

Kyiv - A City Symphony: An examination of the conventions of poetic documentary and how they can create a representation of the city of Kyiv, Ukraine.

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ABSTRACT

This research is an examination of the definitions, theories, and film processes of poetic forms of documentary. Poetic documentary shares many characteristics with European avant-garde film movements in the 1920s, where experiments with cinematic techniques including the close-up, montage editing, and sound explore associations and patterns that involve temporal and spatial juxtapositions. It is argued by filmmakers and film scholars that this approach to filmmaking results in sensuous knowledge and a unique experience of reality, notions explored in this exegesis by focusing on film representations of a modern European city.

The aim of this practice-based research is to expand upon the approaches of poetic documentary to explore the possibilities of creating a valid representation of the city of Kyiv, in contemporary Ukraine, as a chosen cultural site of interest (between 2016 - 2022). The notion of 'place' provides a conceptual foundation for this research and insight into humanistic geography has been essential for identifying the 'meanings' attached to places, that give them value. These meanings emerge from complex relationships between us, our environment, our physical and sensual experience of place. The research problem has been approached in a multidisciplinary way, exploring ethnography to provide a model for the mapping of these related concepts to develop a methodology and to consider which methods were useful to the filmmaker. The motivations and practice of a documentary filmmaker in many ways parallel the work of ethnographers who participate in the lives of others, and this research has a correlation with the rich history of ethnographic cinema and the study of cultural identities.

The design of this practice-based PhD is underpinned by a connective model of research design where historical and theoretical concepts have been explored and expanded upon to produce new knowledge in the form of film experiments, the outcomes of which are two films, *Vision of Europe* (2017) and a city symphony *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022). I argue that by sharing my self-reflexive creative processes, in conjunction with the analytical processes, this research contributes to new knowledge in this area of film studies and articulates the connections between poetic documentary, aesthetics, and representations of place.

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KEY WORDS

Poetic documentary

European avant-garde cinema

City symphonies

Place

Ethnography

Kyiv

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to practice and my interest in avant-garde film

I have been interested in the production of experimental film, documentaries, and forms of factual programming for over twenty years. My professional work has allowed me to experience a range of categories of filmmaking including news, sports and arts funded film production, all of which have clear connections with documentary conventions. Yet, my own personal work seemed to gradually shift from the conventional form of many of these categories to explore the experimental modes and my own emerging styles. Presently, my filmmaking is situated within the practice of Artists' moving image (Elwes 2008), which I define next, and which I argue is placed within traditions of the European avant-garde cinema. It was this challenge, to trace the roots and importance of similar poetic forms of avant-garde filmmaking, that was not merely an inspiration to me at the start of this project but an opportunity to contribute practice and knowledge to the field of present-day experimental documentary filmmaking, and specifically in documentaries seeking to create representations of place.

Artists' moving image is a contemporary term which connects avant-garde moving image practices including film, video, multi-media, in the pursuit of fine arts, often referenced as media-arts (Jennings 2015). Catherine Elwes (2015, p.164) describes Artists' moving image as a "hybridisation of art practices" and a "liberated" form of filmmaking. The term identifies filmmaking at the heart of artistic expression and considers notions of aesthetic tradition in a broad range of moving image practices. Such experiments in moving image practice have a long history within the field of experimental cinema, from the 1920s European cinematic avant-garde, to new-wave movements such as the Expanded cinema of the 1970s (Youngblood 1970), to more recent movements such as Artists' moving image, all of which identify new forms of independent artistic filmmaking and have a relationship with what may be categorised as poetic forms of documentary (Le Grice 2001; Elwes 2015; Jennings 2015).

This research aims to produce knowledge that will demonstrate ways in which current documentary practice should place even greater faith in the potential of filmic poetics

and their capacity to represent place, but its achievement necessitates, as a first objective, an examination of the definitions and approaches of poetic forms of documentary. The conventions of these poetic forms derive from a unique style and practice of filmmaking, which emerged under the influence of various European film movements in the 1920s. Gathered under the collective banner of the European cinematic avant-garde (Winston 1995; Aitken 2001; Nichols 2001b), those movements encompassed several national film movements from 1925, and onwards. Each film movement was driven by its own aesthetic concepts and/or theoretical manifestos, key examples and influential artistic concepts which will be discussed in due course. As much theorists as they were filmmakers, they created poetic documentary forms that shifted equally between social observation and auteuristic concerns of form and aesthetics. Nichols' (1991, 1995, 2001a) theoretical work on the documentary genre is well established and vital to the film scholar. He offers a definition and a way into examining, what he defines as, a poetic mode of documentary filmmaking:

“Poetic documentary shares a common terrain with the modernist avant-garde. The poetic mode sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions” (Nichols 2001a, p.102).

Nichols' description provides an interesting starting point and motivation to explore the definitions and revisit the historical foundations of the modes of documentary film production, which does not seem classified as a concrete genre. Nichols' modes of documentary film production, although criticised by some academics for providing an “overly prescriptive underpinning theorisation of documentaries” (Bruzzi 2006, p.4), present a framework where the “blurred boundaries” (Nichols 1995; Winston 1995; Bruzzi 2006) of style and approaches to documentary filmmaking can be identified and debated.

When considering my own filmmaking practice at the start of this project, I began to wonder whether my work was part of the tradition of the modernist avant-garde in film, albeit in yet unexpressed ways. If my practice were part of that tradition, then to what extent, and would revisiting the era when the modernist avant-garde was most dominant, help with the development of my understanding, knowledge, and practice in documentary film production. On reflection, and as a result of completing the

research, I can see how my filmmaking is situated across a range of definitions that exist in the history of experimental filmmaking, but what also has been illuminating is to discover the close links to other multidisciplinary fields, including humanistic geography and ethnography, which I will refer to presently.

Exploring landscape, space, and place

My own filmmaking, from 2004, began to follow the trajectory established by Artists' moving image, when I was inspired by several exhibitions, screenings, and installations. For example, the exhibition *Time Zones* (2004) at the Tate Modern was a group exhibition of global works that contributed to questions of how documentary approaches in moving image can explore the concepts of time and space. Here filmmakers reflected on personal experiences and definitions of landscape, and the impact of social and cultural influences on the environment, including locations such as Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, and Bangkok. Many of the films can be described as poetic documentaries interested in "reflecting the continued spatial and temporal differences that co-exist globally" (Todoli 2004, p.9), and demonstrate "an art practice that obliquely and poetically pulls together communication and patterns that form the interlinked webs of commerce, circulation, mobility and belonging" (Rogoff 2004, p.85). These uniquely personal films were interesting on several levels, and simultaneously seemed to be offering both cultural knowledge and, through their experimental documentary features, a cultural resistance to dominant representations.

My style of documentary filmmaking at that time began to explore these experimental forms and notions of landscape and place. I became affiliated with the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection. The organisation is dedicated to documenting the work of British moving image artists and promotes group exhibitions and retrospectives. Based at Central Saint Martins, London, and the University of the Arts London, the organisation manages The British Artists' Moving Image Database, designed to assist research into British Artists' film and video. As a result of this collaboration, I participated in a touring exhibition of short films by Tate Galleries called *Figuring Landscapes* (2008). The exhibition was pivotal in bringing together poetic representations of Australia and the United Kingdom (UK), generating a dialogue

between people from different continents, exploring definitions of place and their respective cultural identities:

“In both countries, artists are variously representing landscape as a place of memory and the imagination, as contested territory, as a testing ground for humanity and as nature under threat” (Elwes 2008, p.3).

My contribution to the exhibition was a film entitled *311* (2007) which records the impact of beach replenishment schemes on the Dorset coastlines. The short film examined the juxtaposition of industrial intervention on the coast and the natural processes of longshore drift and erosion, ultimately revealing the manufactured landscape. Similarly, the motivation for many of the filmmakers involved in *Figuring Landscapes* was to explore landscapes of personal interest and the meaning and experiences attached to them, which, on reflection, proved to be a formative experience for me in working with ideas of place and meaning. Cresswell (2008, p.135) suggests artists and researchers encounter geography as a form of philosophical study, “Places, then, are particular constellations of material things that occupy a particular segment of space and have sets of meanings attached to them”. At this point I began documenting the landscape in relation to my home to create a meeting point for moving image and personal experience, but also to work with the geographical concepts that were indirectly discussed by such films. Definitions of ‘landscape’, ‘space’ and the enigmatic notion of ‘place’ took on increasing intellectual importance, and I began to question these terms and to research the differences and nuances of the taxonomy. Indeed, the interdependency of these terms are the reason for the focused research effort undertaken within this study.

Careful consideration of these definitions has been given throughout this thesis to explain my overall research position and my choice of phrasing in this text. In particular the notion of “place” provided a conceptual foundation for this research as I began to understand the complexity of geographical representations within film. The apparent interchangeability between place and geographic representation, therefore, necessitated further research into humanistic geography that has become an important part of the literature review (Tuan 1974, 1979; Cresswell 2004, 2008; Ingold 2013). Cresswell (2008, p.134) succinctly highlights “Geographical definitions of place since the 1970s have focused on the combination of location (an objective, definable

point in space) and meaning.” Such consideration provides an important means of achieving the study objectives, and concurrently, as a turning point in being able to interpret my chosen city of Kyiv and articulate the meaning generated by my filmmaking.

The notion of place is a contested concept among both artists and theorists, causing multiple divisions in theory and practice. The influence of art on the study of landscape can be traced back to a multitude of practices. While the visual study of landscape is as old as representative art itself, and visual cityscape as old as the conception of the city, a heightened sense of imagining the city can be seen, for example, in the *veduta* or “view” paintings of the Italian 18th century with painters such as Canaletto. It was Canaletto, real name Giovanni Antonio Canal, who specialised in the views of Venice that became so wildly popular with British purchasers, as markers of their experiences of the Grand Tour. While Canaletto’s cityscapes are, largely, topographically correct, and given extra precision in his use of mechanical drawing devices, reputedly of a camera obscura, he was “not above tampering with the truth” (Janson 1997, p.628) to achieve the kinds of compositions that satisfied his training as a scenographer. Such a form of representation that came to be known as Capriccio art provided a “convincing portrayal of fact and fantasy that produced a captivating reality rooted in imagination” (Steil 2014, p.43). By contrast, a more bluntly mechanical exactitude was sought after in photography by the FSA photographers of the 1930s who “aimed for total Neutrality” (Bate 2018, p.122) creating “topographic visual knowledge, as surveys of the land”. Such divisions between theorisations, practices and complex representations continue in the art of cinema whether that be the Direct cinema movement of the 1960s when “the documentary camera is now able to follow its subject across social boundaries and borders which previously served to keep it from intruding” (Chanan 2007, p.166); or two other filmmakers that are of specific interest in this study Epstein and Paradzhanov, who compliment the physical attributes of topography with highly constructed representations of place. A common theme in symbolic representations of place appears they are “a way of experiencing and expressing feelings towards the external world” (Cosgrove 1998, p.9).

A key term that has been identified by humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1979, p.7) is “experience”, which can be understood through questions such as, “What is the

nature of experience and of the experiential perspective?” and by prioritising the subjective experience of place and opposing meanings where “Experience can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediated by symbols” (Tuan 1979, p.6). Therefore, the exploration of experience and meaning attached to place has been a focus of the present study, which is why the methodology I have developed has brought attention to “subjective experiences of people in a world of places” (Cresswell 2008, p.135). These subjective experiences of place have been a motivation for me as a filmmaker for a long while, but they had not taken their proper structural position, consciously, until I embarked on the present research. Reason and the project aim demand that a sense of place take its proper and ever prominent position within my filmmaking, for introducing locations, and creating a representation of communities and lifestyles that exist within my sites of interest. The study therefore argues the “experiential perspective” is useful to the filmmaker and practice-based researcher in sharing sensual knowledge and “the complex relationship between ourselves, our bodies, and our environment; our physical and sensual experience of place; and the impact a particular location can have on our lives” (Roms 1998, p.80).

Poetic documentary as a form of ethnography

The aim of this practice-based research is to examine the filmmaking processes of poetic documentary and explore the possibilities of creating a valid contemporary representation of the Ukrainian city of Kyiv, a major shift from my early films of Bournemouth, UK. This study spans across 2017 to 2022, the period of my doctoral study, and during which I visited the city of Kyiv, Ukraine, twice (2017 and 2019), to film and experiment with filmmaking practice. The reasons for my choice of Kyiv are personally motivated by the need to explore family roots and establish a sense belonging, and they present the basis of my intuitive reasons for undertaking this research. Although the filmmaking is not directly examining family history, it is important for me to acquire knowledge about the complexity of places that have and continue to impact my family heritage. Despite being primarily about the exploration of film techniques and the conventions of poetic documentary, my filmmaking indirectly and uncontroversially provided an embedded means to reflect on personal experiences and consider the impact of social and cultural influences which shape my

own identity; with a particular interest in how film techniques can manipulate these representations.

My wife, Natasha, is from Ukraine and we have multiple links with Kyiv, both personal and professional, that I have been interested in both developing and mapping through my filmmaking. The opportunity to undertake a PhD was a catalyst to the exploration of the representation of the city of Kyiv as a personal place of discovery and connection. This study enabled exploration of my own identity, and that of a blended family that has crossed borders to maintain a Ukrainian and British family profile. Kyiv is a significant choice of subject presently central to the discourse on European relationships between the East and the West, and the particularities of the different national and international socio-political narratives that define it. Kyiv, therefore, became my new site of interest, not only for personal reasons of identity, but also as a choice of place that best calls into play its complex cultural heritage, the visibility of which in European affairs has been increasing since 2014.

As a consequence of needing a methodology that could aid the exploration of both place and culture, I turned to ethnography as a means to traverse the disciplinary boundaries of humanistic geography, documentary, and cultural studies; and reflected on this practice in film as a way of linking these related concepts. The motivations and practice of a documentary filmmaker seem akin to the work of ethnographers who “participate in the lives of others, observing and documenting people and events” (Campbell and Lassiter 2015, p.5) and of its definitions as a research approach, “many fieldworkers are committed to documenting the lives and times of their host communities. This work of documentation is known as ethnography” (Ingold 2013, p.2).

Ethnographic research approaches have been helpful in developing a methodology and, from that development, to derive a set of methods that would be most useful to the filmmaker. A key feature is the use of fieldwork which can be conducted through the practice of documentary filming. But filming in this sense ought not to be understood as a synonym solely of recording, and instead requires the sister-feature of “interpretation” to become operational in any meaningful way. The methodology I developed, therefore, aligns with ethnographic practice precisely because it is

complemented with the interpretation of texts that illuminates the knowledge and experience of a culture. As Campbell and Lassiter (2015, p.6) succinctly put it “fieldwork involves the reading, interpretation, and production of cultural texts”. The ethnographic understanding of practice is most relevant to the favoured connective exegesis of practice and interpretation, suggesting methods of recording data, ways of interpreting the data and importantly positioning the researcher to reflect on their own personal relationship with that experience.

The use of film to study places as cultural sites is well established in the history of cinema where it is noted, “ethnographic film became an institutionalized scientific field, with recognized specialists and a body of criticism” (De Brigard 2003, p.14). The ethnographic goal of creating representations of a culture is a familiar debate in film and media studies, and I reflect on key literature (Hall 1997; Lacey 1998; De Brigard 2003) throughout this study. Key arguments concerning how the world around us is constructed and presented through a range of media products, is later highlighted through the interpretation of my practice-based outcomes. Often these constructions present images of gender, ethnicity, age, events, and nationality, that offer a way into definitions of culture and identity. To open these discussions, there is no better place to begin, perhaps, than with Stuart Hall’s definitions (Hall 1997; Hall and Evans 2013) of the circuit of culture or cultural codes where a representational system is established through a media product, in this case a poetic documentary. Hall (1997, p.4) states “thinking and feeling are themselves ‘systems of representation’, in which our concepts, images and emotions ‘stand for’ or represent, in our mental life, things which are or may be ‘out there’ in the world”. Hall’s preoccupation, as one theoretical perspective, is closely aligned with films inspired by ethnographic sensibilities:

“The history of ethnographic film is rich in examples of film’s unique capacity to record the multileveled nature of events, of its usefulness in teaching new ways of seeing, and of its power to evoke deeply positive feelings about mankind by communicating the essence of a people” (De Brigard 2003, p.38).

Culture is itself a complex term and Hall (1997, p.2) presents a simple and useful definition of shared meanings, “‘culture’ is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation, or social group”. I will argue these notions of cultural identities are central to places such as cities, which are the lifeblood of modern European culture. To capture these identities, and the human experiences

that comprise a way of life, a variety of researchers and artists have turned to ethnographic studies of place, as noted by Tuan (1979, p.7):

“Yet it is possible to articulate subtle human experiences. Artists have tried—often with success. In works of literature as well as in humanistic psychology, philosophy, anthropology and geography, intricate worlds of human experience are recorded.”

Although there are distinctions between ethnographic writing, ethnographic film and documentary film, there are nevertheless similarities that cross over in cinematic practice, and I will discuss a number of key texts that have inspired me and helped design the practicalities of this study in subsequent chapters. Central to ethnography is the question of the ethnographer and their relation to “place”. Self-reflexivity, therefore, acquires an equally central significance to the project and my filmmaking, exemplified in the limitations of my experience and knowledge of my chosen cultural site:

“Ethnographic practice is a relationship-based intersubjective practice that demands honest and rigorous appraisals of our own assumptions and ethnocentrism as we learn about those of our ethnographic collaborators through co-experience and shared dialogue” (Campbell and Lassiter 2015, p.5).

The self-reflexive interpretation of the films, therefore, becomes an important thread throughout this study which allows understanding on a personal level, but also a necessity in sharing the sensual experience of place. I too contribute to these broad disciplines of ethnographic practice through my chosen practice of experimental documentary filmmaking.

Statement of the research aim and objectives

This exegesis contributes to the field of film studies by adding to extant scholarship from numerous film scholars and filmmakers, noted and discussed in chapter one, the literature review. The research aim and objectives emerge directly as a response to the historical contextualisation explored in key literature, films, film concepts and by filmmakers, which together comprise the expressive form of poetic documentary filmmaking. My intention has been to draw from past filmmaking practice and film theories to evaluate what is relevant to my contemporary practice, and through

experimentation in filmmaking, develop both an understanding and evaluation of the creative processes involved, and offer an original approach to current poetic documentary practice.

The methodology underpinning this exegesis, discussed in chapter two, includes film study approaches of textual analysis and semiotic analysis that have assisted with analysis of the research outcomes and the application of poetic hermeneutic interpretation. The resulting interpretation offers a reflexive evaluation of the creative processes that have had an important impact on the originality and design of the project's films. In the final chapters of the thesis, I assess how poetic approaches to documentary can impart new knowledge, through the experience of place in relation to culture, as communicated through film language, and through this written interpretation of my own films.

The challenge facing the production of new knowledge through practice-based research is how to combine and share self-reflexive creative processes in conjunction with analytical processes. In practical terms, the study explores research as a process and the processes within my own experimental filmmaking. In philosophical terms, the research examines how poetic approaches can create representations of lived experience and place, in this particular case, the city of Kyiv. This thesis explores the extent to which the theoretical underpinnings of the research inform my practice and, in turn, ways in which my practice informs my theoretical understanding. Building on that notion this thesis discusses the creation of knowledge as a process of an ongoing, internal, and external reflexive dialogue.

To resolve the seeming incompatibility of combining creative self-reflexivity with objective analytical science, I have adopted a connective model (Hamilton and Jaaniste 2010; Hamilton 2011) that can re-connect the arts with the sciences:

“this ‘connective’ exegesis offers clear benefits to the researcher in connecting the practice to an established field while allowing the researcher to demonstrate how the methods have led to outcomes that advance the field in some way. And, while it helps the candidate to articulate objective claims for research innovation, it enables them to retain a voiced, personal relationship with their practice” (Hamilton 2011, p.340).

A connective model places equal importance on the practice-based outcomes and the written thesis that records a commentary on the research and allows for an exploration of the potential of the relationship between my films, my primary research, and my interpretations of process and reflection. The exegesis will therefore offer a meaningful contribution to knowledge in this field through, firstly, testing and elaborating on the avant-garde theoretical perspectives that are established, to highlight the potential application of 1920s avant-garde filmmaking to current documentary practice. Secondly, through original practical concerns and the creation of film artefacts, to expand upon those creative motivations and possibilities, and explain how this approach to filmmaking can give voice to a place and culture, that other forms of cinema may not reach.

The research aim of this exegesis therefore is:

Aim no. 1: To conduct an examination of the conventions of poetic documentary and the ways in which they can create a representation of the city of Kyiv, Ukraine, in my own filmmaking (between 2017-2022).

My objectives involve the initial critique of existing knowledge in this area in order to explore key theoretical and filmmaking concepts of 1920s poetic documentaries. This will enable the development of a set of criteria to experiment with in my own filmmaking practice, leading to interrogating and expanding upon those criteria, to offer a contribution to aesthetic development in this area of experimental filmmaking and in practice-led research knowledge:

Objective no. 1: To explore key theoretical concepts of poetic filmmaking that emerged during the 1920s European cinematic avant-garde, with the intention of developing a reflexive understanding of the creative film processes involved, to further expand upon both theory and practice in this area of film studies.

Objective no. 2: To experiment with filmmaking techniques employed within the European cinematic avant-garde and the city symphony films of the 1920s, with the intention of developing an original personal creative approach to experimental documentary filmmaking.

Objective no. 3: To produce a number of filmmaking experiments that both explore and expand upon the creative processes evident in the European cinematic avant-garde, to develop my own filmmaking practice.

I have applied the historical and theoretical concepts to produce new knowledge in the form of my own film experiments, the outcomes of which are discussed later in chapters three and four. My intention was to experiment with filmmaking techniques and the use of the poetic documentary processes to understand my own reflexive practice, and to also consider how a city symphony film has, and can again, portray the representation of place, today. Therefore, the following research objectives focus on reflexive analysis and interpretation in the exegesis that offers methodological innovation in relation to new scholarly approaches to this form of practice-led research:

Objective no. 4: *To create the practice-based outcome of the research and complete a city symphony of Kyiv, Ukraine, as my chosen contemporary European cultural site of interest, which will offer an original contribution to the practical design of this approach to documentary filmmaking.*

Objective no. 5: *To create an exegesis from the application of a connective modelling that provides a reflexive analysis of the creation process, from inception to completion, in conjunction with the analytical process, to offer an original contribution to new scholarly approaches in practice-led research.*

In conjunction with the practical experiments, the artefacts that I have created and the thesis itself combine as a self-reflexive assessment and evaluation of the film techniques and processes involved in its making. My final written reflections will apply analytical processes, including poetic hermeneutic interpretation, and evaluation of my films to examine the outcomes as films and cultural artefacts. Therefore, in fulfilment of the project's aim and to reach a revitalised understanding of the potential of poetic documentaries to represent place, my final objective must be:

Objective no. 6: *To assess how poetic and experimental approaches to documentary can contribute to a representation of Kyiv, Ukraine, and a unique experience of culture, which will offer a contribution to the study of place, in film studies.*

To summarise and conclude, the film experiments are accompanied by this essential written thesis to evaluate them in relation to generic methodological innovation, aesthetic development, and the purpose of artistic educational inquiry. Alongside the personal, professional, and intuitive arguments for undertaking this research, I therefore also argue, as a point of scholarship, that the originality of this work lies in the reflexive creation process in conjunction with the analytical process. As Hamilton

(2011, p.341) states, the connective model, as the locus of new knowledge, presents challenges for the practice-based researcher that I have addressed:

“It requires a reconciliation of multi-perspectival subject positions: the disinterested perspective and academic objectivity of an observer/ethnographer/analyst/theorist at times and the invested perspective of the practitioner/ producer at others. The author must also contend with a range of writing styles, speech genres and voices: from the formal, polemical voice of the theorist to the personal, questioning and sometimes emotive voice of reflexivity.”

My work is therefore part of an ongoing research interest, where the aim and objectives of this research identify the need to explore avant-garde approaches in cinema, documentary filmmaking, and film as ethnographic practice, because I am placing my work within those traditions and expanding upon the possibilities this multidisciplinary approach offers.

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Literature overview and situating the inquiry

This literature review explains the broad context of my research area and helps to set the research problem investigated in this thesis within a broader body of knowledge. It highlights some of the relevant issues and debates that have characterised documentary filmmaking, and surveys books and scholarly articles relevant to the study of documentary modes, avant-garde aesthetics, and the representation of place in film. As a consequence of personally making films that explore place, the research has evolved to embrace a number of other subjects, directing itself towards the discipline of ethnography as a way of connecting related concepts and developing a useful methodology relevant to my chosen filmmaking approach.

The review specifically helps to navigate the complexity of documentary forms that are noted by Nichols (2001a, p.21):

“Documentaries adopt no fixed inventory of techniques, address no one set of issues, display no single set of forms or styles. Not all documentaries exhibit a single set of shared characteristics. Documentary film practice is an arena in which things change. Alternative approaches are constantly attempted and then adopted by others or abandoned. Contestation occurs.”

The research covered by the literature review presents documentary practice as one of the most exciting and progressive of the film genres, where a wealth of new approaches are driven by filmmakers' own personal motivations, the institutions they belong to, and theories that they have developed. The broad scope of the research I reviewed has enabled me to discover poetic sensibilities that speak directly to my practice, which supports my chosen methodology of combining practice with the theorisation thereof. I will argue this form of avant-garde experimental filmmaking, which is itself a form of synthesis of concepts, is an important part of the evolution of documentary film.

In this literature review chapter, I identify topic areas that I divide into sub sections, and I pinpoint the key concepts that have helped me to navigate the design of this study, noting how the present study expands upon various disciplines. The sheer volume of traditions, on first view, seems overly complicated but is essential for the

study to illustrate the cross-fertilisation of disciplines that have resulted in new approaches to documentary. In my own documentaries, I experiment with sound and image to push the boundaries of my practice. Yet, this current research has helped to construct a critical framework for writing about practice and to present an original exegesis of my practice that is relevant to today's documentary filmmaker and film scholar. How the concepts learnt from the different disciplines have influenced my work, how I have synthesised ideas, and how the study expands upon the research to create new knowledge, are summarised at the end of each subsection and in the conclusion of the literature review.

1.2 Documentary practice and the European avant-garde cinema

The first section of this review offers a broad survey of the key literature that traces the history of documentary filmmaking. The literature that I refer to throughout the study has helped me to differentiate between film approaches, and debate the modes of documentary practice, and introduce the creative sensibilities of the key filmmakers involved. A challenge of the research into this film genre is that documentary "is what we might call a fuzzy concept. Not all films that count as documentaries bear a close resemblance to each other" (Nichols 2001a, p.21). Documentary filmmaking seems limitless and what has been written in this field is vast. The different modes of documentary filmmaking identify the many aesthetic choices available to the filmmaker, in selecting techniques and making practical decisions on how best to represent reality. Nichols' (1991, 1995, 2001a, 2001b) work provides a comprehensive and historical overview of documentary filmmaking from early cinema to the contemporary. The work is useful in navigating the numerous techniques that have been employed by filmmakers in the making of their films, and the motivations behind them, identifying and simplifying broadly six different modes of production, one of which is the poetic mode which seems aligned with my own practice. It was important to trace the historical development of documentary, as it is here that definitions of the poetic and debates about the role of aesthetics are established.

A key finding of the literature highlights the dominance of the mainstream narrative, ideological and observational approaches to documentary film production, which can be described as adhering to "a scientific model with a clear distinction drawn between recording (data) and analysis (findings)" (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009, p.3). Nichols

(2001a, p.34) suggests “modes come into prominence at a given time and place” but some “persist and become more pervasive”; for example, expository, participatory, and observational modes have been discussed as mainstream and associated with “staple” forms of journalism and documentary, whereas other modes come and go, following the contours of critical thinking at the time.

Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) trace the emergence of the observational mode of production and argue for its importance in both documentary and ethnographic film, identifying the dominance of techniques including hand-held technology, distanced observational perspectives, and synchronous sound. The debate that comes to the forefront is over how best a filmmaker can represent reality, and which mode of documentary is best suited to the purpose of representation of a place and its community. Since the definitions of documentary were discussed by John Grierson in his ground-breaking lectures and work ‘First Principles of Documentary’ (1932), documentary has been dominated by the notion and pursuit of cinematic truth, with the goal of capturing reality in the sense of an authentic experience between a filmmaker and a subject. Thus, the argument over accuracy versus aesthetic, appears to be a key determinant in both aesthetic choices, and the criticism of particular modes of documentary. As I reviewed the literature, it became clear to me that some scholars and practitioners have devalued the significance of the history of the poetic or avant-garde in this field, arguing for the importance of the scientific perspective on documentary filmmaking, over the poetic.

Barnouw (1993) and Winston (1995) also trace the history of non-fiction filmmaking and the dominant forms of documentary but are significant in elaborating on the role of art approaches in realist filmmaking. Winston (1995, p.18) elaborates on the key divisions in documentary approaches: “This tension, between ‘film as art’ and ‘film as mechanical reproduction’ was to be echoed in the world of documentary”. On reflection, their work presents the question to a practitioner like myself: to what degree can creative approaches in documentary filmmaking be justified by the filmmaker? Winston (1995, p.25) explicitly notes there have been important attempts “to move documentary altogether away from the established modes of factual communication in science, economics, politics, etc.” and that the documentary medium may offer “a painterly tradition that allows for ‘poetry’ rather than, say, ‘essay’”. Understanding both

the practical techniques and the idea of this historical and theoretical counterpoint concerning aesthetics has resulted in further experimentation in my practice and encouraged me to justify my own poetic aesthetic as a documentary filmmaker.

An overview of the scholarship brings further light to the avant-garde movements that are of interest to this study, leading to a focused survey of the literature in the discipline of film studies that showcases the radical progressive nature of the early avant-garde filmmakers and their relationship with documentary filmmaking. Documentary production and experimentation go hand in hand to provide many definitions, movements, and categories that continue to expand the possibilities available to more avant-garde forms. By tracing the historiography of the key avant-garde filmmakers and documentarians from Lumière to Epstein, and Vertov to Grierson, to name a few, I could see that momentum has built in re-evaluating this era. Such a re-evaluation of avant-garde aesthetics has not only motivated my research presented here but also addresses a long-standing oversight regarding the poetic mode since, as Renov (1993, p.32) puts it,

“the expressive is the aesthetic function that has consistently been undervalued within the nonfiction domain, it is, nevertheless, amply represented in the history of the documentary enterprise.”

By the 1920s, key cinematic avant-garde film movements were formed in Europe which would continue to contribute to the foundations of documentary practice as noted by Nichols (2001b, p.592), “The explosive power of avant-garde practices subverts and shatters the coherence, stability, and naturalness of the dominant world of realist representation”. Aitken’s (1992, 2001, 2020) extensive work on both documentary film and European film movements provides a detailed history and identifies important filmmakers that were broadly connected under the banner of the European cinematic avant-garde, including film movements such as Soviet montage, Surrealism, and French cinematic impressionism. These movements contributed to an international effort to understand through experimentation the possibilities on offer in the art of film. Aitken argues that experimental practice diversified and there was a cross-fertilisation of ideas between artists and filmmakers, who celebrated new and creative technical achievements; for example, French cinematic impressionism became concerned with both “traditions of naturalism and symbolism” (Aitken 2001, p.81). The era saw a wealth of experimentation in cinema, including the theories of

editing of Dziga Vertov and the associated Kino-Eye group of filmmakers. Vertov's writings from 1924 to 1934 have been posthumously collected in Michelson and O'Brien 1984 and discussed by Hicks 2007. Sergei Eisenstein's montage of attractions theory and writings from 1922 to 1934 which are collected in Eisenstein 1988 and discussed by Michelson and O'Brien 1984. Jean Epstein's theory of *photogenie* of the image established in articles from 1921 to 1955 and discussed by Abel 1988, and by Keller and Paul 2012. I will discuss these historical theorists and practitioners in relation to the making of my own film artefacts and the practical evolution of the present study.

My research into the 1920s era of the modernist avant-garde cinema introduced me to several important filmmakers and their films. My personal discovery of French impressionism and the filmmaker Jean Epstein in particular have been essential in developing an understanding of the connection between realist representations in film and the symbolic function of film processes. Epstein's writings discuss *photogenie* and the transformative techniques of filmmaking that, when applied to subjects on location, create enhanced characteristics of human experience, whereby individuals "may see their moral value increased by filmic reproduction" (cited by Keller and Paul, p.267). Chanan (2007, p.97) helps formulate a useful definition of the term *photogenie*:

"photogenic becomes a noun, *photogenie*, which means more than 'attractive to the camera', more than the special beauty of certain faces in movement or certain filmic effects, but also a sense of transcendence which film lends to the phenomena under observation, a shimmering that gives us the impression of seeing things as we've never seen them before, as if they were endowed with a special intensity and inner life, or, as Epstein put it, a personality of their own."

Chanan (2007, p.97) highlights a range of film processes linked to the concept including "exposure, framing, focus, angle, composition" and "editing and montage", identifying compositional techniques that could be explored in one's own filmmaking, and provides a number of examples through film analysis.

By way of summary, it should be noted that *photogenie* is a complex concept developed in the writings and theories of French filmmakers Jean Epstein and Louis Delluc, and that other important writings have helped develop the concept. The theories presented by Epstein were published starting in the 1920s in French

magazines of film criticism including '*Cinea-Cine pour tous*' and '*Photo-cine*', and included the articles 'Bonjour, Cinema' (1921) and 'Espirit du Cinema' (1955). These texts have been difficult to access, although some of the writings exist in a classic reprint series by Forgotten Books, London (2015). As an English-language reader I have been assisted by English translations featured in several texts, in particular the works of Abel (1988), Keller and Paul (2012), and Wall-Romana (2013), who provide some of the few instances in the scholarship where the processes of technique and theory are considered together in analyses and readings of Epstein's films, alongside translations of his original articles. These studies, as well as rediscovering Epstein as "one of the best-kept secrets of film studies" (Gunning 2012, p.13), examine the practical application of cinematography, editing, and sound. Epstein grandly states that cinema opens opportunities to understand the complexity of life: "we want to hear what the ear doesn't hear, just as through the cinema we see what eludes the eye" (cited by Abel 1988, p.68). To that end, I have been interested in exploring processes connected to concepts such as *photogenie* and experimenting with such compositional techniques in my own filmmaking, to expand upon such possibilities, and consider the effect expressive techniques can have on the sensual experience of place in film. The texts on literature and film that I have surveyed over these last few paragraphs prioritise the filmmakers and film movements that arguably created the first body of work that can be referred to as poetic documentaries.

The concept of *photogenie* was illuminating and sparked a pivotal moment in my research where poetic forms of documentary filmmaking spoke back to the features and theorisation of aesthetics. Many of the theoretical reflections of the avant-garde filmmakers grew out of a long tradition of the philosophy of art and examined how important poetics, or aesthetics, were in constructing and sharing knowledge. This area of filmmaking has naturally led me to tracing the German and wider European traditions of aesthetics in art, which highlighted a broad range of philosophical debates represented by texts including Baumgarten's '*Aesthetica Part 1*' (1750) and '*Aesthetica Part 2*' (1758), Kant's '*The Critique of Judgement*' (2005; originally published 1790), and Hegel's '*Aesthetics: Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*' (1993; originally delivered 1820-1829). I also consulted secondary literature including works by Schaeffer 2000; Graham 2005; Frost 2012; Buchenau 2013; Mininger and Peck

2016. These studies discuss the theorisation and pursuit of “sensuous knowledge”; they constitute “a study of relations between ‘art’, truth, and beauty” (Frost 2012, p.49).

Understanding what aesthetics might mean, as well as analysing some of its key characteristics and discursive divisions, has been essential in understanding the underlying film theories that have been developed by filmmakers bound up in art history. However, for the present study, this discussion of aesthetics comes from a filmmaking perspective, and an exploration of film artefacts to examine the expressive potential of creative processes. Therefore, Lessing’s ‘*Laocoön*’ (1887, p.11) has been useful, as its examination of aesthetics explores meaning (“among the ancients beauty was the supreme law of the imitative arts”) but as applied to the specificity of artistic mediums including poetry, painting, and sculpture. By asking in what ways a sculpture, compared to poetry, was more or less effective at rendering the dramatic event of a priest wrestling with sea serpents, Lessing was able to highlight the aesthetic importance of the medium involved. Lessing (1887, p.68) continued to dissect the construction of an art object to explain why process is important to the artist by stating:

“these means are wanting to the artist, who must therefore give to his personified abstractions certain symbols by which they may be recognised. These symbols, because they are something else and mean something else, constitute them allegorical figures.”

Lessing’s work elaborates on the practical application of aesthetic theory identifying definitive practical choices an artist can make, using techniques to create symbols that connote what he describes as actions and bodies. The artistic signs “imitate actions, but only by suggestion” and it is the role of the artist to select combinations of signs and “therefore choose the one that is most suggestive” (Lessing 1887, pp.78-79). Lessing’s distinctions have relevance to a filmmaker and focus on the material characteristics of the chosen artform or medium in creating narrative and representations of reality. Comparisons can be drawn with key avant-garde filmmakers who were also medium-specific theorists who dissected the processes of filmmaking, for example Eisenstein (1988, p.80) with his discussion of montage (“The expressive effect of cinema is the result of juxtapositions [montage]. It is this that is specific to cinema”), and Epstein (1921a; cited by Keller and Paul 2012, p.33) who

was fascinated by cinematography and the meaning created by the close-up shot: “I look, I smell, I feel. Close up, close up, close up”.

Lessing’s perspective has been adopted by numerous art and film theorists and cinema is comparable to other artforms:

“This, then, not only putatively shows that film could do some things beyond the reach of other art forms, but also suggests the path filmmakers should take if they desire to explore the possibilities of film as an autonomous art” (Carroll 2003, p.129).

This perspective on aesthetics can be applied to the film processes involved and how film is the creation of a text with a certain syntax or grammar and constructed equally through cinematography, sound, and editing. Lessing’s distinctions between mediums are characterised by Sjöholm (2013, p.19) as “discussing how he perceives the work of art, and the semiotic issues attached to it” rather than “to how he perceives the viewer”. It is how the construction of the film medium operates through a diverse range of techniques that is of interest in this study, alongside the way the representation of place is constructed in film.

However, along with Jean-Marie Schaeffer, it has also been necessary to understand the aesthetic phenomenon as a relational concept:

“knowledge, if it is conceptual, is nonetheless also a phenomenal knowledge, that is, it always presupposes the existence of an accord between what is given in intuition and the conceptual activity that organises this sensuous given” (Schaeffer 2000, p.29).

This is a point Schaeffer develops from Gerard Genette’s (1999) observation that aesthetic value lies not in the object but in the viewer’s relationship to the object, a perspective that I will return to briefly in chapter four. By extension of this relational argumentation, scholars with other perspectives have found it necessary to further discuss the true nature of aesthetics as an exploration of audience responses and the spectator experience. The exploration of mediation between filmmaker and audience, which I realise is an equally important area of aesthetics, is not a priority of this study. Instead, uniting scholarship on the European avant-garde and on aesthetic theory with the history of documentary, this study provides a call to analyse more thoroughly the

potential of poetic documentaries and the processes involved in their making. Aesthetic theorisation seems allied to or compatible with the avant-gardist traditions, concepts and poetic approaches presented by the filmmakers that I am drawn towards. It has helped me with appreciating the expressive nature of documentary forms and generating my thinking regarding the possibilities within the practice of experimental filmmaking. The limited scope of this research strand creates a realisation that the subject of aesthetics and poetics has an astoundingly complex history, far too challenging to explore fully in my study. Yet, this research has significantly informed my methodology section and has helped me develop, and justify, a toolbox set of techniques to experiment with in my practice, similar to the notion of “objects” and “parts” explored by Lessing (1887, p.101) where “poetically a single object can be described according to its coexisting parts” and exist as “signs of language in general”.

Across studies of documentary, it could be argued there exists a critical tendency to disregard the avant-garde or present it as a curiosity, rather than to prioritise a working definition of poetic documentary that would be of use to the practitioner. It is in opposition to this tendency that the present exegesis proposes to focus on the avant-garde in a contemporary context to help define techniques and justify the role of the poetic approach in examining place and culture through film. By revisiting this era of filmmaking and assessing its influence on the documentary genre, I have learnt to combine and expand upon possibilities in my own practice. I have experimented with a range of techniques including image, sound, and editing, and by not focusing on one area of filmmaking, I contribute an innovative approach to creating poetic documentaries. This self-reflexive study synthesises theoretical processes with the practice of filmmaking and contributes to knowledge in the experimental digital film era, where these perspectives and historic practices are apparently not so prevalent, or valued, perhaps.

1.3 The concept of place and ethnographic practice

This section of the review attends to scholarly literature that helps construct a critical framework for writing about definitions of space and place, in turn leading to the concept of a ‘sense of place’, which is more useful in relation to the present study.

Sense of place is a key concept in the fields of geography and ethnography, which responds to the question of “what is place?” in terms of the meanings, values, and cultural identities attached to it. Research into ethnography became useful for me in synthesising many of the concepts that the literature review had brought together, including ones from documentary, art, and cultural and sociological studies. In acquiring an understanding of the philosophy of place, I have gravitated towards theorists and practitioners that explore visual cultures and promote a sense of creativity in ethnography. The conceptualisation of place is further explored in this study through the prism of documentary and the practice outcomes of the study, which can be seen in certain specific ways, as forms of ethnographic film production.

Extant literature on place is multi-disciplinary and the present study in part contributes to the wider debate on place that has been of interest to a multitude of researchers, geographers, philosophers, documentarians, and artists. Cresswell (2008, p.134) makes an opening statement that poses the difficulties of providing a working definition of “place”:

“Place, then, is not scale specific. It can be as small as a setting at a table and as large as the Earth. The common assumption that place is a settlement is but one definition of place, and not the most interesting.”

Cresswell (2008, p.134) goes on to explore the definition: “a sense of place refers to the meanings, both individual and shared, that are associated with a place”. The attached meanings and values that permeate place have been central to the themes of my filmmaking, so the discussion is most useful when considering the relationships that exist beyond the physical features of a landscape.

Clearly, the study of place reveals many power relationships and shaping influences at play. An important text by Lefebvre, *‘The Production of Space’* (1974), is a groundbreaking study that explores the construction of space and the many classifications of it that exist, such as the natural, social, political, economic, and imagined, “we are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth” (Lefebvre 1974, p.3).

Lefebvre's in-depth study focuses on the production of space leading eventually to the idea that "a social space is a social product" (1974, p.16), suggesting that the concept of space, itself, is defined by and is a product of social history.

Lefebvre introduces the framework of the "spatial triad" that looks at space as a social product consisting of three components, namely (1) spatial practice, (2) representations of space, and (3) representational spaces, often referred to as perceived space, conceived space, and lived space (Watkins 2005, pp.209-220). This seems a useful conceptualisation of space as it considers many variants including the physical, social, and mental influences on its construction and the signified meaning of space, moving "towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols or signs" (Lefebvre 1974, p.39). Yet, Lefebvre's text has been described as problematic for the filmmaker because it further expands definitions of space with multiple theoretical perspectives including the mathematical, the historical, and the Marxist (his own political perspective). If "space" itself is a product of social history, and if social history is fully accounted for through Marxist theory, there is a drive to conclude, along with Lefebvre that space as we currently experience it is a product of the capitalist society. From a Marxist perspective, the conclusion is certainly consistent, but to describe spaces, communities, and individuals solely as instruments of capitalism in a "space" for labour obliges us to discount the possibility of other social, individual, and personal characteristics that are important, and not least important to the poetic filmmaker. For those following Lefebvre's thinking, society may well comprise communities suffering alienation in a "world of commodities" (Lefebvre 1974, p.53) but this experience was not one I shared. And in fairness to Hamilton's directive to balance creative self-reflexivity with objective analytical science, I could not ground my research in a Marxist conception of space without doing damage to the former directive, for the sake of satisfying the latter. Self-reflexively, I was required to accept that my motivation for conducting this study was to celebrate what I perceived to be a shared cultural experience. Nevertheless, what Lefebvre's valuable discussion of space suggests is that landscape is multifaceted, that space depends on how it is perceived and lived in, and that meanings are therefore multiple, shifting, and always already changing.

Many of the films examined in this study explore spaces that highlight influences of capitalism or politics, but at the centre of which are human affinities that I am drawn to including the emotive experience of “place”, because I see humanist filmmaking as a positive approach to examining cultural sites of interest. To me, as a poetic and not overtly political filmmaker, what is most appealing is exploring how a “sense of place” encapsulates a range of human encounters of intimacy, emotion, and beauty (as described by Tuan 1974, pp.143-144). This literature review will highlight the leading humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, who develops the study of place as a way into learning about humanity and culture. The discipline identified as humanistic geography gives priority to the subjective experiences of place. This resonates with my chosen practice of poetic documentary filmmaking, as both start from a positive perspective on place, leading to similar questions of attached meanings and values.

Tuan (1979, p.6) helps with differentiating the concepts of space and place and how we intellectually respond to ideas generated by place: “In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. ‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘Place’. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow with value”. Tuan shifts his focus to explore how people experience place through a range of senses and how feelings about place are generated, “to take into account the different modes of experience (sensorimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual), and to interpret space and place as images of complex—often ambivalent—feelings” (1979, pp.6-7). Tuan’s discussion therefore suggests two points to consider, firstly, space becomes place as it is embedded in human values, and secondly, the values can be experienced through a variety of senses. Reassuringly, Tuan’s work gives prominence to the importance of the “experiential perspective” on place that is appealing to me and aligned with my chosen approach to the present research. As a filmmaker, I am interested to examine how these experiential senses, including sight and sound, connect specifically with the technical processes and functions of film. I argue that poetic aesthetics of experimental filmmaking offer opportunities to explore unique modes of experience, and the sensory or sensual experiences of place.

Tuan’s (1979, p.7) work is guided by a question that is at the core of this study, namely “What is the nature of experience and of the experiential perspective?”. Tuan describes engagement with place as a “pause in movement” where we firstly examine

a place's physical attributes, and then take a reflective moment which highlights experience on a multitude of levels. The experience of place develops beyond mere spatial ability and awareness, to consider and appreciate more sensual responses and shared cultural experiences. The notions of place, experience and knowledge are therefore entwined, and although I do not consider the current work to be one of anthropology, there are similarities between documentary filmmaking and visual anthropology, in terms of process and interpretation, to be explored in this study. The present thesis contributes to a wider discussion of the experiential perspective on place by exploring how film can express a sensual experience of place, manipulated, and articulated through film techniques. The discussion of the concept of "experience" of place, is developed throughout this connective exegesis, which offers an experiential perspective on Kyiv, Ukraine, as communicated through poetic documentary filmmaking and hermeneutic interpretation.

Ingold (2013) echoes a similar view and breaks down the definition of place further to look at its relationship with key features of culture and human experience. Ingold (2013, p.20) states that the study of place reveals the materials of life, or "what scholars call *material culture*, a phrase that perfectly captures this theory of making as the unification of stuff supplied by nature with the conceptual representations of a received cultural tradition." Ingold (2013, p.27) highlights an important duality within the representation of place:

"On one side is the raw physicality of the world's 'material character'; on the other side is the socially and historically situated agency of human beings who, in appropriating this physicality for their purposes, are alleged to project upon it both design and meaning in the conversion of naturally given raw material into the finished forms of artefacts."

The unfolding definition and focus on the experiential perspective discussed above are mirrored in the field of visual ethnography which I use as a model to connect my practice to the concepts of place and culture. Ethnography and documentary can be argued to be different, and El Guindi (2015, p.442), for example, claims that a "documentary film documents an event, or a story constructed in terms of premises and principles coming out of journalism or cinema", whereas an "anthropologist discovers, explains, and produces knowledge. The two genres – documentary film and

ethnographic film – are different”; however, their contexts of research, motivations, and outcomes seem very similar.

Friedman’s (2020) overview and exploration of ethnographic film interestingly describes an aesthetic shift in visual ethnography and anthropology from traditional observational approaches to experimental sensory approaches, which runs parallel to my choices as an experimental, poetic filmmaker. Friedman (2020, p.21) discusses these theoretical choices and practical approaches as “sets of beliefs”, identifying a shift from ethnographic film as observational record, “Where the film as record frame sought to downplay the aesthetic devices of cinema”, to more experimental design choices. Friedman notes the influence of these experimental sensory approaches, which have benefited the discipline, where “the sensory frame has encouraged formal experimentation which has pushed the limits of what counts as visual ethnography” (2020, p.21). Ethnographic film conceived as “sense impressions”, rejects the supposed inferiority of image to text in ethnographic research, promoting alternative, experimental approaches that can be explored in a wealth of arts and documentary practice.

MacDougall (1975, 1998, 2000) was one of the most prominent theorists and filmmakers in the field of visual anthropology and integral to the development of the use film in exploring sensory embodied experience. MacDougall (1998, p.98) suggests “the conventions of filming and editing do not simply direct us to different visual points in a film but orchestrate a set of overlapping codes of position, narrative, metaphor, and moral attitude.” MacDougall’s discussion of the concept of synaesthesia and its application to film is most useful. He notes how human senses, such as sight, sound, touch, and smell, are interconnected, ultimately responding together. Such synaesthetic responses can be triggered by film techniques and represent multiple meanings and experiences. MacDougall (1998, p.106) illustrates the theory with examples from avant-garde film alongside his own ethnographic work and notes how filmmaking “exploits the textures of objects and faces in close-ups in a way that links sight with the sense of touch, producing the strong synaesthetic effect of feeling the objects as they may be felt by the characters in the film.”

Pink’s (2006, 2007) work on “sensory ethnography” has also been at the forefront of ethnographic discussions and developments as a practitioner. Sensory ethnography

resonates with my practice as a filmmaker, and Pink, like MacDougall, champions the need for experimentation in ethnographic practice and the need to challenge conventions around studying cultures on location. Pink's discussion of ethnography provides explicit connections to visual cultures, with her own fieldwork studies exploring the practices of photography and video filmmaking. In her work, the definition of visual methods is widened, and similar questions to my own are posed (for example, how useful is the observational approach in representing a culture?), suggesting the need to move beyond the visual aspects of a culture, and to connect with the multi-sensory nature of human experience. Pink connects ethnography to the ongoing debate in documentary over objective versus subjective viewpoints, and the use of experimental aesthetics, "this 'observational' approach depends on the problematic assumption that reality is visible, observable, and recordable in video or photography" (Pink 2007, p.31), and "visibility and reality is significant for an ethnographic approach to the visual because it implies that reality cannot necessarily be observed visually" (Pink 2007, p.32).

Reflexivity becomes important as a central part of an ethnographic methodology such as Pink's, and the self-reflexive role of the researcher is essential on several levels, from techniques, to ethics, to analysis. Pink (2007, p.33) states:

"realist uses of the visual in ethnography should be qualified by a reflexive awareness of the intentions behind such uses and their limits as regards the representation of truth", and as a result, "subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation".

Furthermore, Pink's point about subjective intervention is reinforced by Ingold (2013, pp.4-5) as an essential principle of ethnographic practice, in that "observation and practical participation are recast as empirical material for subsequent interpretation." This important focus reinforces ethnography as a hermeneutic practice of continued subjective interpretation where the research outcomes can only be seen as cultural texts if accompanied by such interpretation. Together, these arguments for a subjectivity justify the design of the present study and the notion of a connective model of research which is further discussed in the methodology chapter.

Pink's (2007, p.42) work is inspiring as it promotes the context of creativity and experimentation around research, "researchers should not have fixed, preconceived

expectations of what it will be possible to achieve by using visual research methods in a given situation.” Furthermore, the work of sensory ethnographers is encouraging because it suggests to a filmmaker, or artist, that a hybrid or innovative practice can lead to new knowledge, and this group of academics encourage likeminded researchers to “mix up contexts that you keep rigidly separate” (Ingold 2013, p.14).

Uniting the scholarship on place and ethnographic practice importantly highlights that the definition of “place” is not a limited concept, and that research into place, as a representation of culture, can be both practical and experimental in approach. Reviewing the literature has allowed me to think conceptually about my filmmaking, as my research into European avant-garde cinema has done, and to consider a range of ideas to experiment with during filmmaking. The review of the extant literature has encouraged a connective approach to research, with the practice of visual culture being one predicated on interpretation and evaluation. The work of key scholars also reassures that this study is valuable and contributes something new to these debates. I return for another thought from Tuan (1979, p.148), who reinforces how artistic, reflective research on place can be an important contribution to knowledge and perhaps fill the gaps in the representation of cultural sites of interest:

“Pictorial art and rituals supplement language by depicting areas of experience that words fail to frame; their use and effectiveness again vary from people to people. Art makes images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought.”

Ingold (2013, p.8) also notes a past gap in academic research and the field of ethnography that I would hope to contribute to filling: “collaborations between anthropologists and arts practitioners have been few”. The literature also raises questions such as whether art can be useful as ethnographic practice, and what artistic processes would be best to use to create an artefact worthy of ethnographic analysis. The present study directly explores these questions and asks if poetic documentary and the avant-garde aesthetic can offer something different to the filmmaker, and the ethnographic researcher, in giving voice to a cultural site of interest.

1.4 The city symphony as ethnographic practice

This study engages in a dialogue centred around film processes and their capacity to create a representation of culture and identity. The practice of using film not only to

create but also to examine such representations is commonplace, and similar research has been conducted in various genres of filmmaking and the social sciences. Alongside the rich history of the documentary genre, there exists a broad range of films that could be viewed as ethnographic in practice, described by Leavy (2015, p.192) as art films, documentaries, ethnographic films, ethnocinema, and so forth. De Brigard (2003, p.13) notes:

“It is usual to define ethnographic film as film that reveals cultural patterning. From this definition it follows that all films are ethnographic, by reason of their content or form or both. Some films, however, are clearly more revealing than others.”

Such a range of classifications as Leavy lists is fascinating within the world of cinema but beyond the scope of this research. However, De Brigard (2003, p.29) does highlight that the forms of attentiveness behind many of the films covered by this range of classifications are similar, as many visual researchers and filmmakers were “not trained anthropologists, but the best of them did their work with enthusiasm, extraordinary dedication, and sensitivity”.

My filmmaking comes from an experimental, avant-garde mindset and not from the pathway of an institutionalised scientific field, such as visual anthropology and ethnographic cinema. Therefore, and in reflection on the subjective creative process, I have been drawn towards an important group of films connected to the historical timeline of the European avant-garde cinema, known as city symphonies. These films were popular, mainly in the European avant-garde cinema of the 1920s to the 1930s (Jacobs et al. 2019). They were seen as ambitious film experiments that explored the creative possibilities of filmmaking technology as well as the dynamism of the city subject. The representation of the city through cinema can exhibit the heart of that community and offers multiple narrative strands that encompass shared collective or personal identities. Peimbert (2013, p.20) alludes to a range of features that the place of a city can offer:

“European cinema of the twenties presented some of the most striking frames of urban space, exposing either the realism of urban spectacle offered by its inhabitants, their transport and their architecture, or providing delusional images that the landscape of the cities could inspire.”

Each city symphony, often a fragmented non-fiction film that was short in duration, offered a view, through the eyes of its filmmaker, of a location and its associated life stories. These films include *Manhatta* (1921) by Paul Strand, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) by Walter Ruttmann, *Regen* (1929) by Joris Ivens, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov, and *A Propos de Nice* (1930) by Jean Vigo, to name a few. The films exist as groundbreaking exemplars of technological and aesthetic experimentation from the birthplace of a poetic form of documentary filmmaking. Yet, they can be seen to be ethnographic in practice too, as examples of fieldwork that examine features of culture. Many of the films are noted in the literature on the European avant-garde (Barnouw 1993; Aitken 2001; Nichols 2001b; Chanan 2007); however, the recent study on the phenomenon of the city symphonies (Jacobs et al. 2019) is exceptional in its detailed examination of this area of filmmaking and brings together over eighty films that are loosely connected by the practice of poetic documentary.

