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Old Town Tales:

an exploration in film portraying the transition of place from community to commodity.

Justine Gordon-Smith - B027641

Transdisciplinary Film and PhD by Practice

The University of Edinburgh

2024
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Declaration

The following thesis has been composed by Justine Gordon-Smith and is the author's own work.

Signature JGS

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Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to Julie Logan, Simon Byrom and Peter Gordon-Smith, who so kindly allowed me to document their experiences and life in the Old Town of Edinburgh. This work also would not have been possible without the leadership of Dr Nichola Dobson, my primary supervisor, and Dr Daniel Swanton, my constant influence and guide. Gratitude is also due to Professor Noe Mendelle, who has guided me along this road, and Dr Jamie Chambers. I would also like to thank Kathy Smith, Victoria Buchanan, Dr Julie Ross, Liz Redpath, Professor Stephen Boyd, Professor Michelle Keown, Linda Grieve, Lynn Marshall, Alan Binnie, Ian Sutherland, Karin Bolton, Dr Benjamin Bateman, Clair Halliday, Dr Alistair Cole and Professor Nick Higgins. I am also indebted to Ian Ferguson at Delta Video, Graham Fitzpatrick and Screen Education, Sean Young, Carlos Rosales, Dr Donald Smith and Ruth Holmes, Rebecca Scarlett, Victor Spence, the Gold Brothers, the staff at Camera Obscura, Edinburgh City Council, Historic Environment Scotland, Nick Finnegan, Laurie Risk, Michelle Anderson and Lillias Thaim for access for filming, Councillors Ian Perry, Joanna Mowatt, Karen Doran and Claire Miller, Community Councillors John Thompson, Anja Amsil, Bill Cowan, Sam Piacintini, and so many other local residents such as Heather McNeehan. Sadly, both Tommy Gilzean and Mary Gordon have passed away; may they rest in peace. Thanks to DJ Johnson-Smith for his faith and kind encouraging support and my dear friend Simone Lahbib for hers. I would like to express my gratitude to my sisters Rachel and Storm, my brother David and my mother Sylvia, and my stepfather Harry. Lastly I am indebted to my partner Riley Stewart who has supported me every step of every way and who’s patience and own sacrifice enabled my research to continue through every low and high.
Dedication

I dedicate this research to my father and his memory; may he live on beyond our hearts and never be forgotten, because he has been the subject of a documentary. I also dedicate this work to my patient partner who has constantly helped me to stay focused on the future and not be subsumed by the overwhelming grief associated with the circumstances of my father’s death. It is through the love and compassion of our loved ones that we navigate adversity. I could not have asked for a more steadfast and loving partner, and I am indebted to him. I would lastly like to acknowledge all those who campaign for social justice, and democratic rights and to protect their communities. Historically without people who have the courage to campaign, there would be no rights and no commons to protect.
Old Town Tales is represented in the form of a documentary film and accompanying thesis. The film depicts the efforts of some of the residential community of the Old Town of Edinburgh to sustain a living community amidst the commodification of the Old Town. The Old Town becomes not a place to live but a tourist destination catering to transient peoples. The project is reflexively constructed and scrutinises the documentary form through the representation of experiences using different modes and strategies. The final film constructs a bricolage of gathered archival recordings meshed with bespoke recordings gathered over a decade. The scope of the recordings thus represents this transition over time, creating a film that makes new the notion of historic, filmic research of place and community.

The practice and theoretical approach demonstrate that the veracity of the documentary and indexical link does not exist despite the role of the filmmaker; rather, artists are creatively situated as storytellers, representing the world as they perceive and experience it in time. Filmmakers mediate the indexical link rather than diminish it. The research explores how social and economic changes have affected the use and function of the Old Town, specifically, as a place. Gentrification has been supplanted by transification: transient communities have now replaced residents, as capitalist accumulation generates more wealth from people passing through space than those residing in it.
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Abbreviations

SOOT – Save our Old Town
CEC – City of Edinburgh Council
SES – Screen Education Scotland
OTCC – Old Town Community Council
SG – Scottish Government
UKG – United Kingdom Government
OTT – Old Town Tales
OT – Old Town
JGS – Justine Gordon-Smith
WW1 - World War 1
WW2 - World War 2
## Illustrations & Stills

