments on Jeff Daniels' performance:

Every actor somewhere wants to please his audience, or wants them to like him. But you can over-endorse yourself. There are actors who are winking at the audience and saying, 'See, I'm playing this guy who's such an asshole, but I'm letting you know that's not me'. How about having the guts to let that be you. Remember Jeff Daniels in 'The Squid and The Whale'? It's one of my favourite performances because, you fucker, you never winked at the audience. You found your inner asshole and just said, 'There it is'.

(Hynes 52-56)

Both financiers and actors wanted redemption for Bernard but Baumbach resisted (Baumbach: DVD commentary) and it is primarily through Daniels' performance, his willingness to show his 'inner asshole,' that some sympathy is still derivable for the spectator despite his reprehensible behaviour. An echo of Bernard is found in Ed. My journey in creating Ed was one of making him more empathetic throughout the drafts. Commentators during the

development of this screenplay frequently called for him to be more likeable. Whilst I wanted to retain Ed's 'asshole' qualities, I also wanted to ensure Ed had multi-dimensionality. To help suggest the sensitive elements to Ed, later drafts included his love of music and his attempt to connect with Tess by accompanying her guitar composition on the piano. An excerpt from the scene on the beach (where Marion is helping Ed to set up for a photograph by placing a washing machine on a rock but a mis-shot from Sam's football causes it to fall in the sea) shows how subtle changes in the re-writing between draft five and six reduced Ed's overt aggression. In the fifth draft:

Ed grabs Sam and drags him into the sea.

ED

You can bloody well help get it out now.

Marion rushes down towards them.

MARION

Stop it Ed! Leave him. It was an accident.

Ed pulls Sam over towards the washing machine in the sea. Sam falls over and goes under the water. Marion wades in and pulls Sam up and out of the water. She looks back at Ed with anger before leading Sam back over the beach.

(Nuclear Draft 5)

And in the sixth draft:

Ed takes the ball, throws it onto the beach then grabs Sam's arm and leads him into the sea.

ED

You can help us get it out now.

Marion follows them into the sea.

MARION

Come on, it was an accident.
Leave him.

Sam falls over into the water. Marion pulls Sam up and out of the water. Sam looks upset. Marion gives Ed a disapproving look before leading Sam out of the sea.

Ed stands alone in the sea by the fallen washing machine.

ED

Great.

Sam picks up his ball. Marion leads Sam back across the beach. When she looks back at Ed, he is photographing the half-submerged washing machine in the sea.

(*Nuclear* / Vol. 2: 12)

It is the changes in Ed's action/dialogue and Marion's responses that slightly soften Ed's character in this key, early scene of the screenplay. Whilst his behaviour is still reprehensible, Ed is less brutish in the final version and his self-alienation gives him a pitiable quality similar to Bernard in SW.

In SW, the character of Joan appears at first glance to be morally preferable to Bernard, but she also partakes in a process of over-sharing sexual information with her children:

JOAN: We used to make love in the stock room
 WALT: Mum I don't want to hear about your affairs...
 WALT: You have a way of saying things that makes me not want to know about them.
 JOAN: I know sweetheart. It's a bad habit.

Baumbach reflects on this as a form of 'violation' (DVD interview). By dismissing this way of relating to her children as a 'bad habit,' Joan is 'absolving herself of responsibility' (Baumbach: DVD interview) and, despite their separation, together Joan and Bernard are sexualising their children. Whilst for Walt this manifests in hurtful and superficial behaviour (for example after kissing his girlfriend Sophie he remarks to her that he wishes she didn't have so many freckles), for Frank it results in a precocious and inappropriate attitude to sex. When Walt confronts his mother about her affairs, Frank takes a different stance:

WALT: Oh my God under our noses like a brothel. Men coming in and out!
 JOAN: If you want me to explain I will.
 WALT: I don't want to hear about it.
 FRANK: Well I do.

(The Squid And The Whale)

Frank's sexuality begins to show publicly as he masturbates and then smears his semen in public places (fig. 34) and in private there is a scene where Frank, after drinking beer unsupervised, rehearses a scenario of coercion in the mirror. In the absence of consistent or appropriate parental attention, Frank begins to define his identity using the detritus he picks up from his parents. In SW, the characters are torn apart by freedom and choice in its many variant manifestations, just as Farhadi suggests is the predicament of the West.



Fig. 34: *The Squid and The Whale*: Frank smears semen in public places.

In each of these three film stories language is used to increase complexity between characters. Baumbach notes of SW that the family 'understands psychology but use language as a barrier' (DVD interview) and Farhadi notes the problematic relationship his characters have with language:

It seems to me that language and words exist to allow for better communication between people but they are also the source of misunderstandings.

(Farhadi: DVD commentary)

The pedantic use of pronouns in an exchange between Bernard and Frank in SW provides a glimpse of Frank's unease regarding the new parental care arrangements:

BERNARD: That's your mother's house.
 FRANK: No it's our house.
 BERNARD: It's your mother's house. This is your house too.
 FRANK: No this is your house.

(The Squid And The Whale)

Through this dialogue, Bernard attempts to assert parental control by insisting that his new residence qualifies equally as a home for the children. This is in stark contrast to Frank's disapproval of his father's shabby attempts at home-making: Frank complains to Walt that Bernard has got him a 'leftie desk' and that 'one turtle would have made the difference' (*The Squid and The Whale*).

In *Nuclear* the use of the word 'love,' in relation to both its thematic role and its utterance within the dialogue, shows how problematic a concept it is for the characters. Marion uses the word liberally as a term of endearment towards her children, yet in her actions, she does things to hurt both children. Ed musters the courage to use it only once:

ED (O/S)

Doesn't what I give you make you feel good?
 Kids, a home, love. Isn't that enough?

MARION (O/S)

Love? That's the first time you've ever used the word.

(Nuclear. 89)

Marion's disdain demonstrates her need to hear the word and Ed's difficulty in using it.

Tess' behaviour and song lyrics show that she is trying to work out what romantic love is:

TESS (sings)

*When I see you
 When I hear you
 When I smell you
 Then I feel you...*

(Nuclear: 67)

As a hormonal adolescent, Tess' senses tingle as her yearning for love fixates on Angelos.

And for Sam, love is still fastened within the familial, though he feels it more for and from Angelos, his temporary surrogate father, than from his actual family. Dissatisfactions around love, as it manifests linguistically (or not) and through action (or inaction) between the characters, is where much of the conflict arises for the characters in *Nuclear*. The characters are motivated by ideas of how their relationships should be and what they think love is rather than tending to their relationships as they actually are.

The characters in each of these multiple-protagonist films undergo change to varying degrees, but the means of transformation is achieved through subtly different methods. Of the characters in AS, Michael Sicinski describes:

What Farhadi is staging, in essence, is psychological interiority, a modernist notion of the subject that insists that we cannot know one another solely from our actions, that only through communication and discourse can we overcome “separation,” a basic human condition. (When Termeh and Nader have the pivotal conversation about whether or not he knew Razieh was pregnant, they are face to face at the kitchen table. By contrast, the discussions between Simin and Nader are weighed down with everything left unsaid.)

(Sicinski 75)

Communication and negotiation are the processes by which the characters begin to change in AS, whereas in *Nuclear* (and to an extent SW) transformation is prompted by realisations born of a failure to communicate previously. For example, soon after Angelos hears Sam ask ‘when is dad coming back?’, he decides to leave and return to his own son. My intention here is that Angelos reflects on his own father/son relationship when he witnesses Sam distressed by the absence of his father. Similarly, when Ed is chatted up by Cecile on his night away in the bar in Belgium, he is prompted to call Marion and attempts (unsuccessfully) to tell her he loves her. It is by being offered another option that Ed begins to realise the worth of what he already has.

The ending of each film presents a beat of potential change for the characters without specifying how things will continue. In AS, Termeh is forced to make her first adult choice

(which parent she wishes to live with) but the answer is not shown. Instead, we are left watching Nader and Simin waiting in the corridor, separated by a glass partition (fig. 35).



Fig. 35: *A Separation*: Simin and Nader wait for Termeh's decision.

In *SW*, Walt separates from his father, like Termeh making a step towards adulthood, and forgives his mother as he re-visits the squid and the whale in the natural history museum: a place of comforting associations of intimacy with his mother (fig. 36).



Fig. 36: *The Squid and The Whale*: Walt re-visits a childhood memory.

In *Nuclear*, the death of Marion presents a harsh existential beat marking both the arbitrariness and the cyclical nature of the rhythms of life and the role of death within everyday life. As in *American Beauty* (1999), Marion's death is announced at the beginning of the film rooting it narratively into the fabric of the story. From the beginning the characters take for granted what they already have. Marion dies and Ed becomes a single parent presenting a new beginning for Ed, Sam and Tess. Perhaps Ed will be a more loving and present father as a result. Finally Angelos is reunited with his son, though how temporary or satis-

factory this reunification will be given that he and Leda are still separated is left uncertain. What becomes apparent is the love between characters living, dead, separated or hitherto emotionally distant. Through explorations of what love (desired, rejected, unrecognised and lost love) might mean within these familial relationships, *Nuclear* positions choice, and the proliferation of the consequences of choice, as fundamental to experience and understanding of the everyday within a Western context.