Jacobs et al. (2019) identifies numerous filmmakers working in different places and offers a range of readings that examine the motivations behind the films and their meanings attached to places. A considerable number of these films, and the critical readings of them, explore the city in relation to the mechanical, urban infrastructure, “space determined by the logics of industrial capitalism” alongside “the rise of the fetishistic nature of commodities” (Jacobs et al. 2019, p.32). Other studies of these films also explore the city as a cultural economy of capitalism, “careful articulated geographic space” and concerns of “the forces of capital” (Gartenberg and Westhelle 2014, p.248-276), for example *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), *A Propos de Nice* (1930) and *Empires of Steel* (1931). Such perspectives link to a tradition of city studies that can problematise the political nature of the capitalist economy, for example, the work of Debord (1970), Kracauer (1995), and Benjamin (Gilloch 1996). Although this literature presents an historically important body of work that is insightful and can be applied to readings of many of these films, some of the perspectives misalign with the subjective component of my connectively modelled study, and do not always find direct reflection in the sensibilities of the filmmakers with whom my work aligns.

As a poetic filmmaker I have singled out examples from the city symphonies that explore the “ephemeral, fleeting beauty” and “the natural world of shifting sensations” (Jacobs et al. 2019, pp.109-110); such effects, it can be argued, are not representations at the forefront of the city symphony movement. However, it is evident that they are priorities in many of the films, noticeably in the obvious example Iven’s *Regen* (1929), as well as the work of Epstein, Vigo, and Vertov. I am drawn to such filmmaking examples, as I am drawn to French impressionist theory, as they present the sensual experience of the city and prioritise the expressive ability of the cinematic image, and other film techniques in revealing this. The political dimension is an important distinction within the city symphonies, but not the only one, and for many not the most important one, as pointed out by (Jacobs et al. 2019, p.33):

“City symphonies do not just adapt the film viewer to the imperatives of the metropolis and the capitalist economy, they also emphasize cinema’s power as a cognitive instrument, using the mastery of the stimuli of the metropolis as the basis for creative responses, artistic reflections and critical interpretations.”

The economy and globalisation are evident in my films too, as are contemporary concerns such as race and gender, that arguably are irreducible to ideas of class and the economy. However, in the present study examining poetic documentary, I have prioritised my sense of the beauty of Kyiv and my emotional engagement with the city, in both the making of my films and my interpretation of them. Therefore, alongside expanding upon the experimentation present in many of the classic city symphony films to develop a hybrid practice, I also emphasise the ephemeral, expressive concerns of place, presenting a perspective on the city symphonies movement that will be contested by some.

1.5 Documentary as practice-based artistic research

This section of the literature review will examine practice-based research literature resonant with the design and practicalities of the present study. This literature has also provided a conceptual framework for my study and helped me with the design of the data collection stages and evaluation of the outcomes. I will highlight that there are many research groups and academics embracing practice-based research, across many artistic practices including the fine arts, photography, and filmmaking, and there is now a respected discipline of practice-based research, where “complex

relationships between creative practice and academic research have arisen internationally for nearly 30 years” (Mäkelä et al. 2011). Researchers in this discipline substitute the written text with artistic documents that provide alternative methodologies and creative interpretations. The research theorists and practitioners discussed next have helped shape the argument that my practice-based research, specifically filmmaking, forms a viable research approach.

The work of Sullivan (2006, 2010) is significant in tracing the origins of practice-based research and the organisations that championed the dissemination of knowledge through practical outcomes known as “research artefacts” or “knowledge object”. This type of research is seen as inclusive, offering the potential for different types of researchers, with particular sets of creative skills, to engage with research innovatively. The history of an experimental phase of research opened academic study to a range of new disciplines, and the use of art in contributing to philosophical debate, including by the sharing of knowledge of culture and society. I subscribe to Sullivan’s (2006, p. 20) argument underscoring that “If an agreed goal of research is the creation of new knowledge, then it should be agreed that this can be achieved by following different, yet complimentary pathways”. Like Sullivan, Mäkelä and Routinne (2006, 2011) present extensive insight into the development of practice-based research. Their work initially helped me to identify where the present study fits within the discipline and to navigate the terminology and options from arts research through practice-led to practice-based research. Mäkelä et al. (2011) also discusses a range of work from practitioners within doctoral studies, “When pursuing a doctoral thesis, claims of originality and ‘contribution to knowledge’ may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital products, performances, and exhibitions”. Although I have chosen to pursue a connective model of research and understand the importance of an accompanying thesis to present the findings and claims of the research, I have become motivated to also see if “a richer experience can be obtained through the practical outcomes (i.e., artefacts) created” (Mäkelä et al. 2011).

Leavy (2015, pp.192-203) contributes explicitly to a discussion of the methods involved in arts research methodologies and presents an argument for expanding research into the territory of film and documentary. As well as suggesting valuable

research steps and presenting models to the practitioner, Leavy discusses useful case studies to illustrate how medium-specific research can complement social sciences. Leavy (2015, p.195) describes films as not only means of data generation but “very much about looking at who we are, how we became who we are, and how lives unfold”. Similarly, several other practiced-based researchers have been important in illustrating how connective models of research have been executed successfully, and how findings can be communicated via a dissertation and the creative artefacts itself, across practical disciplines including art, photography, and screenwriting. Hearing (2015), Gee (2017), and Dayan (2018), provide insight into practice-based PhDs and identify useful steps that have been successful in their own research. These research steps are of paramount importance to an artistic approach to academic inquiry and advance a connective model of research that is hermeneutic in design, and includes various approaches to data collection, fieldwork, and analysis and evaluation, and comparisons are drawn in the methodology and interpretation chapters.

The practice-based academic discipline, with its body of work, is as influential on the design of my study, as are the visual ethnographic models of Pink, and the documentary approaches of Epstein or Vertov, all of which are applied and explained further in my methodology, interpretation, and evaluation chapters. Practice-based researchers seem to have an affinity with the disciplines of ethnography, visual anthropology, and sensory-embodied approaches to research where:

“visual representation can offer pathways to the other senses and resolve the difficulties anthropologists face in researching and communicating about ‘emotions, time, the body, the senses, gender and individual identity’, by providing ‘a language metaphorically and experientially close to them’” (Pink 2006, p.49).

This important stage of my literature review has illustrated how an academic, pedagogic outcome can come from creative aspiration. It has allowed me to continue to ask broad questions throughout the study, such as “can artistic forms including poetic approaches to documentary be used as the basis of research inquiry?” and “what is the gap in knowledge that this study aims to address?” The work reviewed also introduces the debate around how, for some research bodies, there is still concern over the validity and usefulness of arts-based research when compared to traditional

qualitative and quantitative methods of research. However, it is evident that practice-based approaches do follow similar models and research steps, are as rigorous in pursuit of knowledge, and result in equally valuable research outcomes. To make such an argument is not the main purpose of this study, but I nevertheless hope to contribute to the ongoing debate.

1.6 Secondary sources and films

I have chosen to produce a series of film experiments that examine the city of Kyiv, in Ukraine. As I mentioned in the introduction, the city of Kyiv has a personal significance, and has become a place in which I engage with my own family history and the understanding of characteristics and experiences that bind my family together. My wife and son both have dual Ukrainian and British citizenship, and her family are residents of Odessa, Kherson, and Kyiv. This family connection offers me an intrinsic motivation to understand the identity of the city, which I have converted into an artistic pursuit. Coincidentally, it also required me to return to a key city visited in Vertov's masterwork city symphony *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) which is one of the most ambitious and exhilarating city symphony films. I have also begun to research Ukraine's history and relationships with other countries in Eastern Europe to help understand the narrative themes of place that may exist within my own films because of this project.

In conducting this literature review, I also considered recent national and global campaign initiatives from the Kyiv City State Administration generating some awareness of recent innovation and reform strategies on a city, and state levels (Pryliuk 2018) (see Appendix 7, p.123). More importantly for a filmmaker, I have started to appreciate Ukrainian cinema to develop a deeper understanding of the cinematic historical narratives that exist in films from the country. Pink (2007, p.45) suggests the first stage of the research process should be to explore "where elements of the visual culture of a research area are represented". To that end, I have noted certain tensions shared by a number of Ukrainian filmmakers representing Ukrainian lifestyles and the Ukrainian experience, and the poetic nature of many of their film approaches. The films I have been drawn to are described by First (2014, p.10) as often "tied to the problem of artistic, rather than political, representation" and "the resolution of particularly personal aesthetic concerns". The poetic approaches

adopted by these filmmakers have been inspiring and aided my thinking and my own filmmaking strategies employed on this project. This research is not at its core a study of Ukrainian cinema, but it led to me discovering a rich history of film schools, movements, and experimentation, and an abundance of directors, actors, and creatives attached to that history. However, Ukrainian cinema appears little known outside of Eastern Europe or even Ukraine itself.

It has been a challenging task to find literature on this subject, especially for an English language reader, but key texts have been very useful in introducing Ukrainian national cinema and other arts. First's (2014) unique study of the history of Ukrainian cinema discusses the role of films in exploring Ukraine:

“They attempted to show, not the canonical ethnic spaces and character types – ‘those notorious attributes’, as a Ukrainian writer called them – that emerged in Stalinist Ukrainian cinema, but a new and unfamiliar imagery of the republic and its people, an imagery they believed was more ‘authentic’” (First 2014, p.204).

First's study presents an excellent insight for English language students and stands alone in its interests. Yet, other studies and articles on Ukrainian cinema and the arts have assisted me with identifying key national themes and analysing poetic film processes; these include texts by Gurga (2012) and Kononenko (2019) which will be referenced during the analysis of my film outcomes. I will conclude this section with a discussion of some Ukrainian films and other key avant-garde films that were essential at an early stage in my research.

A number of the films I discuss next have helped me to reflect on the role of cinema and the arts, and on the signifying potential of my own poetic documentary, which like them will also address the question of representation, “What is Ukrainian identity?”, interrogating the meaning of both “Ukrainian” and “identity”. This question has been relevant to my reflections on recent documentary films and essential for my understanding of current discourse on cultural identities in the city of Kyiv during my visits and filming. These key films are important for understanding the film processes involved in my own creative work and my practical application, as I approached the experimental filmmaking stages of my project, but also for understanding how cinema

becomes part of an artistic effort to create a self-conscious experience of Ukrainian life, a “Cinema of ‘national self-discovery’”, as First (2014, p.10) puts it.

Recently there have been some breakthrough Ukrainian films on the global stage for example, in 2015, the documentary film *Winter on Fire* by Evgeny Alfineevsky about the 2012-2013 Euromaidan protests in Kyiv. The film presented several viewpoints on the protest action against President Viktor Yanukovich and against the influence of Vladimir Putin and Russia’s politics on Ukraine. After its Oscar nomination and its circulation on Netflix, Alfineevsky’s film created an interest in the Ukrainian crisis concerning independence from Russia, but it was still criticised on the grounds that:

“*Winter on Fire* omits key facts, which results in an audience whose understanding of Ukraine’s history, politics, regions, sociological makeup, and languages is extremely limited (or nonexistent) receiving a one-sided view of developments in Ukraine” (Golinkin 2016).

In addition, Roman Bondarchuk’s 2016 documentary *Ukrainian Sheriffs*, which won some European film awards and again a nomination in the Oscars, offers an examination of community in Stara Zburyivka with a context of the impact of the recent conflict in Crimea. Although these films represent some breakthrough successes, the limited profile of Ukrainian films in global cinema has proved it is important to explore some of Ukraine’s homegrown films to understand cinema’s role in presenting regional and national narratives domestically. Critical responses to films like *Winter on Fire* also highlighted my need to proceed with caution as a filmmaker who would be contributing to a commentary on the country as an outsider. My own personal standpoint and subjectivity is central to this connective project, and I will further deal with it during the analysis of my own filmmaking.

A key historical moment of importance I have connected to is the Ukrainian Poetic School of filmmaking from the 1960s and 1970s. At the heart of this movement was the Alexander Dovzhenko Studio which produced both a national cinema that reflected the Soviet era and the later rise of key auteurs and their personalised sense of aesthetics (Gurga 2012; First 2014). These filmmakers arguably claimed a national cinema during the thaw of the USSR by adopting poetic film approaches that had been championed by other auteur filmmakers and global cinematic new waves: “The ‘poetic’ directors addressed their ‘difficult’ films towards an educated and Ukrainian audience,

one whose tastes dovetailed with European art cinema” (First 2014, p.205). A key defining example appears to be *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) by Sergei Paradzhanov which has been described as both ethnographic and poetic:

“Paradzhanov’s film is concerned with a journey, or an experience – that of the filmmakers during the filmmaking process which, in turn, the film invites the viewer to participate in. It highlights the specificity of the Carpathian space which it seeks to introduce to the viewer” (Gurga 2012, pp.101-102).

The film has a complex temporal and subjective structure of the past and present and reflects on the regional life of the Ukrainian Hutsul community in western Ukraine. Crucially, the film explores the landscape and community in a naturalistic way, with the use of non-actors on location, yet employs complex film techniques including colour, sound, and handheld camerawork. Gurga (2012, p.128) describes the film processes and how the film engages the viewers: “the film evokes the sensation of remembering, which is [...] an experience of multiple temporalities, in which both past and present are perceived to coexist.” Several stylised films from this Poetic School attempted to both open up the representations of Ukrainians and simultaneously experiment with film techniques. Many fictional feature films emerged during this movement, including other influential examples such as *A Stone Cross* (1968) by Leonid Osyka and *The Lost Letter* (1972) by Borys Ivchenko.

Recently, similar characteristics have been reflected in the country’s documentary cinema. The Ukrainian Film Office has championed several filmmaking initiatives which they consider as a form of cinematic cultural preservation, with several personal documentaries produced and shared internationally. These initiatives include one about Ukrainian everyday life, *MyStreetFilmsUkraine* (2015), and another about community and cultural concerns, *Docudays* (2016). Festival 86 launched the film project *MyStreetFilmsUkraine* in 2015 with the purpose of recording Ukrainian municipalities, in both urban and rural locations. The aim was to explore “the 459 cities and towns that can be found on the map of Ukraine but are not reflected in the culture and films” (Alejandro 2016). Documentary film examples from the initiatives include *Has-beens* (2016) by Olena Mockalchuk and Dmytro Burko, *In the East* (2016) by Piotr Armyanovski, and *Expectation* (2016) by Denys Furdyn. These films showcase stories of individuals and community initiatives, present narratives of lifestyles, employment, and leisure, and connect regional narratives to the city of Kyiv. In addition, the

MeetDocs Ukrainian Film Festival, which began in 2017, not only exhibits films that share regional narratives in Ukraine but supports documentary production throughout the country as an important social practice. Filmmakers, including Yevgeniya Kriegsheim, promote the practice of documentary in the east of Ukraine and

“strongly believe that the genre is ideal for giving voice to the region and the conflict which scars it still. Hers is also a festival of cinematography, providing workshops to the few local filmmakers who have remained in the city” (Edwards 2019).

These ongoing initiatives use contemporary digital filmmaking to explore conventions of documentary and encourage national discourse and have been essential in aiding my understanding of themes of Ukrainianess. On reflection, these Ukrainian films use a sense of place to evoke meaning and memories about a range of themes including family values, religion, socio-political change, community activism and hopes for the future; a number of these are themes which I also explore in the film outcomes of my study.

As my research has grown over a five-year period from 2017-2022, I have also made links with and followed important academic and public groups that debate key questions about Ukraine in film and the other arts. A number of cultural institutions, including Mystetskyi Arsenal, the Ukrainian Film Festival, Johns Hopkins University, and the Ukrainian Institute London with its lectures and study community, have been essential in allowing me to participate in discussions such as ‘The War in Ukraine: Why It Matters to the World?’ (2020), ‘Ukraine’s Cultural Renaissance: How to Keep It Going?’ (2021), and ‘Ukrainian Cinema: Giving a Voice to the Silenced’ (2021). There also exist a few national and global film festivals that exhibit contemporary films and reflect the growing community of new filmmakers and talent in the country, for example the recent Ukrainian film festival Beyond Borders (2020). This festival offered free access online globally to many new films, presentations, and Q & As with film directors. The festival offered opportunities to be exposed to personal stories of parents and families and the lifestyles attached to regional locations, through wonderful films such as *The Earth Is Blue as an Orange* by Iryna Tsilyk (2020), *Home Games* by Alis Kovalenko (2020) and *Train: Kyiv-War* by Korniy Hrytsiuk (2020). These recent films, similar to the films from the poetic era of the Dovzhenko Studio, provide an insight into the country’s complex history. Themes include multiculturalism,

issues concerning the sovietisation of Ukraine, and the conflict in regaining and sustaining Ukraine's own socio-political independence, but also a celebration of the everyday traditions, lifestyles, and families.

Exploring a number of films, which taken together, by no means presents an extensive socio-historical discourse on the country and its arts, has helped me to critically assess a complex area of representation concerning Ukraine. Since 2014, an important national policy for Ukraine includes the commitment to forge new political and economic alliances, such as integration with NATO and membership of the European Union. The dominant state agenda for the country continues to be one centred on sovereignty but also on an affinity with the West. Arguably, my films, at times, follow a line of scholarly inquiry that identifies the country's socio-political agenda between the nation and Europe is of national importance to Ukraine. I am discovering that many of Ukraine's national narratives are reflected within the arts and film production in the country. As my own filmmaking in the city of Kyiv connects with and presents a perspective on these narratives and events, it is important to sustain my awareness of them. My choice of Kyiv, Ukraine for the production of my own city symphony, can perhaps also offer a pathway into exploring different perspectives on contemporary Europe and its so-called crisis, including such aspects as Russia's expansionism (Toal 2021), and the relationships between the UK, the EU, and NATO (Surowiec and Manor 2021; Foy 2022).

As well as being drawn to key Ukrainian filmmakers and films, I was also drawn to several avant-garde films of the past and present from elsewhere, which developed my understanding of poetic cinema and could be described as ethnographic in approach. For example, there was the work of Jean Epstein, which initially piqued my interest, via his theoretical work on film processes, which identified the poetic nature of image, film, and sound. *Finis Terrae* (1929) is a key example of his work, illustrating the theory of *photogenie* connected to film processes. *Finis Terrae* was shot on the remote Brittany Islands in the northwest of France, and the film examines the resident fishing community. The indigenous people are framed against the harsh coastal landscape of Bannec, and the dangers and beauty of the setting are reflected in a variety of shot types. The vast coastline is displayed throughout wide-angle establishing shots signifying the strength of the waves and the imminent weight of the

storm. In contrasting shots, the camera is placed closer to examine the beauty of the encompassing nature in close-up framing. Epstein's work did not invent, but innovatively explores shot type and how both the wide-angle shot and the close-up create a sense of place, opening a range of choices for the filmmaker.

A feature of the coastline that contrasts with its natural aspect in the film is the unique architecture of the lighthouse Phare du Creach. Close-ups of the lighthouse become familiar motifs in *Finis Terrae* (1929), and other Brittany films by Epstein. The shots represent the lighthouse as an iconic presence and object of cultural heritage signifying several meanings connected to the community, the remoteness of the location and narrative themes linked to the action of the scenes it features in. It can be said that avant-garde techniques, and examples like these, seem at odds with some historical and traditional ethnographic approaches, which has been noted by Pink (2007, p.169): "ethnographic film styles should (among other things) avoid close-ups", and "be minimally edited and use only original synchronous sound".

Epstein's *Mor Vran* (1931) also explores options for camera framing and was filmed on the island of Sein and shows a brutal existence for the fishermen and their families. Close-up imagery again explores the power of nature, the sea, and storms impacting on the landscape, and foregrounds the resilience of the inhabitants. The iconic significance of the lighthouse is used again to represent the plight of the community in this harsh coastal environment. Several close-ups of objects are used to reveal the deep emotional relationships of the community. Close-ups of gravestones and memorials are juxtaposed, with hands gripping important keepsakes from their loved ones, as the fishermen go off to sea possibly for the last time. Wall-Romana (2013, p.136) notes the poetry in Epstein's cinematography which seems "in favour of cinema as restoring a pre-linguistic contact with meaning", and an art "that obviates language's excessive rationalism of reduction".

Ukrainian cinema, Epstein's work, and other significant European avant-garde films, including key city symphonies, will be addressed throughout this project as and when they are relevant to my own filmmaking. These films, themselves, and their analysis as part of my larger literature review, have allowed me to reflect on film processes which have aided me in the design of a toolbox of techniques with which to experiment

in practice. I have also drawn useful comparisons between these films and ethnographic works, as they all engage in a dialogue on the relationships between place and cultural identities.

1.7 Concluding remarks and contribution to disciplines

This literature review has provided a mapping and contextualisation for my study. I have reviewed documentary practice, ethnography and the study of cultures, and practice-based research that connects filmmaking to analytical processes. The review has promoted the synthesise of concepts learnt from a number of different disciplines, aiding the design of my research aim and objectives, the practice elements of my study, and my written thesis.

What I have learnt from each discipline has helped me to contribute back to these areas, as I will now summarise. Firstly, in relation to the practice of documentary, I have experimented in my own practice with the aesthetics exemplified by the films I have referenced. I have explored a variety of techniques including the close-up, the wide shot, the use of multiple sounds, and editing to create an immersive experience; some of these techniques are not prioritised within mainstream documentary and ethnographic film. By developing a hybrid approach to poetic documentary, I have developed a new aesthetic form of city symphony, experimenting with a range of techniques and processes, expanding upon the concepts of place and of sensual representations in film. Although the film outcomes are different, this study has a close affinity to the works of Vertov, Epstein, and Eisenstein, each of whom can be “characterized as a medium-specificity theorist” (Carroll 2003, p.129). I hope I have gone some way towards contributing to definitions of the poetic mode of documentary and offering a working insight into both the theory and practice of this mode.

Secondly, this study has contributed to academic discourse on current representations of Ukraine. It has given priority to my location of choice, Kyiv, presenting a valuable representation of the place. Many of the city symphonies from the 1920s reflect not just an interest in experimental filmmaking but also an interest in cultural differences between filmmaker and place. This synthesis of poetic aesthetics, documentary production, and ethnographic practice is another area where I argue I have also produced new knowledge. Ukrainian cinema was developed in the context of the

Soviet cinema, but as my literature review has illustrated, it has many features of its own, and has been described as “giving voice to the silenced and marginalised groups” (Roper 2021), including not only minoritised communities within Ukraine, but also the nation as a whole in the international context. From an academic perspective, some stakeholders argue Ukraine has been overlooked for “more visible nations” and ignored in favour of dominant narratives and representations, whether those of the “Russian imperial embrace or Western perspectives” (Khromeychuk 2022). From an ‘outsider’ perspective in Ukraine, and alongside the Ukrainian minority in the UK, I have contributed to debates around the representation of Ukraine in academia and I echo the concerns expressed in Mark von Hagen’s paper ‘Does Ukraine Have a History?’ (1995), which highlights a gap in mainstream scholarship where one would hope to find work on the political geography and history of Ukraine. The present study contributes a positive representation of Kyiv and Ukraine, and challenges this “overlooking” of a nation-state that is “undeserving of legitimacy, an independent profile, and study both inside and outside of academia” (Khromeychuk 2022). In Olesya Khromeychuk’s 2022 lecture from the Ukrainian Institute in London she reiterates, “Ukraine exists on maps as one of the largest states in Europe; however, as a nation it has been erased from our mental maps of Europe”. My present study of Ukrainianess offers an original representation of the city of Kyiv, and it began at a pivotal point for the country before the invasion by the Russian Federation and the devastating effects of the full-scale war on Ukrainians and their culture.

Finally, as I stated in relation to the aim and objectives of my research, the originality of the present study lies in the approach to the connective model of research, and my reflexive creation process which I pursued in conjunction with an analytical process. This study provides new knowledge in the form of a synthesised methodology of avant-garde aesthetics, ethnographic film practice, and hermeneutic interpretation of the processes and outcomes, expanding upon research in the discipline of film studies and in the area of practice-based research.

CHAPTER 2 - CREATIVE PRACTICE METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introducing a combined creative methodology

This practice-based study follows the design of a connective model of research whereby the production of two documentaries is combined with this thesis, which acts as a reflexive account of the filmmaking processes and a theoretical reflection on my practice as a filmmaker. The methodology underpinning this study builds on a combination of theoretical perspectives which include poetic filmmaking approaches, formalism as a critical position and the phenomenology of place. This thesis includes the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of collected and produced artefacts, and further reflexively applies poetic hermeneutics as a central methodology leading to justification of this research. In both practical and theoretical terms, the research examines how poetic filmmaking approaches can illuminate understanding of lived experience and Ukrainian culture, and through artistic representation advance understanding of both filmmaking practices and representations of place. Therefore, the assumptions around hermeneutics that this thesis deploys are presented from a specific filmmaking perspective, which belongs to the practice of Artist's moving image, through which meaning is explored and which permeates the film texts through formal aesthetic experimentation and the connective reflexive exegesis.

2.2 Philosophical paradigm of the methodology

The design of this study is underpinned by philosophical hermeneutics as the epistemic position that aids the interpretation of my research outcomes, which include study materials and cultural artefacts produced during this study. I have adopted a reflexive poetic hermeneutics methodology which provides a study framework. Gadamer introduces the motivations for this approach in *'Truth and Method'* (2004, p.9) and states, "to strive for a reasoned historical self-understanding, we must face a whole host of questions about verbal and conceptual history". Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009, p.91) state academics adopting this approach have noted this can result in "a thinking where the plurality of interpretations and understanding may collide and bring inspiration". This approach highlights the need for critical reflection and self-awareness in the research process, which is a major concern for the artist/filmmaker, who should be engaged with approaches of interpretation, reflection, and clarification.

Hermeneutics as an epistemic position is directly related to the study of the arts and literature (alongside the social sciences) and necessarily so since a host of key terms, as Gadamer argues, are themselves effects of historical cultural forces, “Concepts such as "art," "history," "the creative," "worldview," "experience," "genius," "external world," "interiority," "expression," "style," "symbol," which we take to be self-evident, contain a wealth of history” (Gadamer 2004, p.9); many of the same concepts that drive the avant-garde film movements that have inspired this present study. Hermeneutics as a methodology took on a specific expression in the traditions of western romantic hermeneutics, which at its core is expressed through the idea of ‘verstehen’, which derives from the compound German term that covers what in English is given as ‘understand’ and/or ‘understanding’. Conventionally, verstehen is an attempt to describe a form by which we understand and is drawn in counter-distinction to its partner term ‘erklären’. Both terms offer a meaning of what it is to ‘understand’, the former expresses access to a deeper site of originary intentions and essential qualities - the deeper understanding that we may reach, whereas the latter tries to grasp a more instrumental functional understanding of causality and consequence - the ‘lighter’ understanding reached from a (rational casual) explanation: it is a difference often argued to lie between the understandings reached by the humanities contrasted with those reached by natural sciences (Apel 1982).

Conventional thinking around verstehen place emphasis on the meanings that “originators of texts and acts – authors and agents – associate with these” which result in an “understanding of underlying meaning, not the explanation of casual connections” (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p.91). This perspective, and most particularly in Max Weber’s writings on verstehen, has been adopted by qualitative researchers in order to interpret meaning attached to behaviours and actions, “the inner worlds or inner meanings” and “empathetic understanding of others’ viewpoints, intentions, beliefs, and experiences” (Sullivan 2009, p.428). These traditions have explored the role of aesthetics in art with attention on technique and form, yet moving beyond to interpret cultural meaning, as Gadamer (2004, p.34) notes, “Thus taste is in no way limited to what is beautiful in nature and art, judging it in respect to its decorative quality, but embraces the whole realm of morality and manners”. The type of understanding that this study aims to address, therefore, is one that expresses a deeper qualitative verstehen, which includes everyday embodied sensory experience,

and is the same research goal that we find in studies of place, the discipline of ethnography, and the practice of documentary filmmaking.