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OVERVIEW

*Old Town Tales* – takes the form of a subjective reflexive documentary portraying the changing topography of the Old Town of Edinburgh and documents the area’s gradual residential decline to make way for transient tourists and students. The film also represents both personal and social loss, reflecting the duration of the project and the events as they unfolded. Whilst this research considers one specific area of one city, the project has relevance for all urban dwellers. Yet its value stems from its focus on the particular, portraying how privileging universal and global interests limits the specific value of the Old Town as a place (Nash 2001: 232–233). It is recommended that readers of the thesis, review the thesis, then watch the film, and to interact with both components of the research. The film can be accessed on this link: https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/t/1_9y4cufc8
The reflexivity of the project stems, in part, from my situation as a researcher: I spent my formative years as a resident of the Old Town, and members of my family migrated back to live in the place that we viewed as home. The research also involves aspects of autoethnography in its portrayal of my father as a principal character. It seeks to discover why a place where I had spent my formative years was transformed from a residential community to an enclave for tourism and to show not only the distinct differences from the place I remembered, but how these had come about. My thesis offers some hypotheses as to why the Old Town has changed in the way it has. The nature of transdisciplinary work led to an exploration of diverging yet converging literatures, which are reassembled to reflect the complex and intersectional city explored in this thesis.

Site provides a short and selective history of the area of land known as the Old Town of Edinburgh. This introduction defines not just the geography of the Old Town and some of its social history, but the framework for the approach adopted by this research, which focuses more on the experiences of citizens and working-class communities than famous historical figures. I present data which defines the historical social hierarchy that is not just fundamentally a dominant aspect of Scottish culture, but which is manifest in the construction of space and place. Specifically explored via events depicted in the film about the Old Town area of Edinburgh, the nation's capital city.
In the Situation section, I locate myself as a researcher and explore my own experience of the Old Town, using themes of psychogeography and the flaneur to relay the duality of experiencing a remembered place that is now unrecognisable and alien, a place that has become a consumption space for transient peoples. I offer a description of my perspective and my relation to the geography of the research.

The methodology is divided into three sections. The introduction outlines the nature of the documentary project and offers an overview of the transdisciplinary documentary as practice-based research. Framework identifies the traditions and theoretical framework for practice-based research and offers not only a justification of the value of qualitative research but the imperative of creating research which situates itself within communities. It proceeds to explore the Approach adopted to show how the reflexivity of the project developed, alongside defining and discussing the role of the bricoleur and describing the process of bricolage and the scope of how this approach was applied.

The Framing section explores the documentary and ethnographic theories which informed my own practice. Mediation of the Index reasons that the situated nature of representation in time, space and perspective mediates the indexical link of the cultural product, and specifically films and documentaries, rather than detracting from it. As a filmmaker, I consider that the situated nature of all cultural products results in the producer(s) or creator(s) expressing their perception or interpretation of the historical world from the perspective of their own moment in history. Cultural producers convey their understanding of the historical past, or immediate past, which is subject to the
social conditions in which the work is created and those of its creator. I explore this by contrasting two different representations of ethnicity from differing perspectives and assert that the evolution of societies and the decline of explicit colonialism directly reflect the expanse between both producers and the films they created. Therefore, I argue that a greater consideration of the theoretical context of production rather than the semantics of indexicality would offer a more insightful reflection on films which are produced.

Modes or Means considers different theoretical perspectives on modes of production and explores the various forms of documentary production that informed and influenced Old Town Tales, a film which is a hybrid of autoethnographic, reflexive, observational, interactive – and to a limited extent – expository modes. I have also incorporated archival material which contributes to the creation of the documentary and creates a social history while capturing aspects of the gradual transition of place. I explore the notion of the term hybrid and discuss specific films which have either influenced this one, or which have aspects of the same sensibilities. The modes I have used reflect the stories being told and the eclectic nature of the locality. As a documentary maker, I believe the selection of modes used should always reflect the form and shape of the subject as much as they do my own sensibilities as a documentarian.

Boundaries explores some of the relevant theoretical literature framed around the ethics of representation within documentary films. Specifically in terms of the ethical
role played by documentaries and explores some of the challenges and difficulties that surround representation, participation and consent, and the impact of documentary representation on the individuals represented via documentary films. By considering the specific theorists and films which best exemplify these debates, I conclude that ethical considerations are fundamental to the production of documentary film and that an equality of representation is essential. I also discuss the difficulties around consent – whether public interest outweighs the interests of the participant – by comparing one film I admire with one that I found distressing and questionable. Ethical considerations are ultimately specific to each project and participant, and I am not entitled to impose my own judgements or practice on other filmmakers. Ethics cannot be fixed in formaldehyde, but ethical considerations are paramount given the evolution of time and social conditions.