Characterisation in these films foregrounds experiences of the body as a dynamic means of exploring parent/child relationships. In AS, Nader's father's physical needs caused by his Alzheimers present the major dilemma for Nader; and Razieh's dislodged foetus provides the central jeopardy for the story - will Nader be found guilty of the murder of Razieh's unborn child and be imprisoned? These physicalisations, whilst central to the narrative, are subtle in their manifestation: a wet patch on Nader's father's trousers signals the progression of his disease; Razieh's pregnant belly hides beneath her chador; and her miscarriage is never directly shown. AS retains ambiguity in its physicalisation of the body, despite the physical providing the driver for the action.

In SW and *Nuclear*, both products of western culture and so freer from censorship, the body and sensual experience is portrayed more directly. In SW, as Frank's sexuality develops problematically, his body becomes the site of utterance for his parents' unfettered sexualities. Frank's bodily self-abuse continues when he inserts a cashew nut up his nose, the gooey residue of which he then blows out several weeks afterwards. Whilst there is no direct symbolic meaning attached to this action - it is just the curious action of a child - the stymied rottenness of the decomposed cashew nut resonates with the disintegration of relations between Bernard and Joan, as a result, at least in part, of their sexual activity with extra-marital partners. Another haptic moment occurs when Joan pulls a piece of skin off

her lip as she looks in the bathroom mirror. This affective action is not narratively driven yet it gives tangibility to her character growth. Her transformation is physicalised, she is peeling off a layer of herself, becoming new (fig. 37).



Fig. 37: *The Squid and The Whale*: Joan pulls off a layer of skin.

Frank's desire to align himself with his mother, rather than his father, manifests on a skeletal level in another scene where he and Joan are looking in the mirror together:

FRANK: We have the same bone structure.
 JOAN: No. You have your Dad's features.
 FRANK: Really?
 JOAN: Mm
 FRANK: Fuck it.
 JOAN: Frank!
 FRANK: I thought I had your bone structure
 JOAN: No

(The Squid and The Whale)

Frank is dismayed by this physical nexus with his father and by the realisation of disjuncture between his bodily self-perception and its actuality (according to his mother) (fig. 38).



Fig. 38: *The Squid and The Whale*: Frank is dismayed by his bone structure.

In *Nuclear*, Ed has a similar disconnection around perceptions of his body. Ed is a hypochondriac, convinced that recurrent headaches are the symptom of a devastating illness. Keen to have an MRI scan, he wants to know what is inside him. When his doctor reassures him that there is nothing seriously wrong, Ed is almost disappointed. Not facing death, he is forced to face life and its inherent relationships, which he finds much more terrifying, as exemplified by his inability to have sex with his wife, except when she is asleep.

By recognising the power of these bodily expressions as woven into the texts of AS and SW, and through integration into my own practice, I have become more sensitised to the effects, affects and potential potency of the physical and material within an approach to generating character.

Multi-protagonist Structure

AS, SW and *Nuclear* each employ a distinct form of multi-protagonist narrative structure. In AS no character is favoured over another either morally or formally. In the most literal sense, Farhadi and editor, Hayedeh Safiyari, deliberately sought to assign equal screen time to each character when cutting the film. In SW the narrative swings back and forth between Bernard and Joan, whenever each of them has custody of the children, like the game of increasingly vicious tennis in the opening scene. In *Nuclear*, the multi-protagonist structure, or as Bordwell would describe it: a 'network narrative' structure (*Poetics*: 189-250), is arranged almost like a parent listening in turn to each child's version of events in order to get an accumulated picture.

In order to make a portrait of the multiple desires and conflicting responsibilities within *Nuclear*, I chose to structure it in a chapter format which tells the story of marital disruption in a nuclear family from the perspective of each character consecutively. This structure al-

allows for a discrete portion of the film to adhere to the emotional and physical experience of a particular character whilst enabling overall a 'polyphony of voice' (Lanser 618). My intention is to formulate a democracy of narrative 'alignment' and 'allegiance' (Smith) and, in so doing, attempt to simultaneously entertain and invite reflection from an audience: to balance the demands of dramatic structure with a sensation of authenticity and the everyday. It is this philosophical, political and artistic interest in multi-perspectivism, as well as the subject matter, that links *Nuclear* with Farhadi and Baumbach's films.

Having settled upon the narrative shape of consecutive character chapters, I listed the main story events and which characters were present (Fig. 39). From this, I was able to identify possible sequence clusters to consider in which order to arrange character alignment and how the order invited particular allegiances from the spectator. The dramatic structure was continually evolving as the narrative evolved. The order I arrived at initially was AMETSA (Angelos/Marion/Ed/Tess/Sam/Angelos) which I used in the fourth draft (fig. 39).

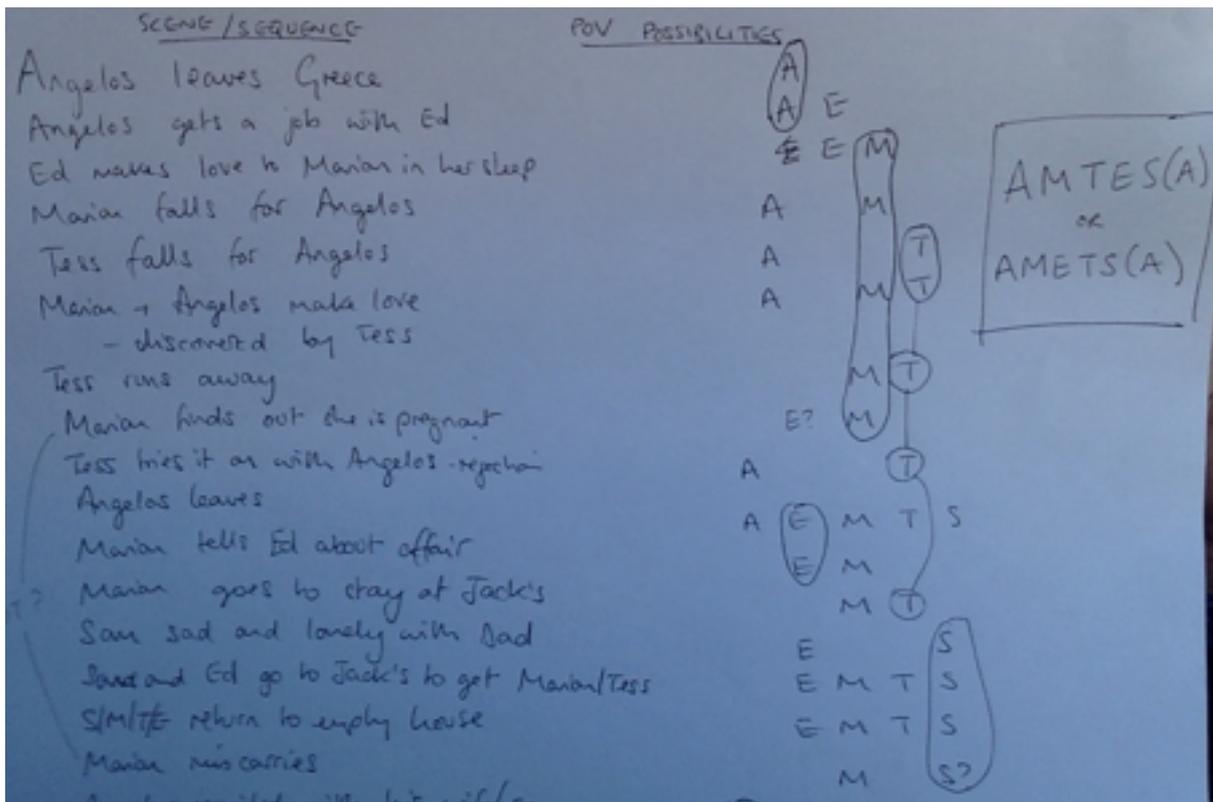


Fig. 39: *Nuclear* notebook: Connecting narrative sequences with single characters.

For subsequent drafts, I amended this to METSA. My decision to order alignment in this way affects both the dramatic shape of the story and the way the spectator's allegiances with the characters begin to formulate and layer. My rationale behind this arrangement was as follows:

- Begin with Marion as it is chiefly she who holds the capacity to destroy the family and thereby sets up the problem.
- Next to Ed as his absence from the domestic centre of family life and preference for the professional and public domains propels the story providing both the opportunity and, to some extent, an explanation for Marion's associations with Angelos.
- Next to Tess, as her feelings for Angelos mirror her mother's giving an uneasy parallel to Tess and Marion's sexualities. Whilst Marion's interest in Angelos is born of a weariness with what she perceives to be the deficiencies of Ed, Tess' interest is the result of being

on the cusp of adulthood but not knowing quite how or when to take the leap. Rather than feeling supported by her mother, Tess feels betrayed when she discovers Marion and Angelos' sexual liaison.