Campbell and Lassiter (2015, P.7) note the relationship between this verstehen perspective on analysing cultural texts and a range of disciplines, “even just learning the basics of ethnographic method, requires a firm commitment to the activity of reading (a lot) and interpreting text as ongoing intellectual practice, intellectual practice that ideally prompts complex understandings of the complicated settings in which we do ethnography”. As a result of this cross fertilization of disciplines, my approach to documentary filmmaking is resoundingly rooted in hermeneutic analysis and therefore resonates in particular with Heidegger’s (1962, 2011) conception of interpretive phenomenological research which is itself a refined deployment of hermeneutics and which he introduces as a “science of life” (Heidegger 1962, p.62), as “the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry” (Heidegger 1962, p.72). This approach offers a level of consistency of interpretation reached by thinkers of complexity such as Gadamer, and suitably applies to the current complex multidisciplinary study.

I have chosen to follow Heidegger’s phenomenology because Heidegger was someone who importantly refined our thinking around hermeneutics and the nature of understanding, in such work as *‘Being and Time’* (1962), to provide methodological guidance and a hermeneutic framework to “facilitate the explication and understanding of the human lived experience” (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016, p.2) and “to expose the meaning of everyday existence”. Several of Heidegger’s principles provide analytical insight into the experience of “man’s being” or the concept known as “Dasein” (Heidegger 1962, 2011), which identifies and interprets complex human relationships through our activity of existing with others:

“But to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus Dasein's understanding of Being pertains with equal primordially both to an understanding of something like a 'world', and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world” (Heidegger 1962, p.33).

Key principles of poetic hermeneutic interpretation, such as Dasein (or being in the world) therefore, can aid analysis of the experiential perspective of place, by highlighting characteristics and influences. Dasein is a partly essentialist way of

defining or thinking about what it means to be human; by conceiving of human as a combination of both body and mind, in respect of, and because of other things happening around you (Inwood 2019, pp.21-31). These goals of interpretation lead to an understanding of the culture under observation, as identified by Horrigan-Kelly (2016, p.2) as “encounters with entities in the world, being with, temporality, spatiality, and the care structure”. The application of Heidegger’s philosophy will make these concepts explicit and provide a deeper level of understanding in interpreting the outcomes of the study. Importantly, the role of reflexivity of the researcher is highlighted as the world is explored by the researcher alongside others. Therefore, the experience of Dasein, the everyday existence, is interpreted within the world’s personal, natural, and social environments, while reflecting on its history, as explained cohesively by Heidegger (1962, p.63), “this very entity, Dasein, is in itself 'historical', so that its own most ontological elucidation necessarily becomes an 'historiological ' interpretation”. In short, the qualitative core of being (in this case, of Kyiv) that the project tries to express is itself not simply an essential condition but also a core that has resulted from historical forces, which also need to be included in the interpretation.

Hermeneutic interpretation in this study, therefore, becomes a personal interpretive investigation moving beyond logical analysis to include contextual considerations (Zimmermann 2015), ultimately identifying the narrative capacity of film texts, and bringing together events to present a foundation of meaning. Leading to in turn the examination of themes that allows the filmmaker to ask key questions, such as, “how do framed objects and the combination of image and sound present everyday interaction and the notion of lived experience?” and “can disparate images, and sounds function as signs to reveal core characteristics of a place and culture?” Both questions echoing the ambition to reach a *verstehen* mode of understanding. The connotations of film techniques present narrative and metaphor and “can provide a valuable way of thinking about and interpreting data” (Gray and Malins 2004, p.153). Therefore, understanding is generated by the interpretive act of hermeneutics and is directly linked to aesthetics and the filmmaking processes at the core of this study.

2.3 Research design of the connective practice-based study

To develop a suitable methodology, I have examined a broad spectrum of research approaches from avant-garde filmmakers, documentary filmmakers, ethnographers, and visual anthropologists, to arts and practice-based practitioners. Such models and work have influenced the practicalities of the design of this study and its operationalisation, leading to the creation of a hybrid practice and a set of methods where it is difficult to locate the work to just one or another discipline. As identified in the literature review, to further complicate matters, a range of arguments exist that highlight differences of opinion about methodologies, which on the whole divide across a line between documentary as art and documentary as science. However, there are other voices who believe that the divide does not need to be a dichotomy and researchers, including Pink (2007, 2010) and Leavy (2015) in particular, advocate hybrid approaches that combine an art/science dichotomy and cross boundaries of disciplines:

“By combining media and practices in this way it is possible to produce texts and presentations that draw from both arts practice and conventional social science practice. As such, researchers can represent their work by juxtaposing different types of knowledge, subjectivity, epistemology, experience, and voice in ways that complement one another” (Pink 2007, p.176).

Pink and Leavy argue for the context of creativity in practice research, by not following conventional demarcations of research that parallel Apel’s distinction between arts and natural sciences, from which this study derives its concept of an historically conditioned *verstehen*. Both have been influences on the design of this study which I impart next, and I have designed, therefore, a hybrid, experimental approach to documentary to explore how the sensory nature of human experience can be accessed through a variety of technical processes potentially, image, sound, editing and installation. As a result of the influences of other disciplines on this research, documentary conventions, such as fieldwork, traditional observation, and the interview have been rethought and incorporated in a design that could be described as a form of sensory ethnography (Pink 2007, 2010), connected to traditions of ethnographic film and visual anthropology.

These disciplines have had an influence on the research structure, the production of the films, the analysis, and evaluation of my work, and by suggesting research steps which bring together my practical filmmaking and written thesis. The research steps I have distilled from studies of Pink, Leavy and others, to expand upon and create my own, and the justification of these methods are as follows:

Research Step A) approach the creative activity from a clearly defined research question and select appropriate production techniques

Firstly, to meet research objectives one and two I introduce the methods leading to the making of the two documentaries. By setting a clearly defined aim and objectives, and conducting the literature review, I was directed towards a relevant area of film studies that has inevitably informed and inspired my own practice. With this knowledge in mind, I was able to identify concepts attached to image, sound, and editing, then choose and formulate production techniques that became useful to experiment with in my own filmmaking, in particular inspiring concepts such as *photogenie*, the montage of attractions, and the counterpoint of sound. Experimentation with the range of filmmaking techniques has resulted not in simply copying and applying the features to the practice outcomes of this research, but in expanding upon and prioritising my own poetic techniques. The work presents a debate about the usefulness of traditional and alternative filmmaking processes, in suggesting a hybrid form of documentary that presents a unique experience of place. As a result, I developed a toolbox of filmmaking techniques that were experimented with to expand my practice and add a new perspective on poetic documentary production. The techniques involved are as follows:

1) The use of the close-up and the aesthetics of proximity

My experience as a filmmaker tells me that trained and experienced filmmakers are familiar with the rules and grammar of the shot (Bordwell 1989; Musburger 1999) established by classical narrative cinema. For example, a conventional filmmaker may use the wide-angle establishing shot to introduce a scene and then change framing to introduce characters and follow movement. However, as a result of the present study, I have come to understand that such conventional shot techniques conceal a greater complexity of possible meanings and interpretations. From the perspective of poetic

documentary, the conventional shot types are there to be challenged, or, rather, are there to be used in ways that might reveal new meanings; a perspective that has become an essential part of the design of this study reflecting why I'm not a maker of conventional narrative filmic space. In a similar effort to create a new filmic grammar, Epstein described essential elements of cinematography as "the aesthetics of proximity" (1921) and reflected on techniques of composition, framing, depth of field and focus in representing spatial relationships, place, and people in film.

As aforementioned in this document (p.40), an argument exists in observational documentary and ethnographic film in favour of the wide-angle shot in establishing a representation of space (Pink 2007; El Guindi 2015), a choice favoured by many documentary filmmakers, for example in Keiller's *London* (1994) and Chanan's *Detroit, Ruin of a City* (2005). But the avant-garde, notably Epstein, favour a range of shots and in particular the use of the close-up which "calls attention to the process of picturing the world, emotional states, and intimate environments" (Keller and Paul 2012, p.35). The close-up focuses on objects, which function as signs and present connotations of experience, history, and place. The use of the close-up reveals the importance of objects, textures or actions that may be ignored in a wide shot. Therefore, this isolation of imagery when filming has become a feature of the research design and seems vital to form a representation of place. As Ingold suggests, objects considered in isolation should then return to the wider spatial context of the location, "In every case, by treating these erstwhile objects as materials we rescue them from the cul-de-sac into which they had been cast and restore them to the currents of life" (Ingold 2013, p19). So rather than filming a wide-angled context that can be favoured in some conventional documentaries, items are instead filmed in close-up that together and in relation to each other just may suggest a new perspective or understanding of location. Therefore, the film outcomes of the study experiment with aesthetics of proximity, contrasting close-ups with wide-angles and shot movement to explore the usefulness of a range of shots, the notion of proximity, and how cinematography impacts on representation and meaning.

2) Fragmented editing styles

Experimentation with editing and the sequencing of shots is essential to poetic forms of filmmaking and were key features of the European avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s, creating a recognisable departure from continuity editing and the illusion of representational filmic space. Eisenstein (1988, p.40) as an originator of montage champions experimental editing, “It is the path that liberates film from the plot-based script and for the first time takes account of the film material, both thematically and formally, in the construction”. These experiments are often difficult to categorise in relation to conventional definitions of continuity editing and the flow of narrative action, which could be argued to present a more coherent sense of place. However, by contrasting continuity and discontinuity styles in film production it has been useful in highlighting how editing contributes to the notion of “the spatial triad”, that of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space (Lefebvre 1974), not just continuity spatial relationships. Therefore, using juxtaposition, contrast, and montage in editing styles to contribute to those representations involved with conceptual and value judgements, from filmmaker to subject.

I argue that the techniques of intellectual montage explore conceptual and sensual experiences of place, as supported by Hicks (2007, p.60) who discusses fragmented editing techniques in relation to Vertov, and Eisenstein, where “the editing plays an equal role in creating the layers of metaphors dynamising apparently simple themes”. I discuss the application of these techniques and how these themes relate directly to my experiences of making the films. The research design examines how sequences of shots complement each other to create meaning through juxtaposition, repetition, overlapping, layering and temporal relationships, alongside classical linear narrative, and continuity design choices. I extend these experiments to combine fragmented editing with characteristics of Artists’ moving image and installation films, which continue to explore montage with multi-channel exhibition and the construction of immersive viewing environments, which I also argue contribute to a sensual experience of place, by means of representation in the documentaries.

3) The counterpoint of sound

The use of sound and the technique of counterpoint in the poetic documentary was also identified in the city symphonies of the 1920s (Stutterheim 2018). Images were edited alongside sound design and accompanying music was used to suggest meanings independently from the images. Hayward (1993, p.137) discusses this trend in avant-garde French cinema which includes a reflection on Epstein's experiments:

“Epstein who took this second form to its most advanced state in advocating that camera and sound should have equal but independent mobility. He saw, in what he termed phonogenie (filmed sound), the complement to Delluc's photogenie (filmed image). Epstein's concept of film as the editing together of these two disparately 'filmed' realities constituted a first theorising of counterpoint (in Faulknerian sense of the word of the running of two narratives simultaneously)”.

This interplay of sound and image is important in my films, and I will analyse how the use of sound reflects my experience whilst filming on location and the findings of the study. This experimentation does not ignore the conventions of diegetic, actuality sound in documentary, which is essential in presenting a naturalistic sense of location. But both diegetic and non-diegetic sound become an important design element in the construction of my films, and I give priority to the use of counterpoint at times in the films to examine how sound can move beyond creating mood or atmosphere, to open again up a variety of interpretations and meanings.

My production notes on these techniques allowed me to reflect again on the concepts behind them. “How did the techniques manipulate meaning and what were the narrative themes being presented by the filmmaker?” The processes, however technical in application, direct the filmmaker always to the question of meaning creation. Experimenting with the techniques favoured by the avant-garde filmmakers created an effective, yet spontaneous and experimental practice when on location and resulted in this working toolbox. I considered and selected many of the approaches in the 1920s poetic city symphonies, combining techniques in a personal style and hybrid film design, for example developing and prioritising a triptych fragmented editing presentation, that challenges some of the criticisms aimed at aesthetic choices, yet supports others. For example, “is discontinuity editing appropriate for representing spatial relationships or a sense of location?” “Or how does non diegetic music present

a cultural experience of place?” It was my goal to challenge these doubts in exploring these contrasting techniques of sound and image whilst on location in Kyiv, and a discussion of how these ideas are evident in my final films, and the why and how they were applied is discussed in detail in chapter three.

Research Step B) observation methods and approaches to data

Next, to meet research objectives three and four I introduce the methods resulting in the production of the two documentaries on location. Step B resulted in my two field trips to Kyiv to film. This stage of the research involved a range of data collection and my practical experimentation with poetic film techniques. My first trip to Kyiv was in May 2017 during the Eurovision Song Contest events. The importance of the event, the timing of both trips and my reasons for these choices are discussed in chapter three. Secondly, my next film production trip was in July 2019. This later production allowed me to reflect on my initial findings and focus on creating a more exploratory and purposeful city symphony of Kyiv. These trips were motivated by the literature review, and initial research I had conducted into Ukrainian filmmakers and conversations with a range of citizens, visitors, academics, and family members to seek viewpoints on the current emerging narrative themes in contemporary Kyiv, Ukraine.

This study goes beyond traditions of written accounts in research fields to include practice-based work from the arts and visual media and contributes to a growing research area, which includes art-practice, photography, and filmmaking, offering new ways of engaging with research participants and places. Such practice-based research has been described as sensory ethnography (Pink 2007, 2010), using innovative methods and forms of media to record a sensory perception and experience of a place or culture. Such an approach appeals to an artistic filmmaker that examines the relationships of interconnected senses and uses film technology to achieve similar outcomes. These concepts informed selection of the methods for the making of the film outcomes, and as a result, documentary and Artists’ moving image were rethought and incorporated into a hybrid design that could be described as sensory ethnography, connected both to traditions of ethnographic film and the experimental nature of visual anthropology. Readings on the practice of documentary filmmaking, and the role of

the ethnographer has brought together these disciplines that share very similar experiences for the researcher, for example, developing a familiarity with a culture, overcoming culture shock, negotiating language differences, and creating collaborative practices (Pink 2007, 2010). The methods of data collection therefore involve:

1) Pre-fieldwork surveys of literature, electronic and other visual texts, involving the reading, and interpretation of sources, to familiarise oneself with a subject or another culture. Beyond the review of the literature, it involved the examination of artefacts as my planning ventured into travel and fieldwork, for example maps and leaflets that became part of my production journal and are discussed in chapter three.

2) Fieldwork leading to the production of original practice-based cultural texts. Fieldwork that included notetaking in a journal and consequently filmmaking practice which opened up the ability to record a wealth of data. The process of film production was accompanied by a range of production planning notes and a reflective journal/diary, which were updated daily. The production journal detailed the practicalities of my field trip and filming, and my motivations and decisions regarding choices of location and interviews. This written document also includes contacts, leaflets, guidance, and interactions that I had with people and locations on the trips.

The central method during fieldwork could be described as “participant observation” developing from ethnographic writing, and traditional documentary observation. I explored the use of a tripod recording from a distance to assess observational wide-angle viewpoints. But also explored handheld close portraiture to attempt a more intimate and interactive perspective. As a result, my choice of techniques moved beyond traditions of ethnographic observation, as observation needs to be complimented with learning from the inside of a community, as stated by Pink (2007, p.22), “It should account not only for the observable, recordable realities that may be translated into written notes and texts, but also for objects, visual images, the immaterial and the sensory nature of human experience and knowledge”. Pink (2010) develops the method to highlight the needs for “multisensory participation”, which includes such experiences for the researcher as walking with, eating with, etc, to sense the everyday. To explore such multisensory experiences, during the two trips (May 2017, July 2019 for approximately 10 days per visit), I engaged in a range of events,

festivities, and daily rituals, discussed in chapter three, in joining others in embodied activities. I observed citizens of the city during periods of work, leisure, and social activities, alongside the experience of visitors that were welcomed to participate in events; in order to personally be involved in and capture through filming some experience of everyday life. The concept of observation is expanded, to explore the notion of multisensory events that bring a closeness to the culture observed. I experiment with such methods to assess their usefulness for a filmmaker and compare the impact on the aesthetics of poetic documentary.

3) A consideration of the ethical implications of ethnographic research that develops a self-reflexive discussion throughout the research, which is both illustrated in the written and practice elements of the exegesis. Self-reflexive quality is a pre-condition of hermeneutic interpretation and evolves throughout the process of pre-understanding to deeper understanding in the mode of *verstehen*, as highlighted by Pink (2006, p.34):

“This means that reflexivity – as an explanation of the motives, experience, and conditions of the research – is not enough. Instead, what is required is a recognition of the constantly shifting position of the fieldworker as the research proceeds and as she or he experiences ‘differences in levels of understanding as well as the shifts of mood and rapport characteristic of fieldwork’”.

The analytical approach aided exploration of a range of data that was organised and reduced into themes, which included community, kinship, the arts, and history which are discussed in chapter three and the analysis of the films. These themes identified narratives that formed the basis of a representation of Kyiv, inevitably influencing the content and structure of the films. This was then followed by a period of approximately five months in 2017, and eight months in 2020-2021 to complete the editing and construction of the two films. Alongside personal reflection and interpretations important in the analysis of the films, as discussed in chapter three and four of this thesis.

Research Step C) supplement observations with media-specific analysis of the creative artefacts to interpret notes, mind maps, research artefacts, and films

Lastly, to meet research objectives five and six I introduce the methods that facilitated the interpretation of the documentaries as cultural artefacts. Research Step C reviews

the field-work data and the films to, firstly, analyse the aesthetics of my documentary practice and, secondly, to interpret and understand the narrative themes of place developed in my work. This analysis has aided the final stages of the research, including decision making and the final editing of the two films from my field trips, the short film *Vision of Europe* (2017) followed by the extended city symphony film *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022), and the evaluation of these outcomes to inform my future filmmaking practice. These creative artefacts were the result of an experimental phase of filmmaking and reflection that attempts to develop the possibilities of aesthetic representation in poetic documentary and create new knowledge about the creation process, in particular my chosen toolbox of techniques. With detailed analysis and assessment of these films I will justify my filmmaking methods and present how the research contributes to this area of film studies. Through evaluation of my research outcomes, I will also argue that this methodology was best for my personal approach to practice-based research.

It has been important to consider that my films are framed by a range of other essential artefacts including my production planning notes, reflective journal, which are also sources for analysis and interpretation. For purposes of justification, it is useful here to draw quick comparisons between practice-based research methodologies and methods from the social sciences such as the reflective journal, visualisation of data and observation of subject matter. There are certain methods concerned with analysing qualitative data that my observation and production approaches were naturally drawn to and applied, leading to data analysis to inform practice and self-reflexivity as part of hermeneutic interpretation. Okely (1994, p.18-p.34) introduces holistic traditions of anthropology and managing data for analysis. Classification of written and visual data is important to identify narrative, or “the notion of a ‘main story’” (Hughes 1994, p.45), as the fieldworker “aims for the total context, which includes kinship, the economy, politics and religion” (Okely 1994, p.24) and/or other features of cultural identities. The data “is worked and thought through from event to text” as dominant narratives reveal an authentic cultural interpretation, “Writing and analysis comprise a movement between the tangible and the intangible, between the cerebral and sensual, between the visible and invisible. Interpretation moves from evidence to ideas and theory, then back again” (Okely 1994, p.32). The findings of this analysis must then be supported by cross-referencing and retuning to early concepts and

research that introduced the subject matter to the researcher, so the analysis is continually “grounded in the data and the wider literature, categories which go beyond simple story-telling” (Hughes 1994, p.45). These methods of organisation of the data, the reduction and classification of the data into hermeneutic themes, and the presentation in narrative form are explored in detail and central to the analysis of the films in chapter three and were grounded by continual referencing to both literature review, film texts and my own reflective journal.

The next stage of the analysis was the interpretation of the films as practice-focused outcomes of the research. Practice-based researchers often focus interpretation by critically thinking about the processes of design and production of their practice outcomes using the term “inquiry by design” (Zeisel 1984; Gray and Malins 2004). As a starting point, research into documentary as a genre or approach to factual filmmaking was useful in identifying characteristics of the design of poetic documentaries. The advantages of researching modes of documentary, or sub-genres such as observational or poetic approaches, helps narrow the analysis of technique and focus thinking, identifying themes, tropes and styles that are the foundation of these films. Genre analysis has been applied to city symphonies in recent studies to provide an assessment of the commonality of such motifs, as Jacobs et al. (2019, p.15) state “it can help us to be more precise about the genre’s development, its specificities, and its limits”. However, I proceeded with caution as film scholars identify the blurring of boundaries and the fluidity of documentary that challenges the appropriateness of genre study, even though documentary scholars and filmmakers have directly discussed the category of poetic documentary, as a sub-genre or documentary mode (Aitken 2001; Nichols 2001). Therefore, the analytical procedures for the interpretation of my creative practice material further employ semiotic analysis as a more rigorous method for retrospective film analysis. Semiotics, as one of many critical methods open to film interpretation, examines the aesthetic possibilities of the broad notion of “poetic film” (Winston 1995, p.55) and how film language creates meaning, to offer a close textual reading of the films. Metz (1968, p.92) introduces the method of semiotic analysis, “to study the orderings and functioning’s of the main signifying units used in the cinematic message”. Metz explains the use of semiotics in relation to the interpretation of film processes where “Filmic manipulation transforms

what might a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse. Derived from a kind of signification that is purely analogous and continuous” (Metz 1968, p.105).

Consequently, semiotics is useful in examining cinemas expressive use of images and sound, and the denotation and connotation attached to individual techniques, “not just what every shot and sequence means, but how every shot and sequence means what it means – by what cultural, artistic or cinematic convention” (Thomson-Jones 2008, p.59). For example, a semiotic analysis of the close-up shot might reveal an object as a signifier of both a place and event, but in another context act as a repository of shared values (see Bandura example p.93). As a filmmaker and aspiring film scholar, I am interested in the complexities or multitude of meanings behind such choices of film techniques, as noted by Thomson-Jones (2008, p.64), “Insofar as a film image resembles its subject, it functions as an icon; insofar as a film image is causally related to its subject, it functions as an index; and, insofar as a film image bears connotative meaning as a result of context and convention, it functions as a symbol”.

Film studies, as an academic discipline, has evolved and merged with a broader field of media and film aesthetics, which demand a separate discussion going far beyond the scope of my research. However, my interest in aesthetics and poetic analysis provides analytical procedures for examining how image, sound, and text function together, both as and beyond being icons, indexes, and symbols. Semiotics therefore is the most appropriate method of analysis for the present study that considers film not only as an artistic medium, but as a form of knowledge which offers epistemological outcomes, where “visual traditions change into material for a hermeneutic exploration that includes anthropological questions” (Belting 2001, p.65).

Mitchell’s study (2015, p.222) traces the history of such analytical procedures and states filmmakers are “interested in images both as objects and instruments of investigation into human realities”, linking to notions in art history and the study of visual cultures that images are artefacts of a culture and act as performances of that community. Applying semiotic analysis practically involves decoding images and sequences to identify both explicit and implicit meanings, aiding the interpretation of the film’s metaphors and narrative. Leading to directly addressing the concerns of

research objective number five and six, and in assessing how such experimental techniques contribute to a representation of place and culture. Semiotic analysis was executed during the initial research stages of film viewing to identify avant-garde techniques and meanings, and later applied to the interpretation of my film artefacts.

Throughout the study I argue that film is “the field that interrogates the very idea of the image in philosophical discourse” (Mitchell 2015, p.7), with my own films presenting a mediation on place, that functions through poetic associations and resulting subjective perceptions, belonging to, and offering something new to this debate.

2.4 Ethical considerations and principles followed

As an important part of the self-reflexivity of this study, it has been crucial to consider the ongoing ethical concerns and questions raised and directed at myself as both researcher and practitioner. This style of documentary explores the expressionistic aesthetic with filming directly exploring formal properties of cinematography, editing and sound. However, I have addressed a number of questions involving the interests of the inhabitants, observing and working with others, and the country that I am examining through my work. This involves my obligations for accuracy and authenticity, and the concerns of consent, and prejudice, which need to be considered in the early research and planning stages, and equally as soon as the filmmaker turns on the camera. As an experienced filmmaker, I have followed the guidelines of the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) code of conduct throughout my career, which address these issues directly.

The need for self-reflexivity is an important function of documentary production as the filmmaker must consider their personal and professional relationship with the subject, and throughout this investigation, I have considered moral obligations and concerns of accuracy, opinion, and rhetoric in representing Ukraine as an outsider. A starting point in the study of ethics in documentary practice is the concept of “axiographics” which identifies key relationships involved. Nichols’ (1991, p.77) defines the term “axiographics” which “extends ethical debate” to the responsibilities of the documentary filmmaker in considering relationships between subject, audience, and employer, or in my case, academic institution. The awareness of the position and presence of the filmmaker importantly examines influences over the subject matter,

and documentary filmmaking as a part of the socio-historical discourse. The PhD is obviously embedded within, and regulated by, the institutional codes of Bournemouth University and guidance from the Research Ethics Panel (Humanities Research Ethics Panel June 2019) has helped me in part to design an ethical framework to conduct my field work and assessment of my research outcomes (see Appendix 15, p.129). This allowed me to approach locations and people with confidence and explain my work in relation to visiting Kyiv. On the other hand, it is important to state that I have maintained an individuality in relation to the context and content of the filmmaking that is beyond the interaction of the institution, maintaining the integrity of the artist's independent position. On reflection, this duality of independent filmmaker and the University's protocol has required me to open up the ethics debate and develop self-reflexivity on other levels. Ethics has become an area of keen debate in itself, as researchers are urged to "take seriously the ethical and moral commitments we make to ourselves and others as our ethnographic projects unfold" (Campbell and Lassiter 2015, p.5-6). Pink (2007, p.49) unpicks this commitment to highlight a range of concerns for the researcher, which I have increasingly addressed:

"the issue of ethics in ethnographic work refers to more than simply the ethical conduct of the researcher. Rather, it demands that ethnographers develop an understanding of the ethical context(s) in which they work, a reflexive approach to their own ethical beliefs, and a critical approach to the idea that *one* ethical code of conduct could be hierarchically superior to all others".

As a result of this research, I have realised that my work could be identified as suffering prejudice, even in the later stages of evaluation and interpretation which are open to personal reflection and a perspective of a white British filmmaker. I have attempted to work on over-coming biases and, in chapters three and four, I discuss my responsibilities of myself as a filmmaker and my strategies to reduce these, throughout the study and beyond it.

I am also aware that there are limitations to my research and my representation of Kyiv as a city. My research into Kyiv and Ukraine has been limited, but I have attempted to explore history and community through the experience of film festivals and connections to organisations such as Ukrainian Institute London, Mystetskyi Arsenal, National Arts and Culture Museums (some of which are state or independent organisations). I have sought a range of guidance from my family in Ukraine, but also

its citizens, its visitors from Europe, and academics and government officials. There have been many ethical issues to consider, specifically whilst on location during film production. An immediate consideration, as an English speaker in Ukraine, was the language barrier. As well as obtaining formal consent, it was important to represent any interviews accurately and fairly. To achieve this, I secured an independent translator, Denis Martynov, a post-graduate linguistics student at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, to ensure as much accuracy and impartiality as possible. I have also sought validity from several interested parties including supervisors, external academic stakeholders and practitioners at conferences, and Ukrainian individuals and organisations, which have assisted with self-reflexivity and a critical approach. I have been welcomed and encouraged throughout my research and this peer review has also assisted the interpretation of the film outcomes. As a result, I argue in this thesis that I have captured some deeper core meanings, and essence of Kyiv, Ukraine, as a cultural site of interest, yet also the imagination and possibilities of this great city.