- Follow the climax of the story with Sam - the youngest member of the family, the only fully child character and the innocent victim of parental choices (echoing Termeh and Someya in AS and Frank in SW). This emphasises the thematic concern of the story: different manifestations of love embodied within the parental struggle between desire (selfhood) and responsibility (parenthood) within the context of everyday life. With Marion's death, the ultimate final rhythm of life, foreshadowed at the beginning, the story functions as a drama about the lead up to this event and how loss brings a re-valuation of what was.
- Resolve the story with Angelos, the outsider, providing context to Angelos' character and a counter parent/child image. Angelos becomes rooted within the familial, negotiating the conflicts of everyday life just like everyone else. This is in contrast to the fetishised exoticism of his character up to this point as experienced by the Elder family. Each of the two fathers have a new start: for Ed this is implied by his new state as a single father brought about through the loss of Marion; for Angelos it is through re-unification with his son, though still tempered by his separation with Leda. We are left to imagine Ed's new life as a father whilst we watch Angelos riding with his son. The film begins to follow a new family just as the film ends. The rhythms continue.

There were certain difficulties which emerged as a result of adhering to my self-imposed structure and I had to cut or re-order certain story elements to fit the POV sequence I had decided upon. For example:

- I initially intended to tie up Ed's health story with the doctor finally diagnosing a serious illness and thereby, ironically, giving Ed a sense of calm but Ed's chapter was planned

for earlier on and we would be with Sam by the end. However, this led to the more interesting problem for Ed of having to face the messiness of life.

- I wanted to show Marion's doubt and struggle before having sexual relations with Angelos and her remorse afterwards but this wouldn't be possible because Tess and Sam's chapters surround the infidelity scene. However, this led to the implementation of a flash forward of a later moment of Marion alone at Jack's door, having left Ed, and the dream (which also functions as a flash forward) of Angelos coming into her caravan. These new elements introduced a dynamic slipperiness to time: whilst the majority of the narrative is told chronologically, there are moments that temporarily slide forwards in time as if to put a new lens on the here and now when the future ramifications of present actions or decisions are able to be witnessed (by the spectator and in some senses by the character) in advance.
- I was unable to show Tess's reaction to Angelos leaving as, by then, Tess had fled to Jack's and the narrative was located at the house with Sam. Again, however, this prompted the washing-up scene between Sam and Tess where Sam conjectures about Tess' feelings for Angelos (*Nuclear* 89). As well as offering narrative information about the depth of Tess' feelings for Angelos and her sense of betrayal by Marion, this scene also gives a poignant moment of closeness between brother and sister.

To increase a sense of intimacy with each character in turn and to suggest a common humanity between them, I wished to find opportunities for symmetry and parallelisms across the chapters. I decided that each of the family members should have a dream or fantasy. Initially, I had only given the female characters dreams (Marion dreams of making love to Angelos, Tess dreams of a leaf struggling to get free between two rocks in a stream). Having to invent dreams/fantasies for Ed and Sam (for Angelos the final scene of riding with his son is both dream and reality) forced me to get inside the subconscious of Ed and Sam

in a way that I hadn't previously. Ed's fantasy of riding a motorbike alongside Angelos has a homoerotic inference providing layers to Ed's attraction to Angelos whom he both objectifies and identifies with as a more attractive and creative version of himself. Sam's dream of playing in a football team full of Angelos' with Ed in goal suggests the fullness and sense of shared purpose in his experience of Angelos in contrast to the starkness and obstruction he perceives in Ed. The formal limitations I had set myself therefore presented new and unexpected creative solutions. This jostling between constraint and invention was a particularly dynamic stage of the screenwriting for me and, through it, I discovered the potential for creative energy and interplay between the development of structure in parallel to the development of character. Farhadi describes a similar sensation during the process of writing *AS* when he compares developing the structure to 'a mathematical formula or a crossword puzzle. As you fill in each letter, it begins to make more and more sense.' (Farhadi in Hamid 41).

In *Nuclear*, as the chapters begin to layer in the memory of the spectator, an event shown from one character's perspective may also resonate with a character whose perspective the spectator has previously seen. For example when Sam listens to the mysterious sounds of his sister singing a love song, we have already been in this moment before but last time within Tess' physical and emotional space observing her awkward and earnest proclamations of love as she constructs a love song about Angelos. Similarly when Tess listens to Ed's voice on the answerphone, we remember being with Ed when he made the call: alone outside the bar in Belgium, missing Marion. The poignancy of this moment becomes evident when, moments later, Tess discovers Marion having had sex with Angelos in the caravan. With each of these narrative nodes, our allegiance with past characters continues even when we have been re-aligned with a new one. When only one allegiance is aroused it is less subject to comparison or questioning but by shifting the physical and

emotional alignment between the five characters, one after the other, *Nuclear* forces an awareness of how our allegiances are shaped by access to the subjectivities of the characters.

The multi-protagonist structure embodies complexity. There are no easy answers, no moral certitudes and, by implication, it stimulates doubt, wonder and tolerance by forcing multiple subjectivities to be held simultaneously in the spectator's consciousness. However, these three texts also encompass a classical three-act narrative structure within their multi-protagonist structure. Each has a story of rising action: the lead up to separation (AS and *Nuclear*) or the fall-out from it (SW); incorporates conflict as its central dramatic force (albeit multiple conflicts); and employs a psychologically-realist cause and effect narrative structure (once the story is pieced back together into a linear chronology by the spectator in the case of AS and *Nuclear*). It is largely through the combination of using the three-act structure and a multi-protagonist approach to character that these texts find their distinct ways of harnessing emotional, intellectual and sensory engagement and forging a balance between drama and rendering the everyday. The choice of genre contributes to this balance and further informs the quality of narrative engagement.

Genre

In the development of the screenplay for *Nuclear*, there was a point at which I experimented with moving more towards comedy than pure drama. Ed was the easiest character from whom to elicit comedy. Like Bernard, Ed has a tendency towards self-aggrandisement and a lack of self-knowledge. In the third draft, there were some scenes where Ed's ineptitude, particularly towards women, was made the source of humour. For example, in the following scene, where Ed attempts to re-create a suggestive joke that he had previously seen Angelos pull-off, charismatically, with a woman at the tip:

INT. CHEMIST. DAY.

Ed is cashing in his prescription at the counter. A young female SALES ASSISTANT taps the prescription amount into the till. A bag of drugs on the counter.

SALES ASSISTANT

Do you want anything else?

Ed smiles at her.

ED

I'm still at work. Sadly.

The sales assistant looks at Ed supremely unimpressed. Ed becomes uncomfortable and embarrassed.

SALES ASSISTANT

Eight twenty.

Ed flusters about in his pockets to find the money.

(*Nuclear*: 3rd Draft)

Whilst Ed's ineffectual attempt at charm may prompt amusement and/or pity, either response serves to distance the spectator from his character. As the script developed on to the fourth draft, I realised that by employing the chapter structure, I was already dealing with the problem that just as a spectator may begin to care for a character the narrative moves on to someone else so it became clear that each chapter needed to generate closeness with that character, physically and emotionally. So I directed the tone back towards drama. As with the development of the narrative style in *Inhabit* where a stronger action was required (the 'insertion version' rather than the 'flush version') to compete with the kitsch production design, so too the genre of drama suited *Nuclear* more than comedy because of the multi-perspectival narrative structure.

David Bordwell locates omniscient narration with attachment to multiple characters within the genre of melodrama (70-73), whilst Smith refers to it as the 'expressive tradition' (153)

highlighting the transparency of character subjectivities. Whilst *Nuclear* is not fully omniscient - showing a range of viewpoints in turn rather than an overall viewpoint of all the characters - I have determined that, should the screenplay go into production, I would: instigate a down-played style of performance and attribute screen time to the mundane moments of everyday life in the editing, in order to counter any sense of melodrama that could otherwise arise from the script. Also, I have sought in the writing to embed the characters' subjectivities within the subtext, in the gaps between their actions and interactions, rather than to express them overtly. For example, the increasing lack of sexual chemistry between Marion and Ed is felt here by Marion and sensed by Tess:

Marion takes her rubber gloves off and wipes perspiration from her forehead. She embraces Ed from behind and peers around him at the pan of food sizzling on the hob and breathes in the aromas.

MARION

Mmm.

Ed extricates himself from her arms but doesn't look round.

ED

Eugh - sweaty Betty. There's time for a shower.

Ed continues with his chopping and cooking. Marion watches the back of his neck and bald head, a little deflated by his rebuff.

Tess looks up at Marion, noting the missed moment of affection between her parents.

(*Nuclear* : 10)

In the scene where Marion and Ed make up the spare room after Marion has found out that Ed has invited Angelos to stay, desire and power imbalance bristle underneath the surface of their interaction:

Marion stops mid-way through putting on the pillow-case.

MARION

I don't think it's a good idea.

ED

Why not? What's the problem?

Marion struggles to articulate a specific problem.

MARION

He smokes.

ED

He'll smoke outside. We just tell him to stick to that.

Marion looks out of the window at Angelos playing football with Sam in the garden. She looks back at Ed.

Ed takes the pillow from Marion and finishes pulling on the pillow case. Ed throws the pillow into position on the bed.

ED

There. Done.

Ed strides out of the room. Marion watches him go.

(*Nuclear* : 25)

To what extent Marion is acknowledging to herself that she is attracted to Angelos and whether Ed is aware of an attraction would be established in further collaboration with the actors but it was my intention to provide subtextual opportunities. Also, Ed's swift execution of the task of putting linen on the bed suggests the passive aggression in his dismissal of Marion's feelings.

As the screenplay developed, my use of genre in *Nuclear* became integrated into its multi-protagonist approach to character. Although overall it is a drama, I have employed a subtle shift of tonal register between the different character sections so that the style of writing

inhabits the subjectivity of the character. For example, the scene of Angelos performing 'Greekness' when he cooks lamb chops on the barbecue and the following scene of Marion and Angelos beginning to speak more intimately with one another before a rosy sunset belie Marion's desire for Angelos and her way of seeing him. It is Marion's point-of-view that is romantic rather than the screenplay itself. Meanwhile, the writing in Ed's section has a staccato, more austere quality to it dominated by action: medical tests; collecting and arranging equipment for his art work; having business meetings. Tess' section is infused with a more social-realist tone (particularly the scenes at school) as it depicts the awkwardness of adolescence, and Sam's section has a neutral tone of witness embodying his blamelessness amongst the mess of parental discord around him.

Farhadi notes, similarly, the importance of choosing the right generic tone for his script and it was partly reading about his approach to genre in *AS* that stimulated my own sensitivity to the affect of generic tone whilst I was writing *Nuclear*. Farhadi describes *AS* as 'a detective film' or mystery (Farhadi: DVD commentary) which he has consciously chosen to direct in a documentary style.

This film is only realistic in appearance. It has the feel of a documentary but beyond that there are more important underlying layers than raw realism. There are reasons why we think we are watching a documentary and witnessing real-life events. We managed to hide the overt structure of the story, the calculated details and anything that would reveal the input of an author - both screenwriter and director - behind this documentary approach. I wanted to conceal the omnipresence of the director, the scriptwriter and the crew. I didn't want anything to interfere with the audience's reaction.

(Farhadi: DVD commentary)

By avoiding a sense of authorial voice, Farhadi allows his characters to share screen time and the spectator's allegiance amongst themselves. Farhadi asserts that if the same script had been filmed in a non-documentary way, the plot details would become too explicit and it is the way later scenes force the audience to recall earlier details 'that lends a certain suspense to the film' (Farhadi: DVD commentary).

This documentary approach allows us to skim over details which then go on to become key elements of the film.

(Farhadi: DVD commentary)

For example, when Simin is packing her things to leave the flat, she takes money from a drawer (a brief moment, partially glimpsed and barely noticeable even on repeated viewings) which later becomes a key plot point when Nader accuses Razieh of stealing the money (fig. 40).



Fig. 40: *A Separation*: Simin takes cash from a drawer.

It is Farhadi's conscious mixing of documentary with the detective/mystery genre which gives AS its vitality and originality. SW mixes documentary with comedy although this seems to be more of an aesthetic choice for Baumbach than a narrative one.

Cinematography

In preparing to shoot SW, Baumbach and his cinematographer, Bob Yeoman, viewed several documentaries alongside the loose and 'invisible' authorial style used by John Cassavettes. This decision to apply a documentary aesthetic to a comic script reveals how Baumbach has navigated a desire for verisimilitude and engaging the spectator. In SW, Baumbach uses steady-as-possible handheld (similar to the majority of shots in *Inhabit*) giving a subtle sense of anxiety and vulnerability to the photography. By shooting on Super 16mm, they achieved a present and raw effect and the relatively small camera allowed for greater intimacy with the actors. Baumbach sought a sense of authenticity in the way he

shot scenes (Jeff Daniels actually drives the car) and the shots on the subway were ‘stolen’ like in a documentary (Baumbach: DVD commentary) (fig. 41). As well as supporting the desired aesthetic, these methods were born partially out of pragmatism: the low budget meant that the avoidance of hiring a low-loader or purchasing official filming permits was prompted by financial imperative as well as aesthetic choice. As such, the material texture of everyday life informed the cinematic rendering of the script as well as inspiring its content.

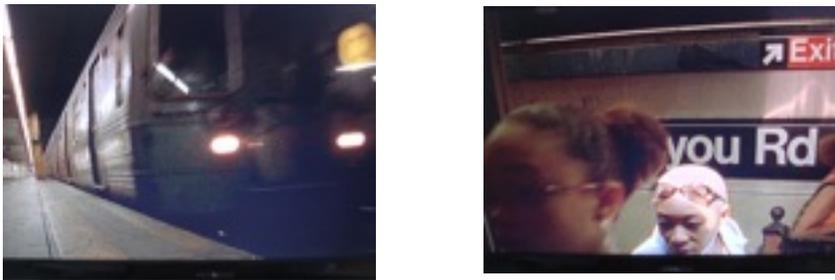


Fig. 41: *The Squid and the Whale*: documentary-style shots on the subway.

In AS, the cinematography also subtly promotes allegiance. In AS, Simin and her husband Nader sit side by side facing a court judge who is positioned behind but very close to the camera, as they present their respective arguments for and against a divorce (fig. 42).



Fig. 42: *A Separation*: Simin and Nader state their cases in court.

The camera position casts the spectator her/himself as judge. Simin and Nader are positioned evenly before us, they sit side by side sharing the same frame and both of their ar-

guments seem reasonable, but towards the end of the scene when Nader comes to sign a paper on the judge's desk, the camera framing and focus remain fixed so that Nader's head extends beyond the top of frame and his body is out of focus whilst Simin's face is still visible and in focus, despite being further away from the camera than Nader (fig. 43).



Fig. 43: *A Separation*: Focus on Simin.

Once Nader has left frame and Simin comes to sign the paper, the camera and focus move with her so that her face and body are both close to the camera and fully visible. So in this scene the story begins subtly weighted towards Simin.

This fixed, front-on camera position is used only in the first and final scenes of the film. During the rest of the film, primarily set in Nader and Simin's apartment, the camera fluidly follows and re-frames the characters as they move between rooms. The choice of location, with its many internal windows and rooms overlooking other rooms, allows the cinematography to shift fluidly between characters and to focus on a character whilst maintaining a level of physical separation through glass. The cinematography and mise-en-scène embody the multi-protagonist structure of the script:

...our perspective constantly shifts as we peer at one character and then another, trying to grasp their thoughts and motives, and work out our feelings about them.

(Cheshire: 62)

The scene in the court where Nader is arguing his case against Hodjia and Razieh is shot very differently from the first and last court scenes. In the messy muddle of conflicting desires and beliefs that have emerged, the camera is now positioned on an angle, the judge is visible and the eyelines of the accused are averted away from camera.

The cinematography in *AS* serves to furnish the film with a sense of non-judgement. There is a democracy and tolerance attributed to all belief systems embodied by the characters. In describing the cinematographic treatment of Razieh's apartment, Sicinski makes the connection between the cinematography and ideology of the film:

Although there are not as many physical barriers in this space as there are in Nader and Simin's upper-middle-class theatre of operations, Farhadi nevertheless maintains the same short, multi-perspectival, sentence-period shot-length and editing scheme. He never makes the lower-class religiosity of Hodjat and Razieh more "organic." In fact, all of *A Separation* is delineated with the same style, which, I think, saturates the entire spatial universe of the film with both anxiety and curiosity, a distrust of fixed answers...

(Sicinski: 75)

The cinematography in *AS* importantly serves to create distance, or separation, between spectator and character. The characters are frequently standing in doorways or seen through windows presenting layers of opacity and translucence between camera/spectator and character. The only time we see Simin touch Termeh and show a gesture of maternal concern, when they sit on the bed and Simin puts a comforting arm around Termeh, the camera is positioned behind them (fig. 44). By obscuring their faces, emotion is underplayed almost so as never to affect us too much to skew our concern for other characters.



Fig. 44: *A Separation*: Simin comforts Termeh.

In *Nuclear* a similar check on emotion is instituted through the chapter structure. Whilst I cannot talk in detail about the cinematography for *Nuclear* as it is currently still in screenplay format, there are some plans for the cinematography that are suggested in the screenplay. However, in contrast to *AS*, in order to balance this emotion-check created by the narrative structure, in *Nuclear* the cinematography will be used to maximise alignment and allegiance for each character during their individual chapter. Each chapter will be shot either from that character's eye line/level or favouring that character within the frame. In consultation with a cinematographer, I would also consider the use of a long lens in certain shots favouring the protagonist of a particular chapter, in order to reduce the depth of focus thereby aligning visual and narrative focus.