2.5 Concluding remarks on the creative methodology

These theoretical, practical, and methodological perspectives offer a reflection on the pursuit of filmmaking, which, like other artforms, is a combination of the artist's imagination and a moment where the camera mediates the experience of the filmmaker on location. By exploring hermeneutics and practice-based methodologies I have considered how the theory discussed justifies, underpins, and supports my own creative choices. Importantly, the connection between hermeneutics and self-reflexivity offers an understanding that, "seems to invite an even deeper level of intimacy, which can, for readers, lead to greater self-understanding" (Gorichanaz 2017) and where "lived experience and culture are sometimes inseparable". Other researchers' methodologies have therefore inspired me to critique work, combine it and design my own approach, "in turn contribute to a wider project of transforming visual anthropology in ways that (re)engage it with other areas of theory and practice" (Pink 2006, p.144).

To summarise, I have chosen this combined methodological approach involving exploration through creative practice, film analysis and poetic hermeneutic reflexivity

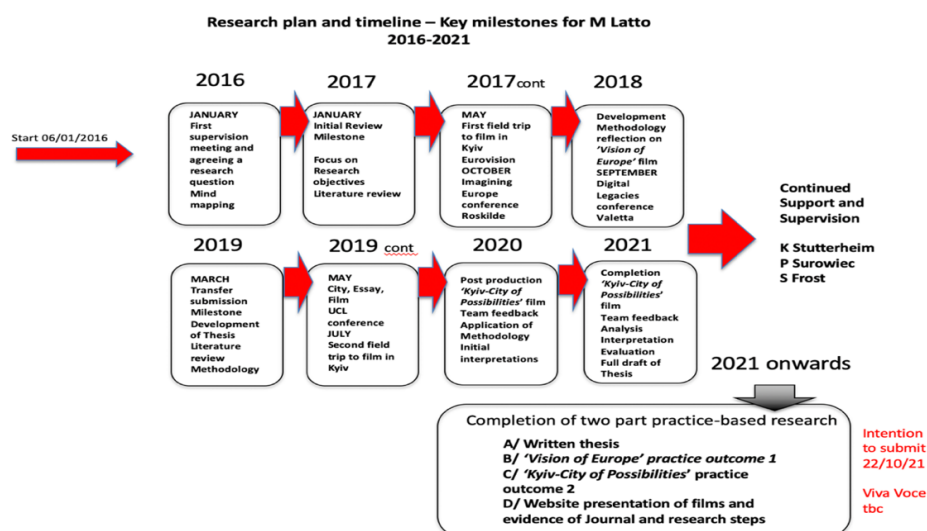
because these constructively aid the process of knowledge creation focusing on fluid and connected objects of analysis. Through integrating filmic creativity and theoretical writing in this thesis, I have developed a deep understanding of poetic forms of documentary from within the creative process, as well as from an observational analytic position concerning how film represents themes of place. My work also shares a perspective on the importance of practice-based research, as I have designed my practice-based research in this way so, “my theoretical research informs my practice, and my practice informs my theoretical research” (Gee 2017, p.15).

CHAPTER 3 - ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF MY RESEARCH ARTEFACTS

3.1 Overview of the emerging insights

This stage of the thesis runs parallel with the creation of the films and discusses my responses to the planning, production and post-production of the film experiments and presents the findings that emerged from the study. First, it includes the reflection on my production journal that has recorded the formation of ideas, alongside a record of my production field trips to Kyiv (2017 & 2019). Second, the interpretation of footage in the editing stages and the completed films which are also a form of data, creating outcomes for reflection and analysis. This analysis and interpretation will follow the analytical approach and methods outlined in my methodology.

Through the narrativisation of insights into my practice, I provide my evaluation and justification of the research as a form of methodological innovation. Importantly, I argue that my practice has allowed me to experiment with, challenge, and expand upon artistic traditions from the European avant-garde to produce valuable artistic and cultural texts. The evaluation will also provide a consideration of the timeline which allows reflection on the structure and work plan of the study. The diagram below highlights the stages of the research and will help navigate the reader through the evaluation of my outcomes, and to explain how the outcomes and findings are processual:



3.2 Analysis of the pre-production planning and production journal

Here, I reflect on my production journal and field notes and the pre-production stages of the films to understand what decisions were made and how this impacted on the content of the films. A starting point was the use of mind maps (see Appendix 5, p.122) which were constructed several times to synthesize historical art movements and filmmakers of influence. This led me to the incredible era of the ambitious European avant-garde cinema and city symphony phenomenon. As a result of the literature review stages of the project, and the viewing of films, I began to construct my own narrative trajectory of the useful histories, concepts, and techniques, circulated in art history and film studies, including 'representation', 'place', 'aesthetics' and 'city symphony'. This terminology and understanding of key concepts would help navigate thinking and help strengthen the research objectives in the pursuit of designing a new form of poetic documentary. The journal offers a visual and written documentation of over 50 pages, including mindmaps, leaflets, maps, photography, and analysis, and supports the approach of mapping ideas in the preproduction stages (see Appendix 9, p.124). Such 'concept mapping' (Gray and Malins 2004; Buzan 2010) and pre-fieldwork surveys help as an essential part of the selection process of useful concepts, example texts and ideas that promote action as a part of learning.

An important example from the journal is where I first noted intellectual responses to many of the European avant-garde films. The viewing and analysis of the films led to devising the toolbox of production techniques to experiment with, as noted in the methodology. From my understanding of the film techniques, and practical experimentation I was able to assess, combine and prioritise a range of techniques leading to a new design. I also identified narrative themes that I would also explore in my films: for example, the socio-historical representations and the impact of industrialisation in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) with sequences dedicated to workers, technology, and modernity; or the focus on the coastal formations and the leisure pursuits and pleasures evidenced in *A Propos de Nice* (1930). Themes that contrast with the notion of beauty and the ethereal experienced in Amsterdam in *Regen* (1929), with a focus on how the tempo, texture and the movement of the rain create a euphoric sensual experience of place. Criteria of interest and the themes behind the films were prioritised to develop them in my own experiments, for example,

the ephemeral and sensual experiences of place, and those that best appealed to my practice, not necessarily the dominant themes of the movement.

The journal importantly allows for a self-reflexive dialogue, an essential and consistent thread of sensory ethnography noted by MacDougall (1975, 1998) and Pink (2006, 2007). The reflexivity as a result is throughout the ideation of the research and the construction of the works. Although descriptive at this initial stage, this is where my argument in support of the practice of poetic documentary and passion for examining the city of Kyiv grew. As a British filmmaker who has studied European cinema and some of the dominant movements in scholarship, there came a realisation that there was a glaring gap in knowledge of Ukrainian history, especially visual culture, and films. MacDougall (1998, p.135) notes that the efforts to fill knowledge gaps creates an important tension and drive behind ethnographic work as “culture is pervasive and expresses itself in all of the acts of human beings, whether they are responding to familiar or extraordinary”. The cultural knowledge gap is one that family and friends as willing participants had also begun to address. Over the years of the study, a dialogue was created on topics as varied as education, art, history, religion, and current events in Kyiv, to exhibitions and film festivals in Ukraine. As well as family and friends, this organically evolved to include other interested parties and promoted links with other academics and artists that were connected to Ukrainian cultural institutions, both in Ukraine and the UK. The growing journal began to provide content and focus ideas, and questions arose concerning how this would develop my work, alongside the management of the study to monitor the pace and time demands of the research. Finally, including some early form of assessment and critical discussions of how the study progressed, for a filmmaker not trained in critical research and writing, it was also essential in forming an early draft of the thesis.

Completing a PhD part-time as a practitioner-researcher has been a complex challenge on its own, but more than a mere record of challenges and rewards, the journal functioned as an important means to thinking forwards and backwards, so to speak. What was useful in my journal were notes of conversations with my supervisory team (see Appendix 6, p.122), other filmmakers and artists, as well as academics whom I also met at practice-based research conferences, some of which who are referenced in the concluding chapter. This again created a wealth of practical

information and ideas that had to be sieved and considered as useful or not in the scope of this project.

A key breakthrough in my thinking and filmmaking occurred when examining my journal in October 2018. It was apparent that the 2017 trip to Kyiv was motivated by the official information from Eurovision sponsors and the *'Everything Starts in Kyiv 2017'* campaign led by the Tourist Department, Kyiv City State Administration and Ukraine Crisis Media Center. This official information (see Appendix 9, p.124), including maps, places of interest and cost comparisons, was highly circulated during the 2017 event, and guided visitors through a route of the city of Kyiv and the official Eurovision village areas central to the city. It was difficult to deviate from this path, even with an independent home base in the city. Thus, a criticism of the work at that point and the film *Vision of Europe* (2017) is that it promotes one official view of the city and iconic historical landmarks with an emphasis of experiencing the visit with a view to "safety and affordability" (see Appendix 9, p.124), and from the perspective of tourism and the arts. As a reflexive critique, I began to consider not only my own position as a researcher but the influence of external forces on the production, and the wider contexts of how the film is produced, noticing my own evolving levels of understanding of the fieldwork. Consequently, at this point it was important to open my discovery of the city as a next step, reflect on this context of promotionalism of the city, and at a time when it was not restricted by the events and official security including the police and army, following the political upheaval in 2014.

I expanded my research into the geography of the city using maps, guidebooks, and literature to construct a wider spatial journey around the city for my next filming trip in 2019. As a result of the journal and because of the literature on city symphonies there came a realisation that there was a need to examine Kyiv as a "megalopolis", looking out further into districts, the expansion of the city and range of communities. When examining the historic city symphonies, there is a distinction between the "megalopolis" which shows the growth of the city, from the centre of what would be termed the "metropolis" or the heart of the city, "City symphonies often present the viewer not only with the modern metropolis but with a vision of the modern megalopolis" (Jacobs et al. 2019, p.16). Kyiv has the city's main street areas of Khreshchatyk Street, Independence Square, St Sophia Cathedral, and St Andrew's

Descent leading to the historical area of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Caves and Kyiv Caves Monastery Preserve. Yet also many new residential districts and developments that extend beyond the left bank of the Dnieper River to create a huge expanse of territories. This wider perspective on the infrastructure, architecture and communities revealed important contrasting factors reflecting both important historical features, alongside current and urgent priorities for the city: seemingly illustrating characteristics of Heidegger's Dasein (1962), elements of the "care structure" or future directions of the city, alongside the familiarity of everyday actions of a community. This acknowledgement of the notion of temporality became an important feature of the analysis to reveal complex characteristics of a city:

"Reckoning with time is constitutive for Being-in-the-world. Concernful circumspective discovering, in reckoning with its time, permits those things which we have discovered, and which are ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, to be encountered in time. Thus, entities within-the world become accessible as 'being in time'" (Heidegger 1962, p.382).

The planned routes and maps used for 2017 to 2019 were quite different to each other. There was a determination to keep the planned route and structure of the final film open and spontaneous, to explore official and unofficial hierarchies of the city. At this stage I reflected on Hick's comment (2007 p.77) about *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) as a "counter-attack against the core shift in Soviet non-fiction film towards scripting and staging". The journal did allow me to see where I had been in 2017 and form connections but, importantly, to expand, and develop the representation and creativity linked to the formation of my final film. The journal became much more than a planner and became an important personal artefact where a desire to learn about Kyiv from a shared cultural experience is evidenced; and important because it became a means to achieve the self-reflexivity obliged by poetic hermeneutic inquiry. Even after visiting Kyiv, Ukraine between May 2017, and July 2019, it became apparent that the filmmaking process required a period of reflection to assess the impact of the techniques applied to the representations. The final entries to the journal became an examination of the raw footage and the early stages of editing in relation to selecting, ordering the imagery and sounds, and building a timeline.

3.3 Analysis of the films

Overview

Film and moving image have been discussed as one of the “powerful mediums of communication and can be used as highly impactful approaches for investigating and representing human experience” (Leavy 2015, p.173). Leavy continues to justify the outcomes of film research in social research fields resulting in “consciousness-raising, empowerment, emancipation, political agendas, discovery, exploration and education”. I argue that I have experienced such outcomes as a filmmaker and film viewer, and my films provide an insight into lifestyles and issues reflected in the city of Kyiv, and Ukraine, as an imagined place. A way of entering interpretation and film analysis is through the method of textual and semiotic analysis. Mitchell (2015, p.220) states that analysis of micro features become “a critical practice that treats images as the building blocks to our psychosocial world”. The interpretation of how the images, sound, and editing techniques function within an avant-garde film and my choices for the application of poetic techniques, matches the nature of the hermeneutic circle where pre-understanding strives to delve progressively deeper into understanding.

Through a combination of semiotic analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, my intention was to not simply provide a textual analysis, nor a descriptive account of the recordings, but provide an interpretation akin with the approach to studying cultures known as thick description; “contrasted with a behaviourist ‘thin description’, which considers only the external behavioural aspect of action; thick description also includes the inner, meaningful aspect” (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p.130). Geertz (1973, p.10) explains the concept and the challenge of interpreting culture after fieldwork:

“What the ethnographer is in fact faced with except when (as, of course, he must do) he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render”.

3.4 Analysis and evaluation of *Vision of Europe* (2017)

To develop a discussion of the narrative inquiry of my films I have firstly considered the syntax and structural organisation of each film by theme. The films can be divided

into sections that present narrative themes common to city symphonies comprising the historical, the contemporary, the urban, the rural, the citizens, labour, leisure, and the ethereal. However, I was naturally drawn to some specific themes, to examine a combination of the physical, the social and the ethereal. Some of the sequences are observational in technique and common to conventions of mainstream realist documentary, while other sequences are impressionistic and focus on the ephemeral, natural phenomenon of light, weather, texture, movement, and sound. Fragmented editing styles are developed throughout the films and combine with these themes to initially show the expanse and spatial relationships of the city, alongside the diversity of location and community.

Films have long attempted to present filmmakers' views of national narratives. The avant-garde city symphonies follow the same "'ideology' of narrating time and space, nation and history" (Mazierska 2011, p.14) as noted in many European new wave films but are more abstract when compared to fictional narrative cinema. The montage structure I construct importantly creates open narrative forms. Firstly, the montage connects a range of national and personal narratives, alongside my experience as a filmmaker, and offers multiple interpretations in an open narrative form. Secondly, the use of a montage offers a vivid and challenging structure where it is argued the experimental form "often questions the regimes of perception and cognition that prevent us from seeing the world around us more critically" (Ryan 2020, p.139). I will discuss how the films offer a complex and multi-stranded narrative as a synthesis of cultural experience and to explain how "we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings" Hall (1997, p.1).

A consistent theme that runs through both films is the role of art in representing identities in the city, including music, performance and the connotations attached to these. This evolved to become a dominant and original theme in the work, an aim to which the final city symphony contributes as a poetic film. The filming of *Vision of Europe* (2017) took place during the staging of the Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv (9-13 May 2017). This was a significant cultural event with an international profile that coincided with my research and highlighted many opportunities to explore national

narratives about Ukraine. The Eurovision Song Contest provided an international platform for Ukraine to celebrate its new democracy since the political changes of 2014. These changes highlighted a move to build relationships with Europe following the plight of Ukraine's conflict with the Russia Federation and the subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014. The televised event was a celebration of both the traditions of Ukrainian music and contemporary artists. Jamala, the high profiled winner of Eurovision 2016, was hosting and performing alongside previous national contestants Ruslana (2004) and Verka (2007). These Ukrainian media personalities featured within the broader pop culture of Europe, with the intention of celebrating diversity, creating unity, and by giving the nation-state a platform to showcase Ukraine internationally. Jamala's performance and song were a springboard for these narratives, as she stated in interview "I think there are two important messages in this song. When we create the future, we should remember our roots and where we came from. And if you respect your own family, your own history, you know 100% how to respect other cultures" (Adams 2016). Jamala's song 1944 also controversially highlighted socio-political struggles against Russian oppression by comparing historic events involving the Ukrainian Crimean Tatars (10 May 1944) with the recent Crimean annexation (27 February 2014).

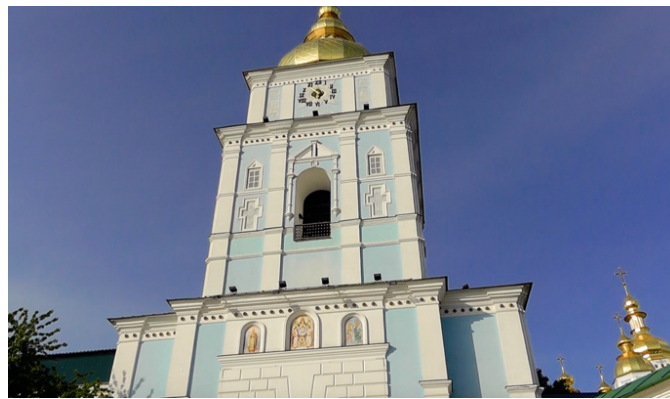
This event was an opportunity for the nation-state to integrate with the wider European community and present multifaceted identities of Ukraine and its national communities. For myself, and as a filmmaker, observation of everyday interaction became a form of multisensory participation of both the daily events and cultural shifts in the country, experiencing the events with family, friends, and the festival goers, offering valuable insights:

"our collaborations with informants can involve not simply spoken narrations of their sensory experiences but also visual display, exposure to sounds, smells and textures, thus bringing the ethnographer closer to the sensory, pre-reflective experiential context" (Pink 2006, pp.47-48).

The use of the close-up and the aesthetics of proximity

An important use of the close-up in *Vision of Europe* (2017) that present connotations of the past and present include the religious sites and cathedrals famous in the city.

Key examples in the film would be the juxtaposition between cultural heritage sites, such as St Michael's Cathedral and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery, with the Eurovision city festival events and performers. For example, the close-up images of the cathedral bells and montage of the bell ringing act as a symbol of the historical significance of the cathedral and explore the signifying potential of this location. Destroyed in the 1930s by the Soviet regime for having no historical or propaganda value, it was rebuilt after 1991 when Ukraine had regained its independence. Photographic evidence of this timeline is provided in the Cathedral Museum situated on the ground floor. Foremost, the bell ringing signals religious practice and the schedules of sermons, yet the cathedral and the bells have historical resonance and create connotations through sound and image of many such historical struggles.



St Michael's Golden Domed Cathedral *Vision of Europe* (2017) copyright MikeLattoFilms.

The close-ups explore Epstein's theory of the "aesthetics of proximity" and act as a magnification or "grossissement" of their symbolic meaning. Epstein (1949) explains the isolation of objects in film as essential for creating meaning, "the film is found to

be particularly apt at both enriching and setting directly into motion the memory and visual imagination of the spectators” (cited by Keller and Paul 2012, p.34). The belfry, for example, is similar in architectural status and symbolism to Epstein’s Phare du Creach in *Finis Terrae* (1929), and is a monument of cultural importance and incidentally, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. St Michael’s was also a key tourism site for the visitors of Eurovision and the bells rang out in celebration of the musical festival. It was a place for the Eurovision community to come together towards the end of the concert village pathway. Yet, the cathedral also represents a memorial to the recent Euromaidan protests of 2013-2014, alongside many historical events concerning Ukraine’s political and social unrest, for example its demolition in 1935 and rebuild in 1997. The bells also often rang out for many hours during times of conflict and the acts of liberation.

The landmarks are initially presented as part of the narrative of everyday life in the city but also function as a symbol of past conflicts and the struggles for the nation. The image of the building and the sound of the bells conjure up many vivid memories for the citizens and also welcomed visitors to the events and to the excitement of the city. These images and sounds offer a sensory experience of the city, and although sites of worship and music festivals are very different pastimes, both do represent community and kinship. It is the combination of filmmaking techniques that are on offer that seem important, with these images, sounds, and structures combining as visual and sensory metaphors of narratives and state ideologies: for example, signposted opportunities in Kyiv’s official City Development Strategy 2017, produced by the Kyiv City State Administration, reflecting “preservation and development of objects of cultural heritage” (KCSA 2017, p.15) and the “Pro-European and democratic vector of development” (KCSA 2017, p.139).

Fragmented editing styles

In *Vision of Europe* (2017), and later discussed in relation to *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022), I have explored fragmented editing styles, influenced by the writing and films of the European avant-garde including Vertov, Eisenstein, Epstein, and contemporary filmmakers including Warhol, and Paradzhanov, who will be rereferred to as and when appropriate in this study. On reflection it is the work of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga

Vertov in particular that have influenced my thinking and application of editing techniques, although both have complex, individual aesthetics. Russian formalist filmmakers adopted the notion of “inner speech” (Yampolsky 1993) from the literary formalists and became increasingly interested in montage techniques and the ability to express concepts and truths through structures. Eisenstein’s writings and theories (1922-1934), among others such as Kuleshov, offer a detailed dissection of montage techniques and an experimental approach to editing that is far-reaching within the art of cinema:

“For the exposition for even the simplest phenomena cinema needs comparison (by means of consecutive, separate presentation) between the elements which constitute it: montage (in the technical, cinematic sense of the word) is fundamental to cinema, deeply grounded in the conventions of cinema and the corresponding characteristics of perception” (Eisenstein 1988, p.41).

The fragmented editing of the imagery in *Vision of Europe* creates patterns and associations that contrast narrative themes and iconography of the past and present in the city. I argue the use of montage creates narrative connections and metaphors to express clarity on many of these themes. For example, the juxtaposition with close-up imagery of the Eurovision festival advertising alongside the architecture of the city, also represents distinctions that have recently been the centre of a branding campaign by the Ukrainian Ministry of Information called Ukraine Now 2017. Artem Bidenko, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, perhaps prescriptively, stated in an interview, “Ukraine is a country with no limits and restrictions...it’s the old mixed with the new that gives a way for new emotions” (Pryliuk 2018). But this is still relevant as much of the marketing and branding appears around the city and is shown through the landscape and events in my film. Such imagery, with some shots direct and others ambiguous, act as a metaphor for Ukrainian governments’ policy and diplomatic initiatives that currently shape national narratives, which include Eurovision. The editing, both sound and images, by virtue of expressing national imagery can be linked to the concept of “nation branding” as an example of soft power statecraft practice (Surowiec 2016, 2021) which is geared towards the construction and delivery of these prioritised state and national identities.

The narratives of the city are explored through discontinuity editing and are complex and present articulations of nationalism, globalism, and multiculturalism. Actually,

many musical and artistic events, motivated by both Ukrainian and European communities, were staged and showcased alongside Eurovision in the same week. I was careful to select a range of these examples from the official, to the communal, to the minority, in order not to solely replicate the “soft power” relationships present in the city. The range of themes also implicitly create binary oppositions which can overshadow the celebration of the Eurovision events and offer a broader view of community events and future plans for the city.



Juxtaposition of shots from *Vision of Europe* (2017)

The counterpoint of sound

An experiment with sound in *Vision of Europe* (2017) is the use of the cathedral bells to connect narratives together and offer clarity on the actions and events; “From the emergence of sound movies, the use of music as part of the narration in documentary filmmaking has seemed natural” (Stutterheim 2018, p.107). Throughout the film it became important to include the entirety of the bell song in the soundtrack, and by doing so, it allowed for the cultural significance of this place to permeate the whole film. The sound is used diegetically at the start of the film to establish location, but evolves to contrast with the images, and events to explore the contrapuntal use of sound. Epstein (1955) discusses the counterpoint of sound and its abilities in allowing objects to speak, much in the same way dialogue would be used between actors in a narrative film; “personalising the representation of sound, making it capable of subjective fidelity, of psychological truth” (cited by Keller and Paul 2012, p.363). The bell song is dramaturgically important to the narrative of the film in terms of presenting connotations of the religious institution, and Ukraine’s community and the country’s independence. The sound of the bells has been one of the most memorable and

evocative features of the film for viewers so far, representing a range of deeply emotional sensual experiences, linked to the connotations forementioned.

In contrast to experimental techniques, I also explored some conventional features of documentary and sound, such as the talking head and interview. The interview sequence would offer another form of narration to develop an informed understanding of city life and explain the importance of the events to the inhabitants in the locations. The Eurovision event allowed for an opportunity to interview individuals and families, alongside visitors from Europe and beyond. Interviews and opinions about the significance of Eurovision for Ukrainians, and for introducing outsiders to the city and Ukrainian culture, were included. The interviews were kept brief and deliberately guided only by the simple question “What is your experience of Kyiv?” During filming an option considered was to use both sound and image from the interviews. In this film, it seemed important to include a participatory section to help develop a narrative of the significance of the events witnessed, including Eurovision, for the city and Ukraine. What convinced me to include sections of interviews, was the range of verbal perspectives that were offered by the interviewees. This included comments on the first experiences of the city as both picturesque and sublime; from “it is a beautiful city, with nice people here” to “it is a little bit scary.... you feel a fear here” (00:04:20). With comments on the benefits of events like Eurovision for the city infrastructure, economy, and global platform from the citizens, “of course, it is very good, it allows to open Ukraine up, not only thanks to Shevchenko, Chernobyl and Klitschko but also from some other positive aspects” (00:06:40). In hindsight, by experimenting further with sound, image, and editing in the subsequent film, an engaging poetic narrative form could be presented.

The decision not to include the talking head interviews in the subsequent film was taken to avoid characterisation of the narrative with personal stories, as the protagonist is not any one person but the central concept of the city. I was principally interested to see how some historical and socio-political events in Ukraine were reflected in a sensory experience of place, rather than a didactic narration. The range of sounds recorded on location alongside the images offered an experiential perspective that seemed more impactful than conventional first-hand accounts and interviews presented in a diegetic and naturalistic style. However, the interviews proved an

important part of the process of learning about the city from a range of interpretations and experiences of the city. As a result, these findings further developed my curiosity and encouraged me to look beyond some of the familiar places, events, and historical references of the city, and were vital to the hermeneutic connective process that enabled both my evolving understanding of the city and the later film of 2021-2022.

On reflection the process of film analysis itself becomes problematic because of the separation of techniques and may not fully explore the organic nature of sound and image in a poetic film and how elements work together. In theory it is possible to separate techniques out for discussion, but in practice the functions are multiple, united, and inseparable. The way the films function also seem similar in concept to Pink's (2006, p.45) discussion of the senses as inseparable and embodied; "This work advocates seeing the senses as unavoidably interconnected and treats touch, taste, smell and sounds as well as vision as repositories of knowledge and memory". This realisation also offers justification why the films and experience of viewing the films are equally important in the practice-based study.

As well as representing my journey through the city and involvement with the events, I have attempted to focus on creating the feeling or mood of the locations, and a range of representations which include a combination of spatial relationships, the landscape, and the people, to express "the space of lived experience". Chanan (2007, p.84) discusses this notion in relation to Vertov's work; "As if, because film constitutes a new form of cognitive mapping, the city becomes its first natural subject. As if you had to be able to find a way of expressing the space of lived experience as the first condition for making documentary at all". These sensory experiences are captured in the poetic associations, and I argue that the cinematic techniques are essential in representing the power relationships existing in the city, as described by Epstein (cited by Abel 1988, p.237) "the landscapes dance is photogenic. Through the window of a train, or a ship's porthole, the world acquires a new, specifically cinematic vivacity".

The foremost example in *Vision of Europe* (2017), where the problematic separation between filmic techniques and the poetic nature of the representation becomes evident, is the final fast-paced montage which combines the performance rehearsal of the contest with the celebration of the community. I also chose to include images of

the war monuments that contrast the horrors of the internal tragedies that separate Ukraine as a European nation at war. The harsh counterpoint of the crescendo of the Eurovision performances contrasts with the ambience of the city war monuments to create an understanding that this triumphant city is also experiencing human suffering. The montage of imagery in slow motion shows the photographs of the casualties of war and memorial flowers and becomes a moment of reflection.