The opening and closing shots, as signalled in the screenplay, are wide-shots from above suggesting dead Marion's POV. In the opening scene she is 'watching' her old work room as Ed registers her death to her ex-colleague. In the final scene, she is 'watching' Angelos ride along the landscape with his son. In discussing endings and identification, Grodal notes a common cinematographic device associated with endings (and I would add beginnings):

...films have a series of optical procedures to facilitate such a change from intimacy to distance at the end of a film, like using a crane up, a fade, a long shot, or other devices that produce distance.

(195)

Nuclear utilises an optical device (wide shot from high angle) which is frequently associated with beginnings or endings (such as the ending of Winterbottom's *Everyday*) and suggests an omniscient narrator but, within the context of the narrative, also suggests the point of view of a character, Marion. These shots are non-realist. They don't intend to suggest that Marion is actually experiencing an after-life but they place the notion of objectivity as being impossible, beyond the reality of life. By ironising this cinematic convention and problematising narrative voice, the (intended) cinematography in *Nuclear*, along with the narrative structure and approach to character and genre, go some way to answering Lanser's call by embedding and promoting a polyphony of voice.

Conclusion

Through this research project, I have investigated how the formal properties of screen fiction can be used to ideate selfhood, love and responsibility within the co-ordinates of contemporary (pre-)parental experience and depiction of the everyday. By beginning with stories that deal with notions of parenthood in non-parent characters, I have brought to the fore contemporary anxieties and desires surrounding parenthood and their intersections with selfhood. *Inhabit*, *The Future* and *Unrelated* offer divergent narrative and formal approaches to these intersections, yet bringing them into dialogue reveals a common quality: each film tackles big questions through a focus on the small. In stories about the adoption of a stray cat, an uneventful family holiday and a couple at a fancy dress party ideas of mortality, love, sex, procreation and identity are addressed.

Through my engagement with representation of the everyday on screen, as it converges with narratives of family relationships, my practice has developed both in resistance and in complement to the other filmmakers' work. Whilst I have not followed the improvisatory methods of Winterbottom and Hogg, as I developed my film and screenplay I found useful the hyper-realist texture of their films and the value they assign to everyday moments, actions and non-actions within the domestic sphere. Through my encounters with Lefebvre's ideas and subsequent analysis of the employment of rhythm and patterns of repetition and difference, I have argued that the films *Archipelago*, *Everyday*, *Inhabit* and *Nuclear* embody and present the mundane and routine aspects of parenthood and in so doing present the convergence of the quotidian with practices of love and human encounter.

I have joined Hogg in focussing on everyday British middle-class life, a generally under-represented subject within non-mainstream British cinema which has traditionally concentrated its realist representations on working class subjects. By generating my practice in dialogue with films by Joanna Hogg, I have been inspired and encouraged to define my interest further by concentrating on a specific social and cultural strata distinct from Hogg's: that of the creative, liberal, non-affluent middle-classes. Whilst from a different geo-cultural heritage, Baumbach, July and Farhadi's unapologetic interest in depicting the middle-classes has also informed my own explorations within UK settings in the context of British cinema.

The major challenge I have experienced in my creative practice, and one of the driving forces behind my work as well as my choice of texts, has been to accomplish a balance between the dramatic and the everyday. Through the writing and production of *Inhabit* and a lengthy process of development and re-writing of *Nuclear*, during which I often felt that parts of the script leaned too far in one or other direction, I finally arrived at two original artefacts which present the reader/spectator with opportunities to engage emotionally, sensorially and intellectually with ideas of selfhood, love and responsibility in narratives exploring domestic relationships. Whilst it will be for each reader/spectator to decide for themselves if this balance has been achieved, I believe that I have, through the processes of screenwriting and filmmaking in dialogue with existing film and critical texts, created unique sites for drama and expressions of the everyday to coalesce.

Throughout my critical writing, my screenwriting and my filmmaking, I have actively attempted to maintain 'curiosity' but resist 'resolution', (Berger 162). By originating many of the scenes in *Nuclear* in 'clumps' which I then began to shuffle and fit together, in early drafts, I was often writing without knowing exactly how a particular scene would fit into the

whole. By filming two versions of the ending of *Inhabit* and using two sets of child actors, I was enabling the writing process to continue into the editing. As such, I decided not to know what the outcome would be until the processes were completed. My approach echoes Connor's when he says,

I see no virtue in a form of reflection or enquiry which has decided in advance what its pay-off is going to be.

(Connor:19)

As Connor says, 'one ought sometimes to be able *not* to be able to describe what one is doing' (26). As this piece of writing is indeed attempting to analyse what I have been doing, Connor's approach is, in certain ways, a difficult one to apply to a research project. Indeed the process has involved uncertainty and doubt but these are the qualities that have inspired investigation and bestowed integrity. Through this practice research, I have learned, as a screenwriter and filmmaker, that uncertainty and doubt are integral to my creative process and I have become a little better at embracing them.

The methods of my creative practice have incorporated auto-ethnography: my experiences direct and indirect of parenthood (both as a parent and as offspring) have morphed and combined with my imagination to create fictional characters and dilemmas; and as my life and the lives of those close to me have evolved over the time of the research period, certain real-life occurrences and related experiences have propagated into fictions. At the very beginning of this project, I used my three-year old daughter's naive drawing of a family (fig. 1) in my initial pitch. Coming to the end of the project, I asked her again, now aged seven, to draw her family (fig. 45). The increased maturity of her draughtsmanship and the greater detail in the drawing mirrored the maturation of my own creative skills; the development from the first kernel of the idea to final screenplay; and an increased awareness of how my own experiences of selfhood, love and responsibility have informed this research project. Whilst *Inhabit* emerged as a subdued comedy of fear, disappointment and

desperate actions, *Nuclear* grew into a drama whose characters struggled to love each other. I was not sure of where exactly my initial questions would take me, but through the reflective practice with which I have engaged in the making of these two artefacts, the questions have dovetailed into a curiosity about how might we, as Kate Tempest puts it, 'wake up and love more,' and what role cinema might play in that process? Whilst this statement is perhaps more earnest and peremptory than I would have initially felt comfortable with applying to my work, given the climate of social and political developments in the West over the last year at the time of writing (2016), such purpose, if delivered as a question rather than an answer seems a good place to have ended up. This conclusion chimes with Asghar Farhadi's approach:

More than anything else, I think today's world needs more questions than answers...I'm not hiding the answers away from my viewers, I simply don't know them...The important thing is to think and give the viewer the opportunity to think.

(Farhadi in Dehghan)

My representations of the everyday have developed over time whilst time itself has ushered in unsettling developments in the everyday.

Through the development of my screenplay *Nuclear* and analysis of *The Squid and the Whale* and *A Separation*, I have highlighted how the use of a multi-protagonist structure promotes film viewing as an act of living: the spectator is invited to be actively engaged in a process of questioning, deciding, judging, doubting, feeling. Though these experiences can be applicable to single protagonist texts also, my analysis shows how the multi-protagonist structure as embodied in the screenwriting, supported (in completed films) by the formal elements of mis-en-scène, sound, cinematography and editing, facilitates a transformative and dynamic relation between character and spectator in ways which are more difficult to achieve in narratives that represent only one perspective. Similarly, the characterisation seeks to give each character their own integrity and the moral landscape is de-

liberately made unstable so that the spectator must form their own judgements. These film writing and making methods are significant because they embody complexity, admit uncertainty and engage the spectator in thought and feeling, thereby empowering as well as entertaining. When a film text engages an audience, tells a story and simultaneously appoints a polyphony of voice within the text's narrative structure, the filmmaker/s invite tolerance, doubt and uncertainty into a world which can only benefit from an increase in such qualities, however incremental.

In summary, this project has contributed to knowledge in the following ways:

This written component in tandem with the two artefacts have charted how my creative practice has evolved within a critical dialogue with other film texts and theorists. From this journey, findings that contribute to methods of working for other screenwriters, filmmakers and film practice-researchers are:

- an auto-ethnographic method showing ways in which a practitioner might use personal experience and observation in conjunction with imagination to create screenplays and film texts
- the dynamic qualities of uncertainty in both practice methods and final output
- how representations of the everyday can be realised in cinema whilst maintaining opportunities for audience engagement
- how abstract notions or questions such as my interest in selfhood, love and responsibility within domestic relationships can be a starting point for the creation of a film narrative
- how a multi-protagonist narrative structure and approach to character can be used to entertain and engage an audience whilst providing a creative and political intervention by producing a polyphony of voice

- practical implementations and investigations into how genre (comedy and drama) affect engagement with the reader/spectator and how the screenwriter/filmmaker judges the most appropriate genre for the story they are trying to tell

The project has also contributed to knowledge more widely by:

- building on existing scholarship on the representation of the family in British cinema by shifting the focus towards the bohemian, non-affluent, middle-class family unit as opposed to the working-class family or working poor that tend to be foregrounded in social realist cinema
- building on existing scholarship on the everyday by applying sociological and cultural theories of the everyday specifically to film and film studies, and by realising the everyday in terms of both the mundane and moments of tension or crisis
- investigating ideas of selfhood, love and responsibility as they apply to experiences of parenthood (with an emphasis on motherhood) and imaginative notions of parenthood in non-parent adults
- contributing to feminist thought and culture by: 'normalising' references to women as subjects (presenting a primary focus on female filmmakers and protagonists); renewed revaluing of the repeated domestic tasks associated with raising children; countering ageist cultural sexism by focussing on middle-aged female characters; speaking about a common, yet commonly unvoiced, dilemma resulting from contemporary Western choice - that of a couple reaching a consensus about if and when to try for a baby (*Inhabit*).

At the end of this project, further avenues of enquiry suggest themselves for future research. These include further investigation into contemporary fatherhood and fictional explorations of non-traditional nuclear family units such as: single-parent families; step families; LGBTTIQ families; families created through continually evolving reproductive tech-

nologies. Beyond the scope of this research project, there is the fertile potential to apply its questions and methods, or indeed evolve new, more relevant questions, to wider cultures and geographies.

As I leave this research project and enter a new chapter of enquiry, my own children have grown from very young to not so very young and so I also enter a new chapter of parenthood whilst my curiosity around selfhood, love, responsibility and the everyday, as explored through cinema, remains fresh and constantly evolving.



Fig. 45: Family Portrait 2

Appendices

Appendix 1: Film Synopses

Unrelated **Writer/Director: Joanna Hogg. UK (2006)**

Two upper-middle class British families are on a summer holiday in a lavish Tuscan villa. The parents are referred to disdainfully as the ‘olds’ by their privileged young adult children, who are conversely referred to by the adults as the ‘youngs’. Into this established group, arrives Anna (Kathryn Worth), a woman in her forties, invited by an old school friend of one of the parents, Verena (Mary Roscoe). Anna was supposed to come with her partner, Alex, and her vague excuse for his absence suggests a possible rift in their relationship. Anna quickly feels herself drawn more to the ‘youngs’ than the ‘olds’, her peers, and an attraction develops between Anna and the flirtatious, twenty-something Oakley (Tom Hiddleston). Pressure builds as Anna’s loyalties become torn between her new young friends and her old, older friend. The suggestion of a sexual adventure with Oakley does not deliver and Anna, humiliated, flees to a cheap, urban hotel. Verena arrives to retrieve her and Anna finally confesses to a deep sorrow about a bogus pregnancy and having been informed by a doctor that she is menopausal. Verena is supportive and takes Anna back to the villa for the last night of the holiday. As the families vacate the villa, tensions have dissipated, and Anna is the last to leave. On her way home, Anna has her first positive phone call with her partner Alex.

The Future **Writer/Director: Miranda July. USA (2010)**

Sophie (Miranda July) and Jason (Hamish Linklater), are a couple who are lost in their mid-thirties in jobs that don’t satisfy them (she teaches dance to children and he works from home providing ‘tech support’ to web-users). They decide to adopt a sickly, stray cat

called Paw Paw and are given one month before they can take him home. Stricken by this impending responsibility, they set about re-evaluating their priorities for their last weeks of freedom. Sophie, desperate for recognition, sets herself the task of making 30 dances in 30 days but instead finds herself creatively paralysed. In an attempt to escape the task, she embarks on an affair with Marshall, an older man and single parent who lives in the suburbs of L.A. Meanwhile, Jason quits his tech-support job and takes on a voluntary tree-selling role whilst assuming a new state of alertness to the present. When Sophie is about to confess her infidelity, Jason cannot bear it and stops time. In their parallel trajectories whilst time is stopped, Jason suffers heartache at the idea of re-commencing time and losing Sophie and Sophie goes to live in the suburbs with Marshall. Jason finally restarts time in order to retrieve Paw-Paw whilst Sophie finally creates a dance and leaves Marshall, also intent on rescuing Paw-Paw. Sadly, they have missed the deadline by a day and Paw-Paw has been killed. Sophie goes back to Jason but he rejects her. They are now both grieving 'parents' and separated lovers.

Inhabit Writer/Director: Jane Devoy. UK (2014)

Melanie (Therese Bradley) has passed forty and her biological clock is ticking. Her actor boyfriend, Andy, (Neil Ditt) is enjoying life and is reluctant to try for a baby. The couple are in a stalemate and the tension is putting pressure on their relationship. They attend a satirical tarts and vicars fancy dress party at their bohemian East London friends' house. During the evening Melanie feels increasingly unable to relate to Andy. When her old, gay friend, Danny (Jonny McPherson) arrives, Melanie confesses to him that despite Andy having agreed to trying for a baby he isn't following through. Danny offers Melanie help in the form of a sperm donation. Spontaneously, Melanie takes up his offer with a medicine syringe in the bathroom. She leaves the party alone and cycles home. When Andy joins

her in bed, he is apologetic about his behaviour and seems finally to be ready to become a father - but it may be too late. The future between them is left uncertain.

Everyday **Director: Michael Winterbottom. UK (2012).**

Ian (John Simm) is serving a five-year prison sentence whilst his wife Karen (Shirley Henderson) manages the home and looks after their four children. Karen performs the routine tasks of parenthood, as well as working part-time in a bar and making frequent visits on the long journey to visit Ian in prison. Despite a brief affair with a local man, Karen and Ian manage to maintain their relationship throughout the five years and are finally reunited. Shot over five years, the children age visibly through the duration of the film.

Archipelago **Writer/Director: Joanna Hogg. UK (2010)**

A middle-aged mother, Patricia (Kate Fahy), gathers together her adult children, Edward (Tom Hiddleston) and Cynthia (Lydia Leonard), for a family holiday in a rented house on the island of Tresco as a send-off for Edward before he embarks for Africa as an aid worker. They are accompanied by two hired professionals: Rose, the cook, (Amy Lloyd), and a painting tutor, Christopher (Christopher Baker) and await the arrival of the father. Over walks, mealtimes and awkward interactions, tensions gradually surface between the family members. Middle-class manners fray when Patricia finally explodes with anger at her husband on the phone for not showing up.

Nuclear **Writer: Jane Devoy.**

(SPOILER ALERT)

The Elders, a family living in West Yorkshire, take on a young Greek lodger, Angelos, to help Ed, an artist, with his work and ease financial pressures. His wife, Marion, a registrar

at the local town hall and writer in her spare time, becomes attracted to Angelos as does their daughter, Tess. Marion and Ed's relationship is faltering and when Ed goes away for a night on business, Marion and Angelos have sex in her writing caravan only to be discovered by Tess who runs away to her grandfather's house. Sensing the disintegration of the family, Angelos returns to Greece. Ed is angered to hear Marion's confession of infidelity and Marion takes Sam to join Tess at her father's house. At his first big solo show, Ed is distressed by his personal situation and his professional ambition has waned. Ed takes Tess and Sam to the grandfather's house in the hope of reuniting with Marion but when they arrive they find Marion lying unconscious on the kitchen floor having suffered an unexpected heart attack. Back in Greece, Angelos visits his son and estranged wife: a new chapter of everyday family life begins.

A Separation

Writer/Director: Asghar Farhadi. Iran (2011)

Simin (Leila Hatami) wants to leave Tehran in search of a better future for her daughter Termeh (Sarina Farhadi) but her husband Nader (Payman Maadi) refuses, citing his senile father as the reason he must stay. Refused a divorce, Simin leaves Nader and Termeh, who refuses to go with her, to stay nearby with her parents. Nader hires the devout and pregnant Razieh (Sareh Bayat) to care for his father. Nader's father escapes from the flat whilst Razieh is tending to her daughter and she finds him at a local newspaper stand about to cross a busy road. The next day, when Nader arrives home from work he finds Razieh absent and his father tied to the bed. When Razieh arrives back, furious Nader pushes her out of the apartment and she falls on the stairs, shortly afterwards suffering a miscarriage. Razieh's husband, Hodjat (Shahab Hosseini) takes Nader to court charged with murdering his unborn child. Under Sharia law, Nader's guilt rests on whether or not he knew Razieh was pregnant. Termeh discovers that her father is lying about not having known but she upholds the lie in court in order to save Nader from a prison sentence.

Simin offers financial compensation (blood money) direct to Razieh if she will drop the case but Razieh reveals that she suffered a car accident whilst trying to retrieve Nader's straying father and so isn't sure which event caused the miscarriage. When Nader asks Razieh to swear on the Koran that he caused her miscarriage before handing over the blood money, she cannot and the case is dropped. Simin is finally granted a divorce and Termeh is asked to choose which parent she wishes to live with.

The Squid and the Whale* **Writer/Director: Noah Baumbach. US (2005)*

Two brothers, Walt (Jesse Eisenberg) and Frank (Owen Kline) are caught up in the aftermath of their parents divorce and separation arrangements. Walt sides with his father Bernard (Jeff Daniels), a professor and failed writer, whilst Frank feels closer to his mother Joan (Laura Linney). With a settlement of joint custody, the brothers are shuffled every few days from one parent to the other, as bitter resentment festers between the parents. Bernard attempts to seduce a young student and advises Walt to sleep around rather than invest in a developing relationship. Frank, frequently left alone at Bernard's, begins to drink alcohol and masturbate in public places. Joan freely shares her sexual history with her sons prompting Frank's curiosity and Walt's disgust. Tensions mount further when Joan's writing career takes off and she begins an affair with the family's tennis coach. Bernard suffers a suspected heart attack which, after investigation, is found to be a false alarm. Walt revisits the natural history museum where his mother had taken him regularly before his brother was born. Walt seems finally to have forgiven his mother and broken free from his father's influence.