Casualties of the conflict in Crimea *Vision of Europe* (2017)



Public and charity memorials *Vision of Europe* (2017)

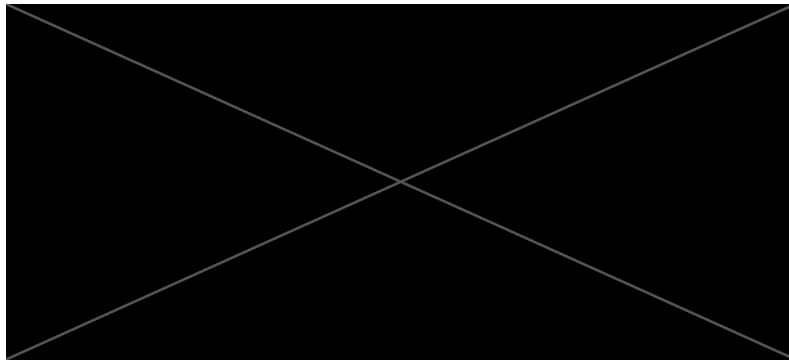
A final observation to reiterate is the self-reflexivity of the film practitioner which “involves constantly examining your own position in the research endeavour, including your assumptions, feelings and decisions” (Leavy 2015, p.282). Throughout the study there has been an attempt to reflect consistently on these responses and choices, and by sustaining an internal dialogue, there became an urgency and realisation that the study needed to be conducted with extreme sensitivity and care, when representing a country as an outsider and during such fragile and difficult times.

3.5 Analysis and evaluation of *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022)

The final film experiment is called *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022) and is a culmination of the two field trips in 2017 and 2019. After completing *Vision of Europe* (2017) and the discussion of this work in my transfer meeting there was a sense that I had not fully experimented with the avant-garde techniques on offer to a filmmaker. I had begun to explore the main techniques from my designed toolbox, including close-up images, the concept of *photogenie*, and the counterpoint of sound. However, there was still potential for experimentation and in particular the exploration of fragmented editing styles. At this stage of the research, reflecting on the outcomes so far, there was a need to examine and experiment with process further, in order to not simply copy the conventions of the city symphonies, but to offer an original design and innovation to the genre.

Research was expanded into the geography of the city to construct a wider spatial journey and guided by a simple question of “What is important to the experience of the city of Kyiv?” to find some points of reference to trace the expansion and diversity of the city. Even the title of my city symphony *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* (2022) mirrors a shift from ‘*erklaren*’ to ‘*verstehen*’, my first experiments seemingly presenting a microscopic explanatory vision, whereas the later film begins to open up a field of potentially boundless, meaningfully interconnecting understandings. The title was inspired by the recent innovative Ukraine NOW branding and marketing campaign which addressed the issues of re-imagining “the country as a place of opportunity” (Banks 2018). Ukraine has also placed emphasis on re-imagining itself as a space in European politics. Bidenko (2018) continued to discuss the municipal branding opportunities at an international conference entitled Ukraine’s Place in the World:

“We’ve chosen the focus by conducting research, focus groups and contests — if put shortly, the message is “the country of possibilities”. Ukraine is a country with no limits and restrictions: you can drive along the beautiful field and stop to explore it because there’s no fence around it” (Pryliuk 2018).



'Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine' (2017)

This campaign is described as an “open source” campaign which can be used and constructed by all interested parties in celebrating Ukrainianess with a more inclusive and diverse representation of the country, “We are more interested in business enterprises, public organizations and common people being the carriers of the brand rather than governmental bodies” (Pryliuk 2018). Marketing campaigns can be very different to the motivations of a filmmaker but there are links to be made, both ironic and sincere, within the narratives of my films. The NOW campaign clearly differs in its way of imagining the new narratives on national identity when compared to the film. However, one similarity is that recent policies have promoted the role of the arts, including music, painting, and film, to share these perspectives on the country in an exciting and challenging way. This includes the Eurovision event, arts initiatives, and film festivals which became an important part of the research experience and filmmaking decisions.

Throughout this evaluation stage, I have also continued to reflect on my political assimilation and resistance to a political viewpoint in the films, especially noting the dominance of national state agendas. The seemingly political equivocality is a response to my position as an outsider, but more importantly as a poetic filmmaker whose motivation is an understanding of the aesthetic concepts that are explored in this study. Political power relations are present in the film and the city environment and invite discussion about the various national, global, and ethnic narratives that are on offer in Kyiv. However, as already signposted, I focus on these as social conditions as a starting point for conversations about these changing representations. The challenge was to include some of these national state narratives but in no way were the films to become consumed as some form of marketing campaign, solely reflecting

their goals and simplistic aesthetic sensibilities. I was careful to show a range of these views and ideologies, without giving priority to one in the selection and editing stage. Some responses to the films may be critical of not prioritising political ideologies, for example following on from the Marxist traditions of critiquing the city and city symphony films, however, as stated I was drawn to poetics as a way into interpreting cultural identities. Therefore, attempting to contribute new knowledge to a form of representation and interpretation that is not so dominant in certain areas of scholarship.

The use of the close-up and the aesthetics of proximity

As movement around the city by foot, car and public transport came more freely in 2019 when compared to the restricted events of 2017, it seemed important to include this movement in the shot composition. This decision was taken to show the new routes taken and to show the growth of the environment and the fast pace of the city life. The selection of shots and framing are more diverse, shifting from the close-up to wide-angled panoramas, as well as exploring different times of day and movement around the city. The framing and position of the camera became an important device in selecting iconography that presented an examination of the city, inviting narrative inquiry, and opportunity for an interpretation of Kyiv. A key theme in the city symphonies is the growth of the city linked to industrialisation and modernity. The film focuses on revealing a diversity in the geography from the rural to the urban and as a result captures similar themes. The Kyiv City Development Strategy - 2017 until 2025 (see Appendix 7, p.123) discusses the development and long-term vision for the city, “The main strategic goal of the long-term development of Kyiv is to improve the quality of life of its residents, which is determined by the economic welfare and comfort of life in the city with a rich historical tradition” (KCSA 2017, p.15). References to development strategies are visible around the city through the marketing, but also in the architecture and fabric of the landscape and part of the discourse of key locations.

Many of 1920s city symphony films examined the vibrancy of European cities during the time of modernity. Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), for example, presents the changes in the cities and exposes a self-reflexive narrative of a filmmaker’s exploration. Vertov’s film succeeds in creating what could be perceived as

the landscape's dance reflecting on socio-economic growth and vibrancy within key cities, including Kyiv. Hicks' (2007, p.25) discussion of Vertov's practical application of the camera, and the '*Cine-Eyes Field Manual*' (1924), was useful here in suggesting some further considerations when filming, including ideas of filming unawares, filming from a distance and filming in motion to capture a location; while being conscious that, as Hick's (2007, p.27) highlights "even with the *Cine-Pravda* series, there are many instances where the presence of the camera has undoubtedly altered or even instigated some of the actions". The representation of movement in the *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is complex. The variation, including camera distance, framing, and the rhythm underlying the representation of the life of the city, is presented through movement, and shot duration; first, the movement of objects within the frame, for example the transport and the people; second, the movement of the camera which is at times handheld and tracks through the roads and streets. Finally, the important editing rhythm and duration of the shots which manipulate time and space through altered cutting rates, where Vertov at times creating a dizzying kaleidoscope of kinaesthetic energy.

This complex mixture of shot type and movement therefore importantly creates an immersive experience of the city that replicates both the objective mechanical capture and interaction of the technology, with a subjective experience of the filmmaker. The images, editing and scope of movement create a sensual experience of city that seems to replicate the fieldwork of an ethnographer, as Ingold (2013, p.20) describes:

"It is to switch our perspective from the endless shuttling back and forth from image to object and from object to image, that is such a pronounced feature of academic writing in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, to the material flows and currents of sensory awareness in which images and objects reciprocally take shape".

The concept of movement influenced the filming and editing in the documentary and reflected the immediacy of my own experience of Kyiv on location. There came a realisation across the two films that this fragmentation represented my own freedom of experimentation and discovery and was to be an essential part of the final city symphony film.



Driving through the districts 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022) Copyright MikeLattoFilms.

I may have explored the city and movement of the people in similar ways to Vertov, and to contrast the streets of the central plazas with the suburbs and show a multitude of development reflecting architectural change, urban change, and recent initiatives for investment in the city. However, I chose not to include an explicitly participatory element in the film, as Vertov chose to do in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and appear as the filmmaker present in the shots exploring the environment. Yet, during filming, there was a continued reflection on the journey theme in the documentary as a metaphor for this self-reflexivity, and an awareness of the question of entitlement in particular. The driving sequences act as an important feature of mapping the city and also symbolise a place of reflection and decision and are reminiscent of the energy and spontaneity captured in Claude Lelouch's Paris city film *C'était un rendez-vous* (1976), "this project embraces the camera and the microphone as sense instruments that capture information about the built environment in ways that are both analogous to how we perceive, and also radically different" (Pigott 2019). The images of car mirrors and surface reflections are indicative of the position and role of the filmmaker in the creative process. I occasionally allow myself to be seen in mirrors, glass, puddles, and sunglasses throughout the films. This creates a subtle metaphor of a British filmmaker welcomed into the city, not just by marriage, but by the arts, diplomatic relations, as well as community links and the recent establishing of a sense of belonging.

The city becomes a mix of historical sites of importance contrasted with new initiatives to make the country a thriving modern city and an attractive competitor within Europe (Wilson 2014; Banks 2018; Pryliuk 2018). Some comments on the film interpreted locations around the city as other sites in Europe, for example in London, and

described this sense of growth as a signifier for the cycle of migration from Kyiv to another megalopolis in Europe (UCL 2019). All filming takes place in and around the city of Kyiv, but what the interpretation of London for Kyiv does reveal, is not simply the expanding homogenisation brought on by globalisation but also socio-economic similarities, for better or worse, which are illuminating to some and, in their positive variant, can help dispel persistent myths of ‘other’ communities, in this case Ukraine and Eastern Europe, as representing non-progressive communities steeped in inequality. The landscape can be argued to reflect change, the speed of development of the city, challenge prejudices and “unsettle stereotypes” (Leavy 2015, p.196) which is an important feature of the socio-political agenda of the city discussed by Bidenko during the conference *Ukraine’s Place in the World* (2018):

“Our research shows that foreigners have a certain image of Ukraine that is something similar to the second-world country: dirty, gritty and grey, people never smile, plus it’s a part of the ex-USSR and there’s a war going on etc. However, when they come here — and I’ve personally witnessed this — they see exactly the opposite: hearty people, delicious food and many destinations to explore. That’s what we have to show — something unique to astonish the foreigners and make them want to come back” (Pryliuk 2018).

To that end, MacDougall (1998, p.140), reiterates that for many ethnographic films, “one of the underlying metaphors of the anthropological endeavour is to cure the disease of cultural intolerance”. An intent of this present study is to both unsettle stereotypes and address cultural intolerance.

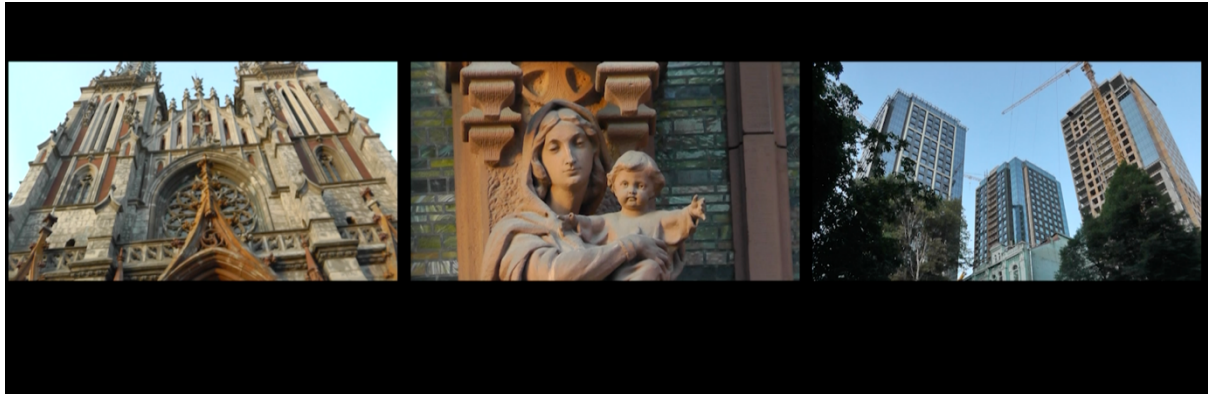
Fragmented editing styles

The structure of the editing in the film and the fragmented style became an essential feature of my experimental practice and was so important in presenting fragments of my journey, as I travelled through Kyiv and experienced events alongside historical locations, artefacts, and the inhabitants of Kyiv. Hicks (2007, p.31) confirms editing became a priority in Vertov’s work, “Moreover, the whole notion of ‘life-off guard’ needs to be tempered by the fact Vertov believed in recording processes and underlying patterns rather than just events”. Whereas Guido (2012, p.146) discusses Epstein’s concepts of editing as a chain of elements that contribute to a sense of modern life, “The obsession with rhythm during this period makes it the key principle for understanding how the new movements of modernity shaped themselves according

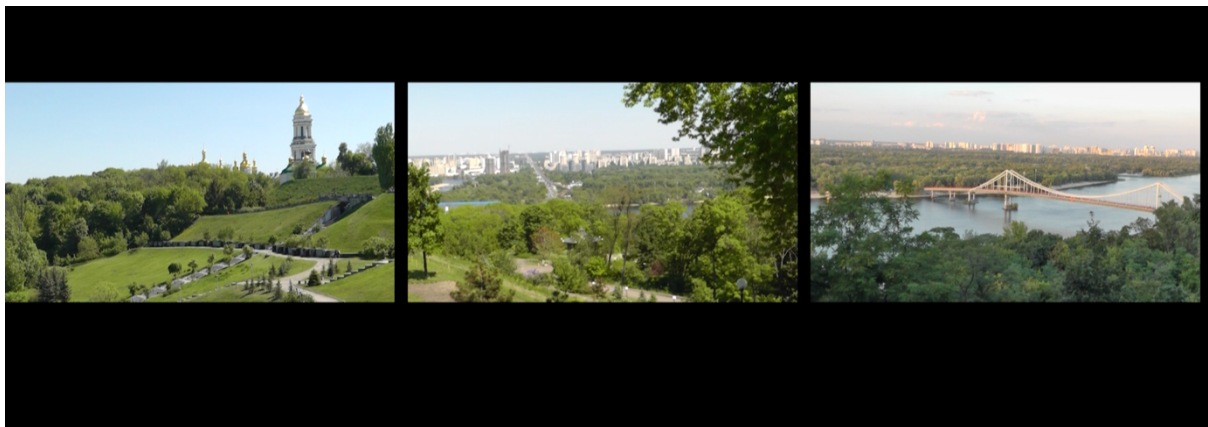
to a very traditional view of universal harmony". The film was edited with the same concentration and verve of the city symphonies, but I was inspired to experiment further and attempt to contribute something new to this area of aesthetic.

The filmmaker's experience in this study more explicitly and uniquely was conducted 'in a medium', and the poetic techniques when applied to documentary were demonstrating significant success in reflecting sensory experience through medium specific techniques. Similarly, research conducted in writing is scripted in words on paper or on screen, read over durable time, is research conducted in a medium, but with the important difference in that convention has rendered the medium of the page invisible. The difference is not one of category but degree. The fragmented representation of my recent visits and journey through Kyiv presents both a representation of the city, and an emotional encounter. Alongside offering some historical trajectory and highlights to what the custodians and inhabitants of the city want to present in relation to everyday experience of culture.

The emerging narratives began to also represent my family heritage and the mapping of their relationship with the city. On our recent visits, since relocating to the UK over 15 years ago, we have always noticed the speed of change in the Ukraine and "the shock of the new" (Hughes 1980). For example, how districts and previous family homes have been replaced and engulfed by building initiatives, with historic buildings and landmarks now standing between multiple modern skyscrapers, many of which are complete but still empty. A mixture of the picturesque and the sublime appears, and interpretations become fraught with a combined excitement and/or anxiety. The city is, for some, fast and exciting, but for others, stressful or shocking, both are valid and personal experiences of the city life. During the filming at times, and as a family, we travelled through the city revisiting school sites and churches, even old homes and shops that reflected a nostalgic view of the city and our family narrative as one metaphorical strand. My work does this because my mediation as a filmmaker creates a personal perspective with many of the cultural sites of interest I have attempted to film.



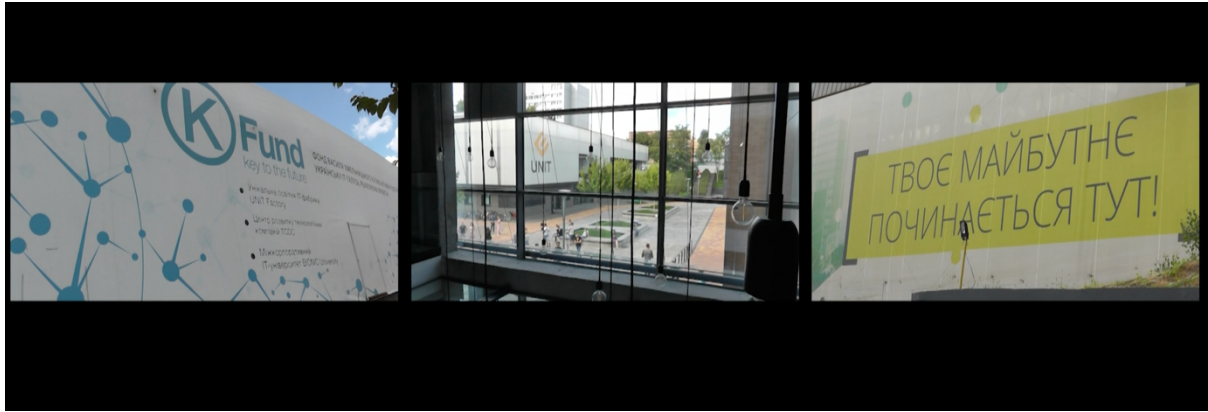
Historical sites and modern construction 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)



Historical sites and modern construction 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)

Examples in the film that explore a range of juxtapositions include the old heritage sites of religion such as Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Kyiv Caves Monastery Reserve and Soviet symbols of the economy such as the Expo Center, formerly known as Exhibition Center for the Achievements of Ukraine, with new innovative environments, new technologies and new entrepreneurship, for example UNIT.City in the area of Dorohozhychi and Lukianivska:

“UNIT.City is Ukraine’s first innovation park. It is the location where matchless infrastructure and all-inclusive ecosystem enable high technology, innovation and creative businesses to happen and flourish. Here the concentration of companies, start-ups, students, professionals, and research laboratories creates conditions for businesses within the park to grow faster than outside” (UNIT.City 2019).



UNIT.City construction and innovation 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)

I was interested to visit and include UNIT.City as it is a place of education, technology, and innovation that represents a range of themes including the state, industry, youth, and community enterprise, yet, also a site representing the centralised exploitation of those same themes. At UNIT.City there are many vivid aspirational advertisements or banners displaying statements such as “Your future begins here!”. This use of text as statement is noticeable around the city and I include some translations/titles in the film to anchor these messages and offer an insight into initiatives in the city. Other titles in the film offer similar exchanges and a way into exploring the connotations or visual metaphors, such as the references to songs and historic figures.

The contrasting architectural buildings, construction design and layout of the city also reinforce the historical narrative in the film with the buildings representing key characters in Ukraine’s past. Carpentier (2015) discusses the importance of memorial sites as offering a way into exploring and understanding national narratives, “We often think material objects are silent. But they are not. And they tell us a story. Analysing these stories, through their materiality, is important”. Many prominent statues and memorials, including The Founders’ Monument, The Golden Gate and The Peoples’ Friendship Arch, to name a few, are a repeated motif that is important in presenting discourse about religion, nationalism, and social change, as noted by Doudaki and Carpentier (2018, p.45), “These counter-hegemonic discourses are contested in turn, but overall, they offer a material presence for different ways of thinking”.

The film features several of the most famous statues in Kyiv, for example the Motherland Monument which stands at the WWII museum site. This is a controversial symbol of the Soviet and Communist past in Ukraine but links the beautiful Kyiv

Pecheresk Lavra and Caves Monastery Reserve and gardens which are the site for establishing the Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the country, and throughout the Kyivian Rus territories. These statues, monuments, sites, and design features are significant to the identity of the city as cultural preservation sites and were dominant features of the landscape and skyline that needed to be included. They present a narrative of the founding myth of the city, alongside notions of kinship between communities, and are presented to the viewer as if they were travelling through the city or visitors to these sites. Likewise, the Founders' Monument which shows the fabled arrival by boat of the three brothers and sister who settled and founded the origins of the medieval Kyiv city. The statue links the Dnieper River to the uplands which lead to the city and is one of the most famous of these memorials. These statues and monuments exist as characters on the landscape and have multiple roles. Tuan (1974, p.99) notes, "Awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place". They represent key moments of history and myth but also lend themselves to a geographical map which connects the diverse landscape of the city from the river to the rural areas, to the suburbs.

A recent example of a public site and monument representing the history of the independence of the nation state, which was included in the film, is the monument Kozak is the Winner (2015) which shows a mythical scene of a knight on horseback fighting a two headed dragon. This is situated, significantly, opposite the Ukrainian Intelligence buildings in Bankova Street as a statement representing the long fight for Ukrainian independence and sovereignty, symbolically representing challenges against the Soviet order. The buildings where it is situated were the base of the Soviet era KGB and Ukrainian Intelligence. The experience of the statue *in situ* was personal as my father-in-law worked as an Intelligence agent up until the late 1990s, working for both the KGB, and the Ukrainian branch following the 1991 independence of the country. During the editing stages much of the footage was revisited as I reflected on the meanings inherent in them. These seemed to expand and multiply with each subsequent viewing, dissecting structures and composition as Lessing had done in 'Laocoön' (1887). On reflection, it was most apparent how personal family narratives were becoming intertwined with national narratives, as it could be for many viewers interested in a Kyiv city symphony. The use of fragmented editing is similar in context to the poetic nature of the statue, as the juxtapositions create a range of connotations

that explore the life of the city and become a feature of signification, crossing the boundaries of architecture, sculpture, music, painting, and film, and this correlation between the arts stands as an ever more important theme in the film.



'Kozak is the Winner' statue 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)

The images are contrasted with other recent political symbols such as the banner protesting the imprisonment of Roman Sushchenko, a journalist for news agency Ukrinform, who was arrested in Moscow in 2016 by the Russian Federal Security Service as a suspected Ukrainian spy (Osborn 2018). The city is covered by such evocative and poetic symbols of protest and liberty which are difficult to miss. The decision was taken not to concentrate on these narrative controversies, as some recent studies of art and monuments have done so (Doudaki and Carpentier 2018; Tunzelmann 2021), because the project's effort was directed at representing these controversies as part of the everyday life and fabric of the changing city, which people may or may not notice as they travel by. So, I chose to examine other themes such as the domestic and commercial features of the city, where people live, work, and enjoy leisure.



Diverse signage and advertising 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)

I continued to experiment with editing, to contrast official cultural preservation sites with economic and social events which signified a unified European city. Many of these events and places do not just reflect Ukrainian culture and, when edited together in juxtaposition, signify a global community in all its emancipatory and exploitative complexity. This included European brands and shops, such as Benetton, and the Connor McGregor UFC sporting event, alongside the central city Besarabsky Market that is an iconic structure dating back to 1912. The market is known for its eclectic mix of traditional food and contemporary lifestyles, where recently established Vegan cafes and Glovo (Uber/Deliveroo) delivery drivers are shoulder to shoulder with sellers of traditional caviar and jars of fermented vegetables.

Had the editing completely elided official state-backed signification, the film might have been read as promoting a false apoliticality, but by repeating certain images of state-self presentation, and those of a global community, the work again engaged with political critical discourse, but without losing its anchoring in subjective experience. This tightrope of political interest is discussed in Dayan's (2018, p.86) study of political power structures in documentary film, "the characters in a documentary can be used either to unveil and criticise or to mask and perpetuate social and political power structures". Dayan (2018, p.86) examines how the socio-political ideologies are also manipulated by the choice of approach by the filmmaker, "their presentation and dramatic framing provide a powerful cinematic means for pursuing those aims". A result is it makes it difficult to remain equivocal about my relationship with the various ideological positions currently in operation in Ukraine.

I understand the films may also allow themselves to be misinterpreted and the filmmaker judged on a number of levels. Vertov himself was rejected as an ideological filmmaker of the state for failing to present the positive impact of Sovietisation successfully and was misunderstood as a filmmaker because his work was deemed by critics as "self-satisfied trickery" (Petric 1987, p.65). Eisenstein's and Vertov's theories were in conflict and their priorities concerning aesthetics and politics are much debated. Eisenstein's theory of the "montage of attractions" was motivated by an ideological perspective, "an assertion of the method of approach to the montage of effects that are useful to our class and the precise recognition of the utilitarian goals of cinema in the Soviet republic" (Eisenstein 1988, p.58). For these reasons, I am

further allied with Vertov. Eisenstein (1988, p.63) criticised Vertov's "Cine-Eye" and exploration of montage, and draws comparisons to the Impressionist aesthetic:

"Like the well-known Impressionist, *Cine-Eye*, sketchbook in hand (!), rushes after objects as they are *without rebelliously interrupting the inevitability of the statics of the causal connection between them, without overcoming this connection through a powerful social-organisational motive but yielding to its 'cosmic' pressure*".

Eisenstein was correct to draw these distinctions but appears to dismiss the importance of what he saw as a "contemplative" approach, which was essential to the avant-garde, the aesthetic relationship, and akin to Epstein's theory of *photogenie*. Eisenstein stated (1988, p.63) "The *Cine-Eye* is not just a symbol of *vision*: it is also a symbol of *contemplation*. But we need not contemplation but action. *It is not a 'Cine-Eye' that we need but a 'Cine-Fist'*". Had *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* engaged more explicitly and critically with the state's self-representation, and guided viewers of the film in making radical social organisational connections, it may well have created a "Cine-Fist", but this was never the intention. Instead, the poetic reflexivity in the study opens many questions aimed at personal experience and influences on the production of a documentary, from topics as diverse as politics, cultural differences, to aesthetic choices.

A final point about the design of editing in the film concerns the use of multi-screen or multi-channel editing, as an aesthetic choice, which combines projections and enables a multitude of comparisons, contrasts, or juxtapositions. The use of the three-channel presentation echoes back to the popular use of triptych in early Christian art, including Ukrainian religious works in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, through to photography and film, for example Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927). This form of editing and exhibition evolved in the era of experimental and expanded cinema of the 1960s and 1970s where the film took on the role of more of a theatrical, immersive viewing that was described as "happenings" (Dwoskin 1975, p.241). This technique allows near-limitless poetic meanings as the multi-channel, or in this case, triptych works to collide together to create connotations and metaphor, or simultaneously the single screens can stand as individual representations. This technique was important to develop not a fist but an eye for the sensual imagining of Kyiv and the multiple identities that exist in the fabric of the city. The notion of space is suggested not only by the choice of

camerawork, the wide-angle or the close-up, as previously discussed, as the multi-channel also offers that sense of space in city, much the same way a panning shot can expand our scope of vision in a film.

The shots across the screens initially offer a continuity sequence and observation of a location, that is not achievable in the same way in a single shot and replicate a view that is not restricted by the cinematic frame. The sequences also follow more directly the tradition of observational documentary and the notion of filming unawares and from a distance. The shot choice and fragmented editing then develops to explore contrasts in the landscape and locations that offer multiple narrative readings, whether that shows contrasts between historical architecture, community, or ideologies. This is where the experimental features of the filmmaking develops the sense of place to suggest more elusive knowledge and representations that I have noticed, and further develops a form of sensory embodied experience.