Appendix 2: *Inhabit* shooting script

Inhabit

by
Jane Devoy

SHOOTING SCRIPT

2.6.14

1. INT. MACRO EYELASHES. DAY.

Highly magnified detail of eyelashes coated in clumpy black lumps are stroked with a mascara brush.

2. INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

MELANIE, 40, stands by the window finishing applying mascara. It is a sparsely, retro-styled 60's council flat. She replaces the lid on the mascara and adjusts her nun's habit around her face.

ANDY, 38, still cheeky-boyish in looks, enters with his eyes closed, hands in prayer and humming. He is wearing a cheap, fancy dress Franciscan monk's costume. He opens his eyes.

ANDY

Sister Melanie.

Andy looks ridiculous with a joke skullcap fitted poorly over his hair and a plastic cross around his neck. Melanie is neat and realistically nun-like.

ANDY (Contd.)

Is that tart or vicar?

MELANIE

Is *that* tart or vicar?

Andy comes over to Melanie and strokes her head-dress.

ANDY

Whatever it is, you look good.

Melanie smiles and tucks a bit of stray hair into his wig.

MELANIE

You so don't.

Melanie moves closer to Andy.

ANDY

And you smell good.

Melanie's face is close to Andy's latex skullcap.

MELANIE

You smell of paddling pools.

Andy kisses Melanie and takes her in his arms. She is pleased to reciprocate the embrace. He feels the outline of her pants underneath her tunic.

ANDY

Ah, Sister Melanie wears sensible pants.

MELANIE

They seemed to be the most fitting choice.

ANDY

Very well-fitting.

Melanie smiles and begins to ruche up the brown cloth of Andy's monk's habit revealing his bare shins.

Abruptly, Andy stops her hand and pulls away.

Melanie's smile fades.

MELANIE

We've got time. In fact, it's a *good* time.

ANDY

We don't want to mess up our habits.
We should go.

Andy heads for the door.

ANDY (contd.)

Come on, let's go.

Melanie's eyes smart as she watches him leave the room.
Melanie is alone. Just the sounds of traffic outside.

3. EXT. ANDY & MEL'S COUNCIL FLAT. DAY.

Andy exits their flat with his bike and leans it against the wall. Melanie follows out and slowly leads her bike along the walkway. Andy flusters around the door double locking it.

Melanie notices a neighbour, JACKIE, 48, bleached-blonde, coming towards them with her two Jack Russell DOGS.

Andy sees Jackie and smiles at her.

Jackie doesn't smile back but takes in Melanie and Andy's costumes without comment.

Andy nods at Jackie.

ANDY

Alright!

JACKIE

It's cockroaches now.

Jackie indicates behind her with a nod of her head. Andy and Melanie both look nonplussed.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

They just got rid of the bedbugs - now its cockroaches.

Jackie passes Andy and Melanie with her dogs. The dogs sniff at Melanie and Andy as they pass. Mel and Andy wheel their bikes along the walkway.

Jackie looks back at them.

JACKIE

They're breeding!

Melanie turns away, unsettled by Jackie.

4. EXT. FRONT DOOR ENTRANCE TO ANDY & MEL'S BLOCK. DAY.

Melanie and Andy exit their block of flats with their bikes. Andy gets onto his bike, Melanie lingers at the doorstep noticing a large, black beetle type creature, lying half-squashed on the doorstep.

Melanie is transfixed and stares at the beetle.

5. EXT. MACRO BEETLE'S BELLY. DAY.

In extreme close up, the beetle's shell is inert and raised off the floor by a huge, swollen belly of sheer, brown skin holding a bundle of embryonic forms.

6. EXT. FRONT DOOR ENTRANCE TO ANDY & MEL'S BLOCK. DAY.

ANDY

Come on.

Melanie gets on her bike and they cycle off.

7. EXT. CANAL. EVE.

It is a late, summer's evening and the sun is low. Andy rides ahead single-mindedly along the canal towpath with a tense pace. Melanie lingers behind. Two PASSERS-BY smirk at each other.

The wheels of their bikes trundle over the dusty path.

Dust and scum float serenely on the surface of the canal.

8. EXT. STREET. EVE.

Andy and Melanie cycle past fashionable restaurants and shops.

Andy sails through an amber traffic light and Melanie rolls up to wait at the red light watching Andy disappear ahead.

Melanie passes a Turkish supermarket. Turkish music blends with Asian music and the throb of bass from a passing car.

9. EXT. WILF AND ALICE'S HOUSE. EVE.

A street of Victorian terraces. Melanie and Andy stand outside the door with a bottle of fizzy wine.

Two children in their pyjamas, FRANK, 5 and CHLOE, 3 answer the door.

ANDY

Hey!

MELANIE

Hello.

FRANK

Hello.

Chloe hides behind her brother. They eye Melanie and Andy with fascination. Andy scruffs up Frank's hair as they follow the children in.

ANDY

(to Frank)

So what did you come as?

Frank smirks and looks down. Chloe wants to be part of the action

and peeps out from behind her brother.

CHLOE

Pyjamas!

Chloe grabs Melanie's hand and swings affectionately from it.

ANDY

Oh no! Not the terrible pyjama twins with
the deadly power to dissolve monks and nuns?!

Andy clutches Melanie's arm in mock terror. The children laugh.

Their mother, ALICE, French, early 40's, looking sparkly and beautiful in a red, vintage can-can dress, appears.

ALICE

Oh wow! You two look fantastic. Come in!

Alice kisses Andy and Melanie on each cheek and ushers them in. She directs the children up the stairs.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Bedtime now. Up you go.

CHLOE & FRANK

Night night!

Melanie gives the children a little wave whilst Andy follows Alice into the living room.

MELANIE

Good night.

CHLOE

Will you give me a goodnight kiss?

Melanie nods and smiles.

MELANIE

When you're asleep.

Melanie watches the children disappear upstairs.

10. INT. LIVING ROOM. EVE.

A rowdy, bohemian party is in progress with the GUESTS wearing satirical 'tarts and vicars' fancy dress costumes: all extrovert, laughing, drinking.

Alice's partner, WILF, 44, enters wearing a vicar's dog collar and a smart suit. He sees Andy and Melanie.

WILF

Ha, good. More of the brotherhood, and sisterhood. Alice was worried that we'd only get tarts. I wouldn't have minded.

WILF kisses Melanie and taps Andy's rubber skull.

Alice comes over with two glasses of sparkling wine for Melanie and Andy. She ushers Melanie over to a table where she grabs her own drink. Alice is about to clink glasses but she stops and pulls back and touches Melanie's hand.

ALICE

Or I could get you a spritzer instead? Or juice?

Alice raises her eyebrows quizzically.

MELANIE

This is great thanks.

Alice is disappointed.

ALICE

So no luck yet?

MELANIE

No.

ALICE

Have you cut out the caffeine?

Melanie nods.

ALICE (contd.)

Did you see my acupuncturist yet?

Melanie is becoming uncomfortable.

MELANIE

Not yet.

ALICE

And is he giving you loads of sex?

Melanie smiles, shrugs, feels awkward. Alice senses she should back off. She clinks her glass against Melanie's then notices a ring on Melanie's finger.

ALICE

Ooo, are these your new ones?

Melanie relaxes.

MELANIE

Yes. Summer season.

Alice touches the ring.

ALICE

Gorgeous!

Melanie takes the ring off her finger and gives it to Alice.

ALICE (contd.)

No!

MELANIE

I've got loads at home.

Alice's face lights up. She takes the ring.

ALICE

(in Swedish)

Thank you very much!

Alice puts on the ring and admires it. Melanie smiles.

AISHA, an attractive party guest beams up to Alice.

AISHA

Hello darling!

Alice beams back at Aisha and hugs her.

ALICE

Hey!

Alice and Aisha kiss on both cheeks.

Melanie looks around at the extrovert party guests and takes a deep drink of wine. She sees Wilf and Andy chatting and laughing over the other side of the room.

11. INT. CHLOE'S BEDROOM/LANDING. EVE.

Chloe is asleep in her bed. The door is ajar, light creeping in from the landing.

The muffled sounds of laughter and raucous conversation from downstairs. Melanie's figure appears at the doorway.

Melanie walks into the room and looks at Chloe sleeping. She gently re-positions the miniature duvet over Chloe. Melanie bends over Chloe's head and sniffs her scent in deeply. Chloe pops upright.

CHLOE

What are you doing?

Melanie is ruffled, having thought that Chloe was asleep.

MELANIE

Just kissing you goodnight.

Chloe smiles and snuggles down again into the duvet. Melanie stands up. Chloe sits up again.

CHLOE

But you didn't kiss me.

Melanie smiles and bends to kiss Chloe on the forehead. Chloe snuggles down again.