An early example of the popularising of a multi-channel film is Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966) where "screens may show two different scenes or two versions of a single scene" while "the sound will come from one screen, sometimes from the other" (Dwoskin 1975, p.122) with the results described as becoming limitless for both the filmmaker and the interpretation. Dwoskin (1975, p.123) expands upon the relationships between the screens "Each combination of movement can be juxtaposed with a single movement; can be linked with scale, with colour, with direction, with sound, with words, with blank space". Gidal (1971) also affirms the early experience of Warhol's experimentation as, "Warhol achieves a totality through the segmented-fragmentary form, a totality not in terms of an easily verbalized statement but in terms of a complex intertwining of emotional/intellectual presentations to form a whole experience" (1971, p.115). Such styles of editing and exhibition can be noted across experimental film movements from Expanded cinema to Artists' moving image.

Kyiv - City of Possibilities sits within this multi-channel tradition that has now become well established in alternative cinema production and exhibition. The film is structured into themed sequences and does use double and triple motifs across the screens at times, to establish the impact of the experiential perspective. Where I start in the city is also reflected and echoed in the final sequence, and at several points in the film, to

offer an open poetic form, and suggest a unity in the city and community. Installation of a film as a multi-channel projection, rather than screening the film in a conventional cinema for example, provides a form of active participation in the form of a sensory cinematic performance. The three screens can engulf the viewer on all sides, like the experience of an open space. And unlike the cinema audience locked into their single viewpoint seats, the installation viewer is free to move in an echo of moving around the city. The sound and images provide actions, texture, and physical movement in a form of a simulation, presenting a phenomenological experience. As discussed later, this study does not explore the topic of audience participation and response to my films, but it has been argued video installation as an experience of moving image actively promotes bodily and emotional awareness that can contribute to a deeper understanding of a film's meaning (Oliveira 2003; Jennings 2015).

The questions to ask here include are the audience willing to participate on such an experiential level, and again, is the cultural experience able to be translated. Pink (2006, p.57) describes her own use of video as an important sensory method where even on a single screen,

“embodied sensory experiences were represented variously, including: visual images of embodied actions (enacting processes or touching or stroking objects); verbal utterances and descriptions; visual images of objects and processes that are metaphors for sensory experiences (such as candles, oils, perfumes and spaces); and facial expressions.”

It is up for debate whether sounds and images represent all the senses, for example smell or taste, but the installation does attempt to create the feeling of being there, of participating in the events, as the filmmaker has done.

Finally, it is apparent that the interpretation of editing and structure has an important resonance with contemporary digital technologies and new film making practices which formulate information through fragmented media across online platforms. New technologies, such as HD video, cross-media production software's, multimedia installation and online resources, have opened the accessibility and possibilities of these representations and experimental forms. Artists' moving image, as many of the European avant-garde films, show the fragmented experience of the world. Artists

have discussed their experience of the world as more realistically cultural fragments, rather than the wholeness of conventional narrative forms. This was an interpretation aimed at my own film during the DRHA Malta 2018: Creative Legacies conference by Olu Taiwo, the chair of the panel discussion:

“*Vision of Europe* (2017) seems very familiar to me, and these avant-garde techniques are comparable to watching a platform like YouTube. It presents an amateur aesthetic and fragmented narrative and shares the temporary moments of real life in a very moving way” (Taiwo 2018).

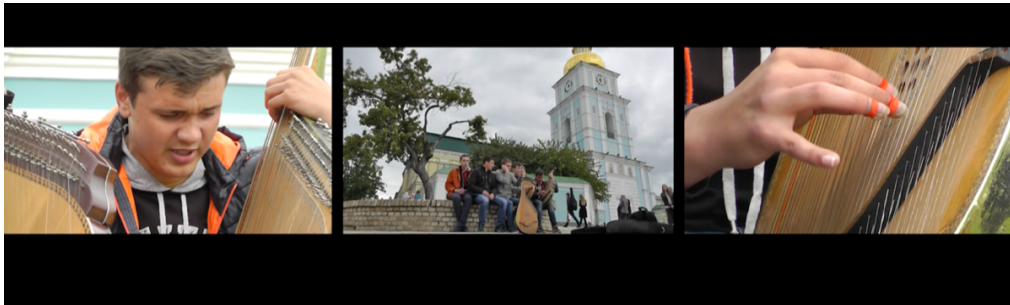
The poetic form of my films represents cultural fragments from the perspective of a visitor exploring the complex cultural identities on offer in the city.

The counterpoint of sound

Sound is of equal importance to the image in poetic forms of documentary and, together, they are arranged in a non-narrative structure, in the hope to represent an emotional impression of time and place, “since poetic documentary are films combining a reference to reality, thus activating our consciousness, with an artistic approach directed towards our senses, the conceptual use of sound and music is highly important” (Stutterheim 2018, p.114). The sound in the final film deliberately constructs an eclectic mix of church bells, folk music, contemporary music on the radio and ambient sound of the city locations. This mix of sound is chosen to develop narrative themes, and in this analysis, I will consider the genre, author and intended effect of key uses of parallel, contrapuntal, and actuality sound. The sound at times supports the visual signs and offers its own connotations of heritage, community and ideologies and compliments the syntax of the structural elements, where structure creates temporal shifts and rhythm too.

An example of the counterpoint of sound that I explore in this film was the use of diegetic music played by young classically trained musicians busking on the St Michael’s Cathedral grounds, using classical instruments to perform traditional folk songs. The ‘buskers’ compliment the example of the cathedral bell song and present a broader performance of historic music in the city. Many of the buskers’ songs, when translated, are also reminiscent of memories of lifestyles and myth in Ukraine. The musicians presented an authentic singing ensemble, with traditionally three or four-

part harmony sequences and string instruments, including the Bandura, and overall, the performance draws on a long tradition of Ukrainian folk music that was played in celebration of identity and ethnicity, “and has been rediscovered by a new generation of Ukrainian performers” (Alieksiienko 2021).



Young traditional folk musicians 'Kyiv - City of Possibilities' (2022)

The first song performed in the film and the chorus is:

Oh, whose horse is standing over there

The girl came closer

Gave me her hand

Oh, it would have been better

Oh, it would have been better

Not to have known love

The choice and translation of this folk song presents a simple love story, but it also has a haunting quality reflecting a commentary on the past life in Ukraine. The folk song is reminiscent of the “Dumy” genre in Ukraine which is a form of epic poetry in song that presents a romantic or satirical view of the past and a depiction of the lifestyle of the citizens:

“Dumy are songs of Ukrainian identity. The genre came into being along with Ukraine. As songs about Ukrainian Kozaks, dumy chronicle the birth of national consciousness, the time when the peoples living on the territory of what is now Ukraine began to think of themselves as a polity, when they began to see themselves, not as families or individual clans subject to a foreign overlord, but as a cohesive unit capable of making its own impact on the world stage” (Kononenko 2019, p.4).

The musicians are playing the Bandura lute style instrument which has itself become a symbol of identity and again links to the narrative of Ukrainian sovereignty. The

Bandura was used by political minstrels who strived for the independence of Ukraine and the musicians suffered for years, banned, or persecuted under the Soviet rule (Kononenko 2019). The instrument and style of song have a close relationship with the identity of the city, with several conservatories in Kyiv majoring in Bandura study and playing. On talking to the musicians, the instrument was specifically promoted as a Ukrainian instrument and symbol of a new era of freedom of expression. These young talented musicians are classically trained in the folk songs of the past as a form of cultural preservation and are part of the wider folk revivalism of post-war Europe, but with a very specific Ukrainian narrative. Their performance and the editing of it in the film creates an evocative counterpoint with contemporary street music and popular national or European music in Ukraine. To complement the use of close-ups and fragmented montage editing, the busker's songs are used in an edited sequence to show transition, presenting a sense of nostalgia and pride, which was also evident visually in the young musicians highly skilled performances.

In contrast to the folk song and church bells, the film concludes with a contemporary song that belongs to the Ukrainian Urban music genre. The song is a more direct political commentary on the present, which again presents a sense of national pride in the lyrics. It exists as part of the eclectic choice of music on offer in Ukraine including the religious, folk, rap, hip hop and Euro-pop. The song, its title translated as No, it won't be like that in my Country by Krizhi (2015), references the contemporary political situation and issues of political and corporate corruption that are recognised as rife in the nation. The lyrics repeating throughout the chorus of the song present a reaction to these issues, "you can't build a future in the country that is sold...we are nothing to our leader". Folk music and contemporary songs can act as a form of dialogue or protest aimed at the issue at hand, as Kononenko (2019, p.5) states "In the popular imagination, Dumy instil fear in the hearts of anyone suppressing Ukrainians, this art form is such a powerful force for resistance". This eclectic choice of music is ingrained in the daily life of the city, and the mix of music in *Kyiv - City of Possibilities* presents a commentary from various Ukrainian voices, with the songs played on location or through the car radio on the journey through the city in the film.



City districts mural art '*Kyiv - City of Possibilities*' (2022)

The Urban music in the final stages of the film compliments the contemporary images of Kyiv. A recent trend in the landscape and artistic expression of the city has seen murals and professional graffiti emerge throughout the districts. This is now a unique and celebrated feature of this expressive city and one that gives voice to the multicultural community of Kyiv, in contrast to that of the official branding used by state institutions. The murals are created by both indigenous artists and artists from around the world, including Brazil, USA, and UK and over 150 murals are fast becoming a melting pot of transnational perspectives on Ukraine:

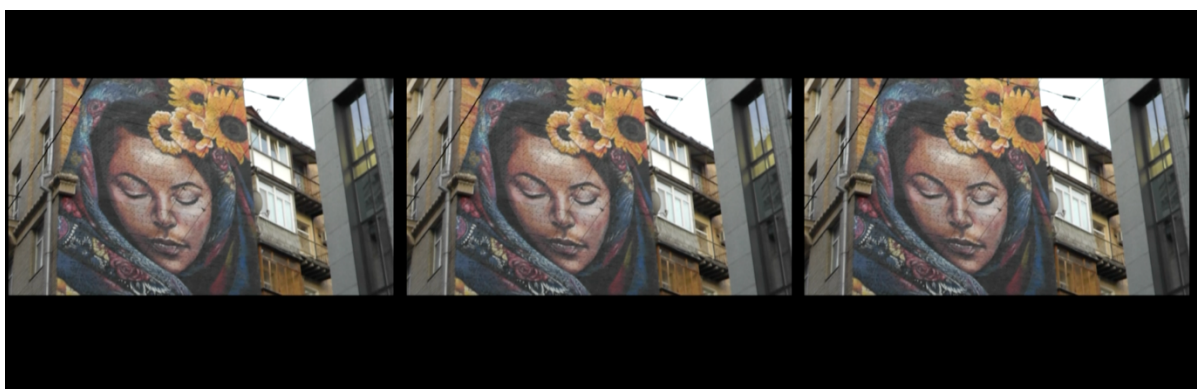
“Launched on 16 March 2016, ArtUnitedUs purports to be ‘the biggest groundbreaking urban art project which will unite 200 of the best artists through mural art and the promulgation of maintaining peace on Earth’” (Shandra 2016).

They also encourage an interaction through performativity, a way for inhabitants and tourists to engage with the city, creating an awareness of the megalopolis and its wider communities. My film sequence captures the experience of walking through the city where these murals become activated from subjective approaches and the work emerges in co-production with its walkers, or in my case viewers. I have combined a range of these cultural signs as this was my experience travelling through the city. As noted in the analysis of *Vision of Europe*, at this point in the analysis it is difficult to separate the discussion of sound and image and the experimental nature of the poetic filmmaking becomes organic, offering a collision of techniques and subsequent meanings.

Many of the artworks captured in the film function as markers of memories and tributes to key individuals and moments in Ukraine and have been attributed to a form of expression after the Euromaidan protests of 2013, “The protest left a deep mark on

the country. Art became an outlet for processing and looking to the future” (Esther 2020). They also present diverse symbols and metaphors for analysis of cultural links between the community and socio-political issues for example, Children’s Faces by Ukrainian artist Konstantin Skrytutskyi at Stritenska Street shows a colourful group of children from diverse ethnicities as an integrated, multicultural future generation. Elsewhere, the athlete Ganna Rizatdinova a Ukrainian Rythmic Gymnast is celebrated in a work by Australian artist Fintan Magee in an incredible action pose on Striletska Street. Representations of the casualties of recent conflicts are presented as anti-war statements with a portrait of Serhiy Nigoyan, the first victim of the protest in 2013, situated at Mykhaylivska Street by Portuguese artist Vhils. There are similarities, as well as stark contrasts, to be drawn between the iconography of statutes and the official marketing, as these images represent the socio-political experiences of Ukraine that exist in the national and international consciousness. The final image in this sequence is of Bereguinya in Shevchenko Avenue by Costa Rican artist Mata Ruda. The symbolic importance of this character is common to Ukrainian folklore and Bereguinya is known in Slavic myth as the great protector of the community, and here she dominates the heart of the city. A spirit or goddess, she has strong connections with Ukrainian cultural nationalism and feminist narratives:

“Since the Ukrainian independence in 1991, she has undergone a folkloric metamorphosis, and is today identified as a combination of the “hearth-mother” (associated with the guardianship of the nation) and a rusalka. This metamorphosis has its roots in the late 1980s, as several Ukrainian writers sought to personify their vision of an ideal Ukrainian woman” (Niklot 2017).



Central city mural art '*Kyiv - City of Possibilities*' (2022)

The final sequence of the film again ends with the war memorials in slow motion and remembers the continuing Ukrainian conflict with the Russia Federation and the annexation of Crimea. The choice of sequence and technique addressed my own thoughts and responses that arose from experiencing the locations. The final scene is a symbolic act that gives priority to the ongoing war and raises questions regarding the severity and impact of the conflict for the citizens of Ukraine. It was important to highlight the struggles of the country, that permeate the city on a personal and community level, again in an attempt to contribute “to the idea of giving voice to previously silenced groups through these more ethnographic forms of media production” (McDougall 2019, p.31).

Finally, again I have considered the importance of self-reflexivity throughout this study. I am grateful for this experience, and that I was able to travel to Kyiv and had time to edit and reflect on the processes and the approach of practice-based research. My intentions were to create a city symphony with Kyiv as the cultural site of interest, “to cross language, cultural, and other barriers and thus make bridges across difference” (Leavy 2015, p.299). A similar positive outcome was noted by the panel at the Imagine Europe conference (2017) in Roskilde, Copenhagen, regarding *Vision of Europe* (2017), “It was fantastic to see what you have made, and to recognize that in fact, Europe is all what you have shown. And I think that [your different works] in fact are symbolizing imaginations, which hold us together” (Bruun 2017). I understand criticisms can be aimed at my work, and likewise, many of the city symphonies which were made by explorers, “undeniably, an element of voyeurism and exoticism is at stake, making more explicit his position of the outsider” (Hielscher 2019, p.154). In defence of the filmmaker, the artist and of the avant-garde, a re-imagining is fuelled by the positive notion of beauty and connected human experience; another interpretation of the viewpoint of an outsider filmmaker being “his drive is first and foremost his unstoppable curiosity for a world unknown to him” (Hielscher 2019, p.153).

To conclude the analysis and evaluation I reflect on the methodology of the study, the connective model of filmmaking and hermeneutic interpretation leading to exegesis. Bate (2018, p.71) has traced the development of documentary in photography to Grierson’s film movement and notes that “documentary practice might involve a

number of different approaches, where truth is valued in terms of interpretation and representation, not as some abstract idea of absolute objectivity or philosophical truth". The interpretation of the research and films in no way offer a 'completeness' on Kyiv or Ukraine and more accurately explores universal human experiences of the city, ultimately what Ukraine is concerned with or cares about; "In Heideggerian terminology, it exposes the human being's circumspective concern and angst. In particular, this is exposed through the human being's future directionality or indeed their future aims, goals, desires, or ambitions" (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016, p.3). I argue in this chapter that, as a result of exploring the creativity and practice in this chosen subject area, my research also offers a contribution to aesthetic development and generic methodological innovation within the practice of documentary filmmaking. With the intention of contributing an original exegesis in this current study, or as MacDougall suggests new forms of ethnography:

"To describe the role of aesthetics properly (its phenomenological reality) we may need a "language" closer to the multidimensionality of the subject itself – that is a language operating in visual, aural, verbal, temporal and even (through synaesthetic association) tactile domains" (MacDougall 2000).

CHAPTER 4 – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary of findings and conclusion

To recap, I situated my research with literature from the main topic areas of interest which includes the early European avant-garde filmmakers, documentary filmmaking, ethnography, and practice-based research; not forgetting the important films that reflect the practical application of many of these concepts that form the foundations of this study. The study has explored the origins and characteristics of poetic documentary, not to simply duplicate and adopt these aesthetic choices, but to critically examine how they mediate a sense of place by means of its cinematic representations, leading to innovation and evolving into an original design approach. The central quality of my practice-based research rests on a combination of creative filmmaking, and thesis, leading to exegesis. Importantly, this research approach was very new to me and, evidently, to some of the academic community I engaged with during the study. The combined methodology of theory and practice became essential once I realised that these two distinctive disciplines developed in parallel to present a cohesive research journey of a conceptual filmmaker. This exegesis joins a visual culture that delivers research content and knowledge in an impactful and engaging way and has helped stimulate dialogue on the disciplines involved and explain the features of the research to a broad range of interested parties, including academics and non-academics.

A final consideration for this research study is a reflection on the aim of the research and an examination of how the films represent an experience of Kyiv and wider culture of Ukraine.

“How can poetic documentary create a representation of the city of Kyiv, Ukraine?”

There is much debate among researchers over the most rigorous methods for capturing a cultural experience of place, for example whether that be art, ethnographic writing, or visual anthropology. I agree with Pink’s (2006, p.51) assertion, “Film certainly can represent aspects of sensory experience visually through metaphors for that experience” and the argument that “aspects of sensory experience and sensory

qualities associated with them cannot be equally represented in words and especially not in scientific writing". The arguments emerging from these debates stood out for me predominantly because of my work as an experimental filmmaker, who has been encouraged to expand my practice within an academic environment. A debate also exists concerning the use of experimental approaches to new forms of reflexive and digital media, that my poetic documentaries as avant-garde experiments belong to, and how effective they are in ethnographic endeavours. One commentators' argument might be critical of experimental composition that creates an "immersive flood of sensory information" (Mees 2019, p.14) that is confusing and disorientating, yet, on the other hand agitates the audience to create "contemplative spaces regarding the subjects" (Mees 2019, p.15). Gadamer (1975) established the foundation for poetic inquiry in hermeneutic phenomenology as a way of understanding human experience. Gadamer (2004, p.113) states that the "truth of poetry" as a form of language presents a "nearness" to the world; a notion that I have attempted to contribute to through the present study of both poetic documentary and the city of Kyiv. Green et al. (2021) concludes, "poetry provides a powerful way to present deep, nuanced understanding, allowing space for play and ambiguity, revealing fresh and surprising 'ways in' to phenomena". During the many discussions with stakeholders during the duration of this study I also conclude, "What is certain is that a scholarship that foregrounds "revelation" and embodied, affective, and sensory experience over discourses of explanation and illustration is unconventional and challenging to traditional scholarship" (Mees 2019, p.14), a statement that reflects closely my experiences.

I argue that the benefits of poetic approaches to documentary outweigh the criticisms, as noted by Keller (2012, p.26) who champions Epstein's work and poetic filmmaking, "Cinema triggers a revolt against the dullness of the senses and the habits of the mind; it recognizes and generates ecstatic attention; and it allows a representation of the world that is true to the nature of the world". Epstein's filmmaking concepts seem ever more relevant to the study, appropriately defined by Wall-Romana (2013, p.165) as a film philosophy, "Rather, it opens up anew the broadest and first questions of philosophy: what are we, what do we know, what do we want?". Throughout this study, I have attempted to apply a poetic philosophy to documentary filmmaking and by creating film experiments, and ultimately a city symphony on Kyiv, have contributed generic and methodological innovation to this approach in filmmaking.

This dialogue between avant-garde film experimentation, and the practice of documentary filmmaking 'now' is vital to a filmmaker's understanding and has justified why practice-based research such as this can form a pedagogical impact. Hearing (2015, p.72) discusses the usefulness of the performative application of documentary film in scholarship and its position in representing reality, "The consequence is that the construction of knowledge through performative documentary film practice opens a space in which to ask questions rather than have them answered". Alongside creating a discourse about Ukraine and Europeanisms, this work joins a conversation which reappraises this area of filmmaking. The necessity to experiment within the genre of documentary was signposted early on in my research by Bill Nichols (2001a, p.167) who comments on the growth of the genre, "It moves forward in relation to all the work that has gone before" and that "Its history belongs to the future and to those efforts yet to come that will enlarge an existing tradition as they strive to effect the world we have yet to create".

The fieldwork for this research began in 2017 and it must be noted that the Ukraine-Russia war had been ongoing since 2014 in Crimea and the East of Ukraine. The war had not been a dominant theme or focus of the research study, but the research has generated recent reflections concerning the immediate priorities for Ukraine today. I submitted my work at the start of February 2022 and on the 24th of that month the full invasion of a sovereign state by the Russian Federation happened. My work was never meant to be politically motivated, but the changing events and narratives have now made a political element to my perspective inevitable. Pink (2007, p.51) discusses the moral and political dilemma in relation to her own work, "While carrying out this research I felt morally able to 'stand on the fence'. I did not commit myself to a moral judgement either way, and still maintain that I don't". This viewpoint appeals to my motivations as a filmmaker, and I have signposted this stance before in relation to the design and the interpretation of the films (see p.24). However, recent events have changed this, as I continue to reflect on the dimensions of representation in this study and realise that "plural moralities" (Pink 2007) are at play. Understanding these shifting perspectives has been a final stage of reflexivity. De Brigard (2003, p.38) also notes that "the retrospective significance of a film often differs from the prospective significance intended by its maker. Films can be put to more than one use".

The research on reflection has shifted and changed, today standing in solidarity against the conflict in Ukraine and attempting to give a voice to the people that are suffering. At this point I reflect on motivations and justifications for this research highlighted in the literature review, with again reference to the keynote speech 'Does Ukraine Have a History?' (Von Hagen 1995; Khromeychuk 2022). These academics identify the overlooking of one of the largest states in Europe, reflecting an uncomfortable unconscious bias that appears in academia, history, and cinema. This project is not examining such concerns directly, but the film outcomes have been consumed by these narratives and now offer a way into these debates. Perhaps political interpretations are now more relevant to the work, but my interpretation and representation in the films still stands, that of Ukraine as a peaceful sovereign nation state, not that of a geopolitical battleground, or place for fashionable victims.

In a similar vein to De Brigard, these changes in narrative and representation also seem influenced by what has been discussed as the natural and constant flow of "cultural material" (Hicks 2010; Ingold 2013). A question to ask at the end of this study, is, "what control does an artist have over the narrative of a documentary?" My final reflections and interpretations have been informed by these "movements" commonplace in studying place and culture, noted also by Cresswell (2008, p.137), "recent work on place has tended to emphasise the way places are not fixed, bounded and unchanging things but open and constructed by the people, ideas and things that pass in and out of them". For example, a narrative theme that the films explore, which will be difficult to acknowledge, is the notion of kinship between Ukrainians and Russians, and the influences of the Soviet era which were valued in the country. These promoted cultural co incentives, involving the disciplines of music, art, and film, and social institutions that bonded communities together, such as the Russian-Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

4.2 Limitations to the inquiry

Due to the limited scope of my research, a set of difficult relationships with which to engage concerns the wider audience. The films are still open to interpretation by an audience, and audience studies is a field of inquiry that this study has not focused on. As stated in the aim and objectives of the study, the research comes from the perspective of, and the creative process of the author, rather than audiences. I am not

naïve about the representations provided in my films, which could be described as partial, or contradictory, with one viewer seeing the city as an experience of capitalism and exploitation, rather than that of community and opportunity. Each view could be contested but I argue the poetic film is provocative and not prescriptive, attempting to create a dialogue and spark the debate. I choose to align myself with theorists such as Tuan (1979, p.148) who again discuss other forces that control meaning, “There is far more to experience than those elements we choose to attend to. In large measure, culture dictates the focus and range of our awareness. Languages differ in their capacity to articulate areas of experience”, and as noted in the literature review, the discipline of art is a supplementary form of knowledge “accessible to contemplation and thought”. The qualities that the films offer I would argue are similarly echoed by Ingold’s (2013, p.1) comment, “It is, in short, by watching, listening and feeling – by paying attention to what the world has to tell us – that we learn”. The wider focus of the study is about the aesthetic qualities of the filmmaking practice, yet it has been obvious that the multiple relational considerations of reception are equally as important. Gerard Genette states in ‘*La Relation Esthétique*’ (1999, pp.10-11) “It is not the object that makes the relationship aesthetic but the relationship that makes the object aesthetic”. I am aware many other scholars have connected the subject of the film audience experience to film technique, and this is a subject to continue to explore outside of the PhD programme.

The current project has resulted in a representation of Kyiv which can be challenged as limited and perhaps wrapped up in personal insecurities, but my work has been transparent. I have presented my findings as an outsider who has been welcomed by my extended family, citizens of Kyiv and a range of academic stakeholders, proving that these films are not a one-way communication but indeed create a dialogue. I have no misconception that, now this research reaches its conclusion, it offers no more than what the viewer wants to take from it. The films may present a fascination with poetics or aesthetics, but I argue that the power of the aesthetic is important in constructing a representation and triggering the conversation, “Aesthetics begins with reflection on them; only through them does a perspective open on what art is” (Adorno 2013, p.473). I attempted to engage on a personal level with the concepts connected to poetic documentary and made films with a deliberate effort to present a memorable image, as championed by a number of academics highlighted in this study, for example

Mitchell's assessment of aesthetics, "And like all provocative world pictures, it produces a vortex of displacements and reorientations, drawing the beholder into a vertiginous reassessment of just what this world is, or is becoming" (Mitchell 2015, p.107).

4.3 Intention to explore the work further

As a filmmaker a final personal reflection aimed at my work questions whether it is currently the best way to help the country? Art is perhaps an intervention, and my films show Kyiv, and Ukraine, is more than a territory involved in war, it existed as a peaceful joyous country before. Importantly now, my efforts will be involved in sharing my film, which I feel is now of utmost importance in humanising the conflict and sharing with the public the aspirations to return to a peaceful Ukraine, and Europe. Most recently my research was shared at the BAFTSS Conference 2023, Sustainable Futures: Ethics, Responsibility and Care in Film, Television, Screen Studies, and Practice, at the University of Lincoln, and gained an honourable mention in the awards. My next ambition will be to share and exhibit the films in the public domain in order to help in "Giving a voice to the silenced" (Roper 2021; Khromeychuk 2022).

The PhD has given me the opportunity to research, reflect and grow as a filmmaker and it has also given me confidence to join peer discussions and contribute to academic conferences in Europe, including Kyiv, Denmark, Malta, and the UK. I have contacted and contributed to many of the research bodies within this discipline including IAMCR – Imagine Europe (2017), DRHA – Creative Legacies (2018) and UCL UrbanLab – City, Essay, Film (2019) and shared my ongoing research which has resulted in important reflections on my own artistic practice. I hope that through my chosen language of experimental filmmaking I have created an exchange of ideas that results in an awareness of Kyiv and in some small way addresses the concerns noted about the overlooking of this city, nation, and community. The research also offers a contribution to the definitions of poetic documentary, however complex this is, and offers some technical and theoretical insights into the 'fuzzy' concept of a sub-genre. My research ends with a personal approach to filmmaking that has been inspired by documentary filmmakers from the 1920s, visual anthropologists, and the wider arts community, who state "there is a moral and ethical imperative for researchers to use available resources, including creating new and interdisciplinary approaches to

research, in order to serve the communities in which they are enmeshed” (Leavy 2015, p.22). This dialogue has resulted in an academic and personal engagement which I know is longer living than just through this PhD programme.