CHLOE (contd.)

Night night Melanie!

Melanie turns back to Chloe.

MELANIE

Night night.

Melanie goes out of the room. Once on the other side of the door, she rests her forehead against it, closing her eyes tightly.

12. INT. LIVING ROOM. EVE.

Wilf and Alice dance in a mischievously provocative way. Guests dance around them and grin.

Melanie finishes her wine. Melanie sees a droplet of wine on the side of her glass.

13. INT. MACRO WINE GLASS. EVE.

A drip of golden wine swells and crawls slowly down the side of the glass. A flash of Alice's red dress curves within the droplet.

14. INT. LIVING ROOM. EVE.

Andy comes up behind Melanie and whispers in her ear.

ANDY

Trust those two to hog the limelight.

Melanie turns to look at Andy. He notices her expression.

ANDY

You alright?

MELANIE

What do you think?

ANDY

Oh Jesus Christ Mel - we're at a fucking party.
Have a bit of fun.

Annoyed, Andy shifts his attention back to the Wilf and Alice.

Wilf and Alice do mock writhing together. The crowd whoop and laugh. The music pounds.

Melanie can't take anymore and leaves the room.

15. INT. HALL. EVE.

Melanie goes into the hallway as the doorbell rings. Cheering and laughter comes from the living room. Another ring on the doorbell. Melanie answers the door to DANNY, late thirties, camp and dressed in an immaculately starched, elaborate, High Anglican rector's costume. He looks dashing in it.

DANNY

My lovely Mel. You look gorgeous!

MELANIE

So do you.

Melanie tries to compose herself.

MELANIE

Where's James?

DANNY

(signaling quotation marks) 'Work' - but really he just hates dressing up.

They glimpse music and dancing in the living room. Danny notices that Melanie is agitated. He brandishes the bottle he has brought and steers them towards the kitchen.

DANNY

You need a top up.

He ushers Melanie past the dancing towards the kitchen.

16. INT. KITCHEN. EVE.

Danny searches cupboards for a glass. He finds one, holds it up to the light with distaste.

Melanie leans against the work surface, trying to put on a brave face. Danny cleans the glass.

DANNY

I guess Alice and Wilf traded in hygiene for kids.

Melanie looks down and steadies her forehead with her hand. Danny stops polishing the glass.

DANNY (Contd.)

Oh, I'm sorry.

Melanie's eyes are filling with tears. Danny comes over and strokes her arm.

DANNY (Contd.)

You've only been trying, what a year? That's not long. It doesn't mean there's a problem.

MELANIE

We're not trying. That's the problem. We've been not-trying for eighteen months.

Danny looks confused.

DANNY

But I thought he said yes.

MELANIE

He did, but then he wouldn't, he won't... you know. Never at the right time anyway.

Danny takes in Melanie's situation and feels a wave of compassion. He puts an arm around her. He tries to upbeat the moment by tapping her empty glass.

DANNY

We definitely need a drink.

He unwraps his bottle of wine to find it has a cork rather than screw top. Danny rummages in the drawer for a corkscrew. He stops suddenly having seen something in the drawer.

DANNY(Contd.)

What are these?

Danny lifts several plastic syringes out of the drawer.

MELANIE

They're for the kids' medicine.

DANNY

There's loads here. They won't miss one.

Melanie is not sure what he means. Danny chooses one syringe and puts the rest back in the drawer, closing it quietly.

DANNY (contd.)

I'm going to help you.

Danny holds the syringe up to Melanie. She thinks he is making a joke, but then realises he is serious. She is stunned.

MELANIE

What?

DANNY

It's not a myth, the DIY method. It works.
James' ex did it with a friend. The kid's now ten!

Melanie shakes her head, confused.

DANNY (contd.)

We talked about it before.

MELANIE

Yes but, before Andy, before James.

Danny looks at Melanie, determined in his offer.

Melanie takes this in as a real possibility. She stares at Danny's face. His eyes; his ear; his nose; his chin.

Melanie takes the syringe from Andy and handles it. Andy grabs a plastic cup and takes Melanie's hand to lead her out.

17. INT. HALLWAY. EVE.

As Melanie is led by Danny past the living room, she glances in and sees Andy still sitting with Wilf. Other guests are dancing.

Danny leads Melanie up the stairs.

18. INT. LIVING ROOM. EVE.

Andy and Wilf are deep in conversation. Their expressions are serious.

ANDY

...I've got the tour coming up and two auditions next week...

Andy checks Wilf's reaction. He looks unconvinced.

WILF

You're just scared. There's no need to be. You'd be fine.

ANDY

It just really doesn't feel like the right time.

WILF

And what about for Melanie?

Andy, agitated, looks at Wilf, looks away.

WILF (contd.)

Just be careful mate. Be careful.

Andy is tense, confused. Wilf grabs a bottle of fizzy wine and refills Andy's glass.

WILF (contd.)

Here.

19. INT. LANDING. EVE.

Melanie sits on the floor outside the bathroom door. A lone nun with smudged mascara. The sounds of excessive, drunken frivolity from downstairs dissolve into the sounds of her own breathing.

She sees a woodlouse climbing along the skirting board and puts her finger in its way until it crawls onto her finger.

20. INT. MACRO WOODLOUSE CRAWLS OVER A FINGERTIP.

21. INT. LANDING. EVE.

The woodlouse crawls back onto the skirting board. The bathroom door opens and Danny appears, his Anglican smock a little crumpled. Melanie stands up. He hands the syringe filled with a white substance to Melanie. She takes it hesitantly.

MELANIE

But would we tell Andy? Would you want to be involved?

DANNY

We'll have nine months to sort all that out.

Melanie holds the syringe frozen with anxiety.

MELANIE

But what would James think?

DANNY

This is mine, not his. And you're the other side of forty so get on with it. Go.

Danny gently pushes Melanie towards the bathroom. She enters the bathroom and the door closes.

Danny stands alone. He clasps his hands together considering what he has done.

22. INT. BATHROOM. EVE.

Melanie places the syringe on the side of the sink. She steps out of her shoes and carefully pulls down her sensible white pants from underneath her habit. She moves the pants away with her foot.

Melanie takes hold of the syringe. She looks up and sees herself in the mirror: a fake nun clutching a plastic Calpol syringe loaded with her friends' semen.
It doesn't feel right.

Suddenly and decisively, she squirts the contents of the syringe into the sink. She runs the tap to flush it down and looks around unsure what to do with the syringe. She drops it in the bin. She sees the cup and puts that in the bin too. She arranges some tissues from the bin to cover the cup and syringe. She grabs her pants from the floor.

22a. INT. BATHROOM. EVE.

Alternative to scene 22: Melanie makes the insertion.

23. INT. LANDING. EVE.

Danny is waiting nervously outside the bathroom door. He looks at her with concern as she comes out.

DANNY

Did it hurt?

Melanie shakes her head. She can't make eye contact with Danny.

MELANIE

I've got to go now.

DANNY

Right, yes. Go home, lie down, rest.

24. INT. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Danny hugs her on the doorstep. He seems full of sweet excitement and innocence.

Melanie kisses him quickly on the cheek. Danny shuts the door.

Andy comes into the hallway from the living room and looks at Danny.

ANDY

Nice costume. Have you seen Mel?

Danny is flustered.

DANNY

Er, yes.

25. MONTAGE:

A re-mixed collage of previously heard sounds accompanies the montage: the bicycle tyres on gravel, over grates; the street sounds; the shop music; the dog barking.

EXT. EAST LONDON STREETS. NIGHT: Melanie pedals through the streets alone. Green traffic light glisten.

INT. PIPES: a black and white, rough video of liquid rushing down pipes.

EXT. EAST LONDON STREETS. NIGHT: Melanie's hands turn the handle-

bars and she turns a corner.

INT. PIPES: the liquid rushes around a corner in the pipe.

EXT. EAST LONDON STREETS. NIGHT: The street whizzes along underneath the bike wheel.

INT. PIPES:
Sperm/tadpole forms swim and squirm about in a murky fluid. The liquid flows down the pipe and comes to a stop at an obstruction.

END OF MONTAGE.

26. EXT. ANDY AND MEL'S FLAT. NIGHT.

Melanie enters her flat with her bike. Alone.

27. INT. ANDY AND MEL'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Melanie is sleeping. There is dull dub music coming from a neighbouring flat. Andy comes into the room and takes off his habit. He climbs into bed in his boxer shorts. Melanie's eyes open.

ANDY

Are you OK?

MELANIE

Yes.

ANDY

Danny said you weren't feeling well.

MELANIE

I just had too much of that fizzy wine.

ANDY

I'm sorry Mel. I know I've fucked up.
I'm sorry.

Andy puts his arm around her. Mel takes his hand and holds it tightly inside her fist.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE: 'THE END' with indistinguishable particles floating around behind. The text divides and replicates into two 'THE END's, then four, then eight...

Appendix 3: Web link to alternative scene for 'Flush version' of *Inhabit*

<https://vimeo.com/170760550>

Password: inhabitflush

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