This research has given me the opportunity to be immersed in understanding the nature of practice-based research, as well as my personal filmmaking, and I have attempted to guide the scholar and filmmaker through this learning experience. I would like to think that this research is of use to filmmakers and students of film. Yet, by sharing my experiences and insight into the connection between practice and theory, I would hope it also promotes practice-based research as a viable option for scholars and artists too. In the recent conference Practice Research Assembly: It’s alive! The search for form (2021) supported by the Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities, University of Glasgow, the event showcased many different forms that practice-based research can evolve into including film, architecture, creative writing, design, performance, to name a few, and how they can complement traditional approaches to research. This was a very inspiring research event, and the work was eclectic. But despite the extremely wide range of artefacts shown, a consensus seemed to be that the impact and contributions that the research offered was very purposeful, and at times, the positive contributions unexpected. Murat Asker, a filmmaker and a Lecturer in Cinematic Arts at Ulster University, was asked to consider how filmmaking and the practice research exegesis may present new knowledge and live on outside of the schedule of a PhD programme. Asker (2021) stated, “the form of the practice can have new life and the film can become an installation, theatre, an online source and be taken on and used by other practitioners”. Just as published academic work can be shared and provide new knowledge, so can the practice elements as part of the exegesis, or the films individually contribute to the arts both inside, and outside of a PhD programme.

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Ukrainian Sheriffs, 2015. Film. Directed by Roman Bondarchuk. Ukraine.

Vision of Europe, 2017. Film. Directed by Mike Latto. UK.

Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom, 2015. Film. Directed by Evgeny Afineevsky. Ukraine.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Imagine Europe conference 2017



The Participatory Communication Research Section of the International Association of Media and Communication Research

Invites to

Imagine Europe

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS WORKSHOPS FILMS

Byens Hus | Roskilde | October 19

Time: Thursday, 19 October 2017, 9 AM – 5 PM
Location: Byens Hus, Stændertorvet 1, Roskilde, Denmark
Admission: Free entrance, coffee & snacks included

ABOUT THE SEMINAR
The Imagine Europe open seminar gathers participants interested in discussing and experimenting with participatory and creative methods, with the aim to articulate, explore, and create knowledge and perspectives on the contemporary, so-called European 'crisis'.
The one-day seminar will include a keynote address, paper presentations, workshops, film screenings and panel discussions to create a critical and reflective dialogue with the participants, imagining a road-map to the future of Europe.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

KEYNOTE	"Telling the Story Differently" by N. Carpentier
PAPERS AND PANEL	"Queering Imaginations" by S. Chacha "Images of the New Europe" by A. Forbes "The [In]Visible Migrant as Image-Maker" by M. Nilsson "Immigrants in the Sexual Revolution" A. Shield
CARD GAME WORKSHOP	"Playing for Integration: Diversity for neighbours" by A. Fox & L. Mark Rugholt
FORUM THEATRE	"Forum Play on Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges" with refugee performers, and paper by B. Rasmussen
FILMS WITH Q&A	"Click to Remain" by V. Kittitz & M. Wickire "Vision of Europe" by M. Letto "HotSpot" by T. Mastic "Ten Europe's" by D. Stankiewicz

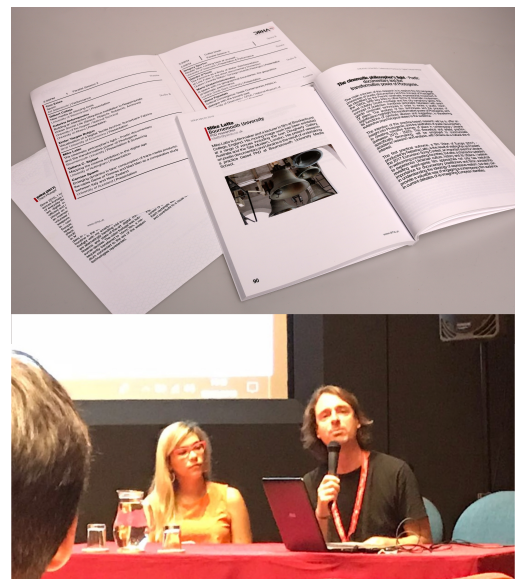
Free entrance | Registration required

To register and learn more, visit nicocarpentier.net/europe or email Jonas Agerbak at joagje@ruc.dk

Byens hus Roskilde | IAMCR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION RESEARCH SECTION



Appendix 2 – Creative Legacies conference 2018



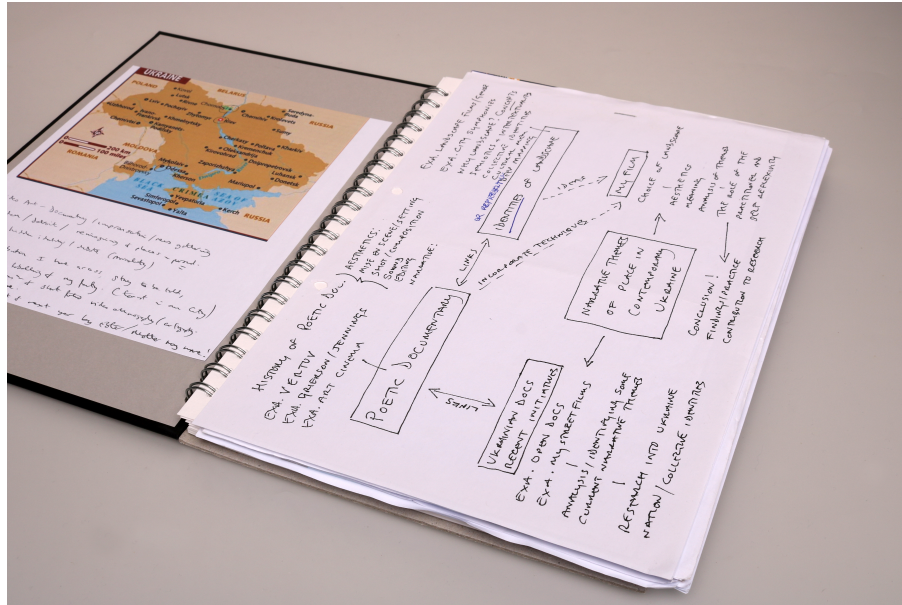
Appendix 3 – City, Essay, Film conference 2019



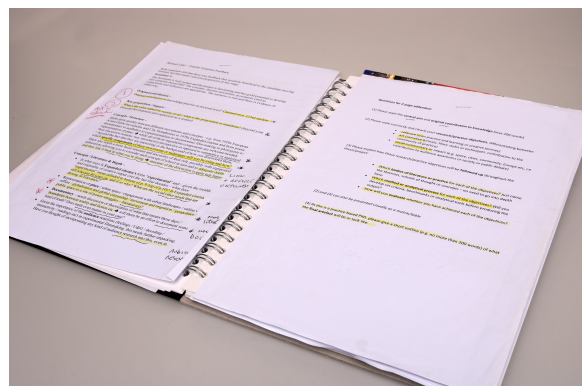
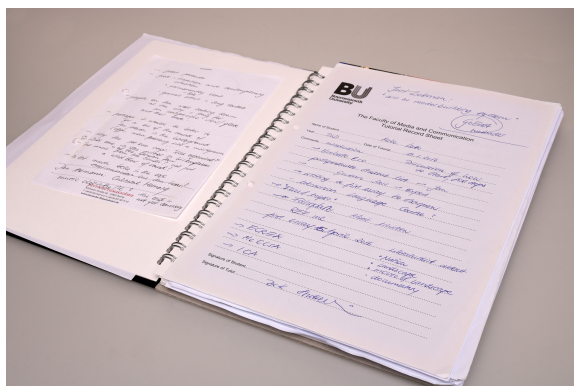
Appendix 4 – Poster Presentation BAFTSS conference, Sustainable Futures: Ethics, Responsibility and Care in Film, Television, Screen Studies, and Practice, 2023

The poster is titled 'KYIV A CITY SYMPHONY' and 'Practice-based research 2017-2022'. It features a background of a cityscape with yellow buildings and a blue sky. The poster is divided into four numbered sections (1, 2, 3, 4) on film strips, each with text and images. Section 1: 'This research is an examination of the definitions and approaches of poetic forms of documentary, the conventions to which emerged under the influence of various European film movements in the 1920s. Poetic documentary shares a common terrain with the modernist avant-garde, where film techniques explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions.' Section 2: 'Ethnography has been a helpful discipline in developing a methodology and to consider which methods were useful to the filmmaker. The motivations and practice of a documentary filmmaker are akin to the work of ethnographers who participate in the lives of others, observing and documenting people and events. This research touches upon the rich history of ethnographic cinema and the study of cultural identities.' Section 3: 'The notion of place provides a conceptual foundation for this research as the complexity of geographical representations within film are explored. Research into the discipline of humanistic geography has been essential for identifying the meanings attached to key locations, that give them value. These meanings are therefore complex relationships between ourselves, our environment, our physical and sensual experience of place.' Section 4: 'The aim of this practice-based research is to examine the filmmaking processes, and approaches of poetic documentary and explore the possibilities of creating a valid representation of the city of Kyiv, in contemporary Ukraine. I argue that the choice of a connective model of research, and by sharing my self-reflexive creative processes in conjunction with the analytical processes, contributes to new knowledge in this area of film studies.' The poster also includes the text 'Historical and theoretical concepts have been applied to produce new knowledge in the form of film experiments, the outcomes of which are two films: Vision of Europe (2017) Kyiv – City of Possibilities (2022). The films capture the beauty of an independent nation state, reflecting a time of peace and solidarity, and stand as a statement to return to these better times.' There is a QR code and the BU logo in the bottom right corner. The hashtag #STANDWITHUKRAINE is in the bottom left corner.

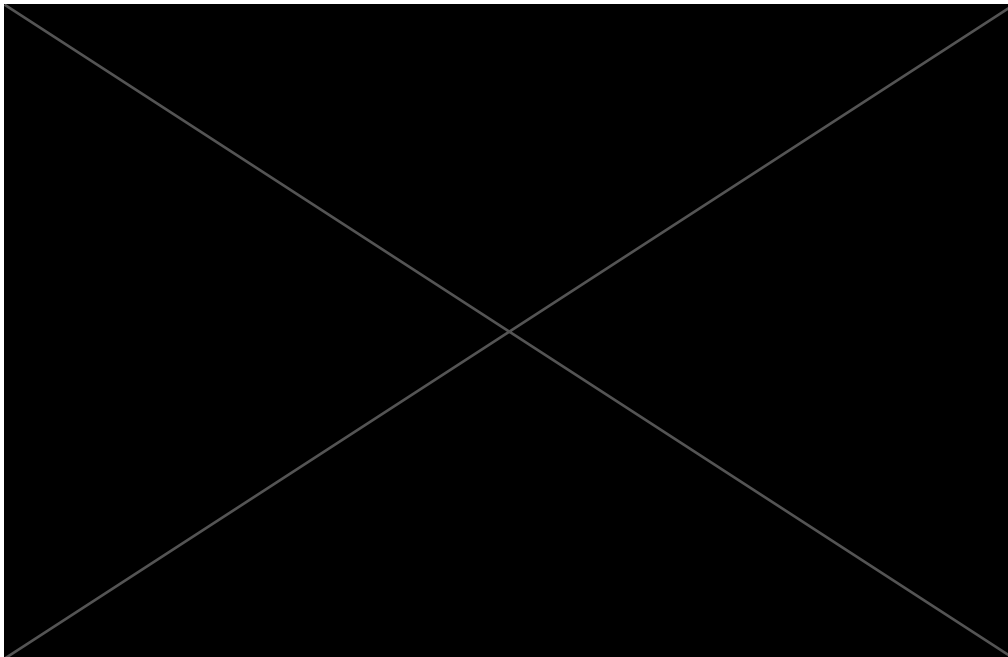
Appendix 5 – Research Journal including mind maps



Appendix 6 – Supervision notes and Transfer meeting feedback



Appendix 7 – Official Kyiv City Development Programmes



Appendix 8 – Photographic records during filming

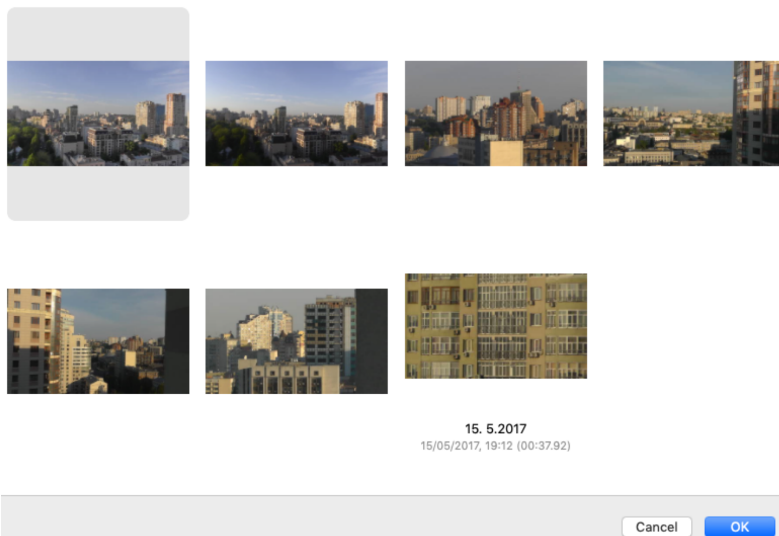


Appendix 9 – Journal and Eurovision event literature



Appendix 10 – Footage/file management and copying

FILE MANAGEMENT

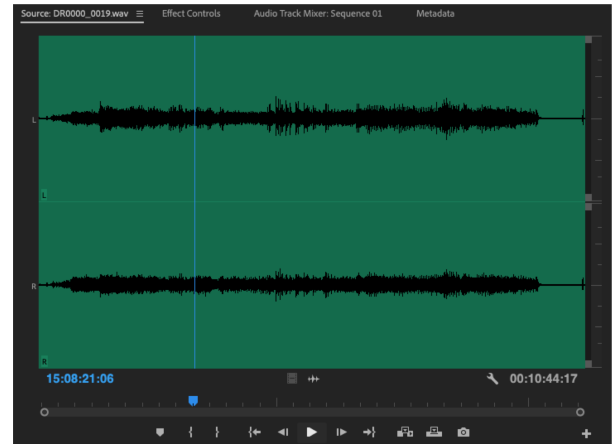


Appendix 11 – *Vision of Europe* production evidence

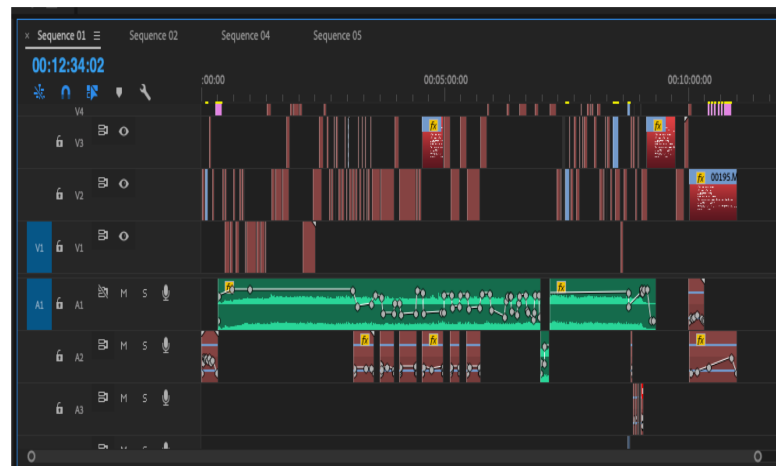
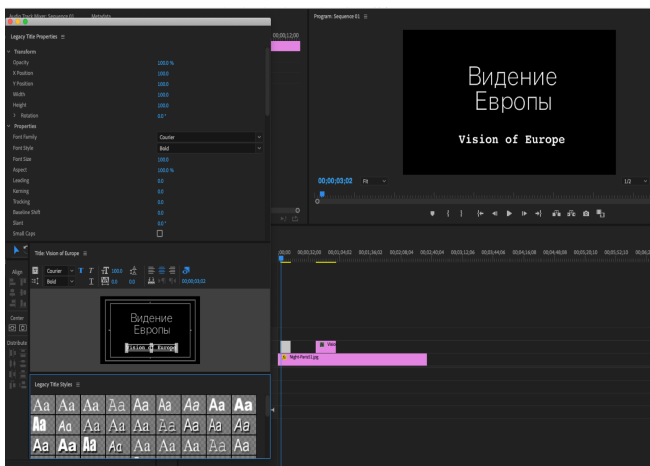
1ST COMPLETED FILM – VISION OF EUROPE 2017



SOUND MIXING – BELL SONG



EDITING AND SINGLE CHANNEL PRESENTATION

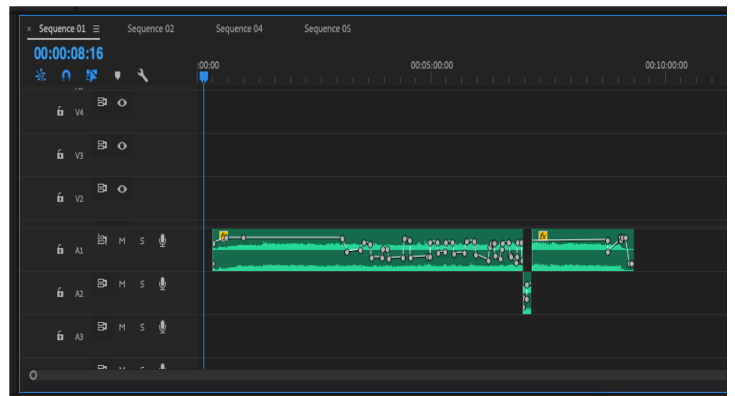
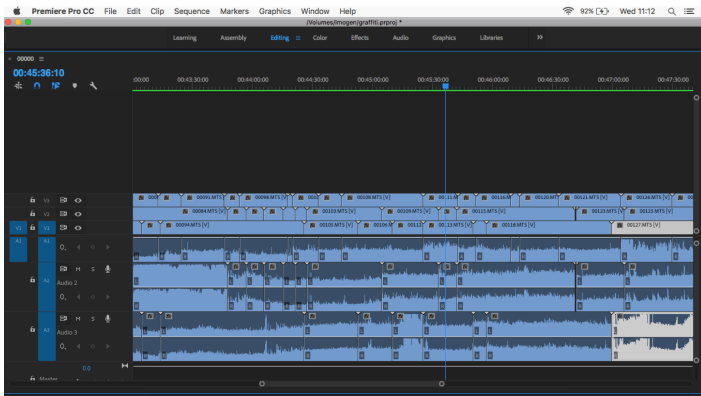


Appendix 12 – Kyiv – City of Possibilities production evidence

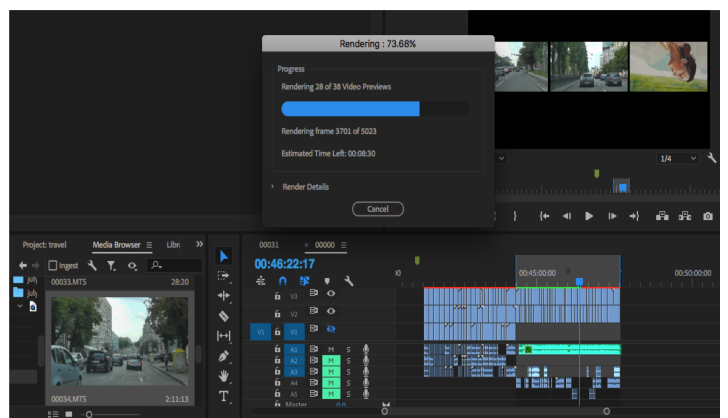
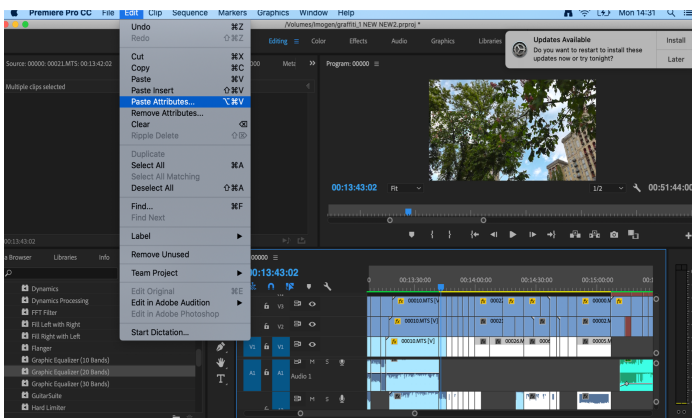
2ND COMPLETED AND FINAL FILM – KYIV – CITY OF POSSIBILITIES 2021



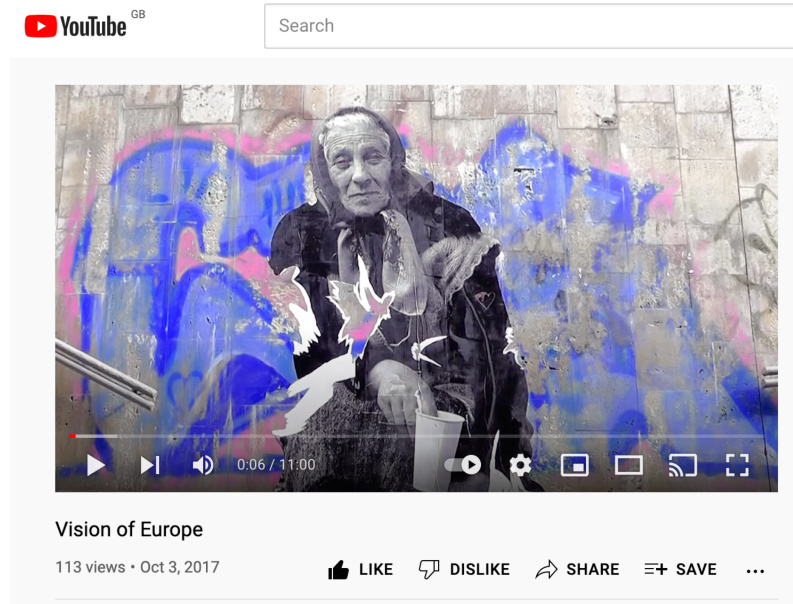
SOUND MIXING



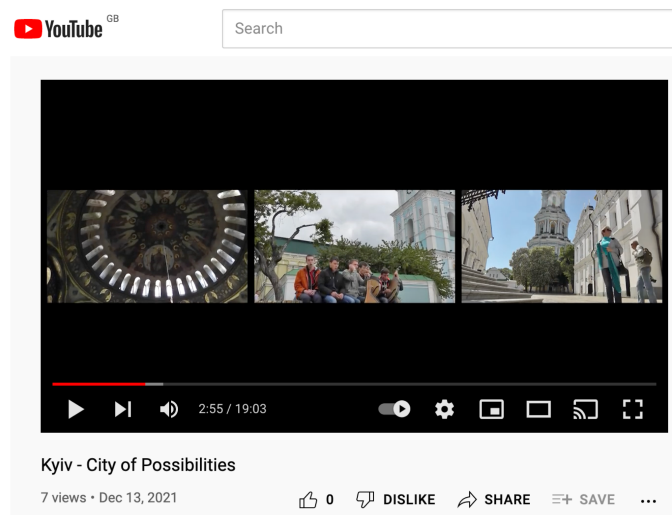
EDITING AND MULTI-CHANNEL VIEW



Appendix 13 – Links to online screenings of both films on YouTube

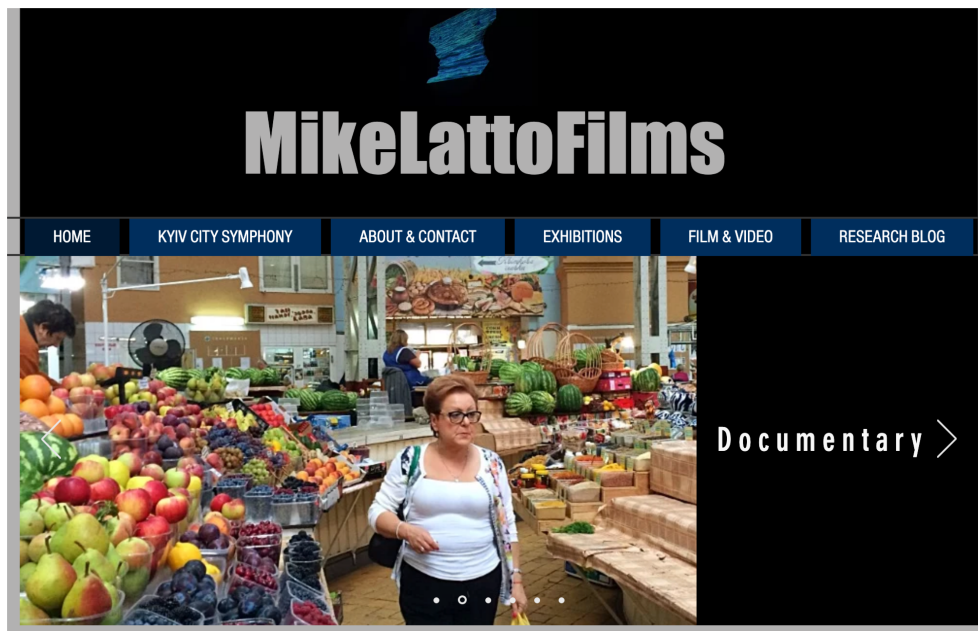


<https://youtu.be/TmbdlHYYOIY>



<https://youtu.be/tuNPEJSfqYk>

Appendix 14- Web journal/blog



<https://mikelatto.wixsite.com/mikelattofilms>

Appendix 15 – Ethics Panel contact and participant record sheets

Ethics Panel application and responses

FAO Sarah Bell

Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Panel on Wednesday 19 June 2019 – response from Mike Latto

NEXT STEPS and REQUIRED ACTION

I have followed the required actions to the best of my ability and thank the panel for their guidance and support.

I will return your ethics checklists to you online
 ([<https://ethics.bournemouth.ac.uk>]/[<https://ethics.bournemouth.ac.uk>])

- 1) Reply to this email and add comments next to each bullet point on what action has been taken to address each recommendation made by Panel. **Use a different colour so your comments stand out.**
- 2) Using **track changes**, please amend your documents and upload your revised documents to the checklist and resubmit. Please remember to **PROOF READ** all revised documents.

Once this is done, I will forward your email and revised documents onto the Deputy Chair for consideration and confirmation of the Panel's final decision.

Please note that data collection cannot commence until all the action points have been addressed and you have received formal notification that the Deputy Panel Chair has confirmed the REP's decision to approve your project.



Participant Agreement Form

Full title of project; Kyiv A City Symphony film

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Mike Latto, PhD Candidate, mlatto@yahoo.co.uk
mikelatto.wixsite.com/mikelattofilms

Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Kerstin Sutterheim, Kerstin Sutterheim@bournemouth.ac.uk

To be completed prior to data collection activity

Section A: Agreement to participate in the study

You should only agree to participate in the study if you **agree** with **all of the statements** in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (v1) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy).	
I have had an opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).	
I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being filmed during the project • being audio recorded during the project • I will feature in any film made as part of this research project and this may be broadcast publicly or shown to third parties 	
I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study.	
I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.	
I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	Initial box to agree

Version: [Latto v1](#)
 Ethics ID number: 25893
 Date: 23/7/2019

Version: [Latto v1](#)
 Ethics ID number: 25893
 Date: 23/7/2019

Section B: The following parts of the study are optional

You can **decide** about each of these activities separately. Even if you **do not agree** to any of these activities you can **still take part** in the study. If you do not wish to give permission for an activity, do not initial the box next to it.

	Initial boxes to agree
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs.	
My personal name will not be used in the research	
I agree for my photograph to be included in research outputs.	

I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS) _____ Date (dd/mm/yyyy) _____ Signature _____

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS) _____ Date (dd/mm/yyyy) _____ Signature _____

Appendix 16 – Exhibition design (mock up for future events)