Practice describes the process of creating the documentary and offers insight into some of the nuances of the creative process and the challenges faced during the process of production to which I responded by incorporating the strategies of a bricoleur. This section describes how I had constantly to adapt and change direction, incorporating setbacks or challenges into the work. It demonstrates the degree to which the participants shaped the project alongside my own prejudices and sympathies, and how practical, technical and safety issues sometimes determined how events were recorded. It also reveals the extent to which I continued to gather material as the story unfolded and how the story was shaped by what can be recorded rather than my intentions. I
explore interview techniques and demonstrate the degree to which the participant always determines how the interview is structured and sets the boundaries of engagement.

The Editing section explores the difficulties of managing such a large-scale project as an individual and describes the process of condensing the work into a distilled form and the different editing techniques employed to shape the reflexivity of the project, including the incorporation of video-layering, and using techniques of ghosting and palimpsest with opacities, and some of my reasoning behind this. The text considers the challenges faced when working with many different formats and why I chose in this context to blend them and combine different types of media. Equally, it explains how the structure of the stories and the timeframes had to be pieced together despite time differences.

Tapestry discusses the final filmic project for this project and explains my thesis and the conclusions drawn as a result of completing this research project.

It is apparent from this research that the traditional definition of gentrification, where a community of lower-income households is replaced by wealthier residents, is no longer relevant in the context of this urban transformation. Countries such as Scotland, and specifically the City of Edinburgh, where the industrial and productive economy has been decimated, have become subject to the forces of global capitalism. Greater exchange can be secured from transient communities, and this has led to the undermining of resident communities. When the capitalist model of creating surplus
value from production changes, capitalism resorts to exploiting land values as a means of exchange (Kuymulu 2014:34).

When the cost of land becomes so high that it consumes a higher proportion of income, this increases the demand for wages and limits an individual’s surplus expendable income. Higher wages and land costs inflate the potential cost of production, which makes creating products or producing too expensive compared to lower-wage economies (Harvey 2012:35). Consequently, in the absence of productive industries, Edinburgh has reinvented itself as a tourist destination.

Landlords and landowners can extract considerably higher rent from transient visitors and students than they can from working people. Even the higher-end rents earn less than holiday lets. The entire Old Town – its homes, its buildings, and its shops – now serves a transient consumption economy, where people spend money on temporary leisure and experience. The paradox in democratic terms is that there is a shrinking community to represent electorally. The increasing dominance of BIDS – Business Improvement Districts (Minton 2006:4) – and the growing scope of large corporations such as Virgin or Premier Inn, who take over land classed as common good in the Old Town, further push citizens out of the city centre.

The City of Edinburgh is designed spatially to revolve around its centre, as illustrated by its transport system which intersects with the centre (Richardson, Vipond and Furbey 1975:26). The Old Town was not only a residential area but also the creative hub of the
city, with a concentration of venues, theatres, and cinemas. Now that the centre of the city, or Old Town, caters to a transient population, (Judd 2013:28), how will this impact in the longer term on the city’s ability to prosper as a place of creativity and production when all its residents are spatially segregated on the periphery?

All cities have their own specificity and history and are formed, to some extent, as a product of the evolution of trade and commerce. The process of globalisation has led to the commodification and homogenisation of many historic cities all over the world including the Old Town of Edinburgh. The residential function of a home has evolved from servicing the needs of fixed communities to those of transient peoples. What was culturally specific about the Old Town, as a Scottish locality with a culture imbued with its own unique mutualism and stoicism, has been reimagined in a reconstructed

2.1 Still from Old Town Tales, image taken by an unknown filmmaker, Screen Education Scotland; undated, probably 1980s to 1990s
historicism. History has become not just a record, or a mode of social memory or historical rhetoric; it is also commodified to reconstruct destinations for tourism. This section offers a different selection of historical facts and perspectives to provide a context to the overarching narrative of this research which unfolds through these pages.

Control over land, even communal land, is not just fundamental to democratic rights: land ownership and control are manifest in the topography of the landscape of the city, which represents the hegemony and reflects the power of ownership. The processes of agrarian improvement and land clearances that began in England, which it is argued are the true origin of capitalism (Meiksins-Wood 2017:102–103) spread to Scotland after the 1707 Act of Union and propelled the growth of cities such as Edinburgh (Devine 2012:86). Edinburgh was always a place of trade and of commerce. The City of Edinburgh that we see today evolved over many centuries in a process typical of urbanisation, by amalgamating and incorporating the surrounding villages into one mass area defined as a city.

This research focuses on the site of the original medieval City of Edinburgh, which grew from a wooden barracks on the site of the Castle Rock (Richardson, Vibond and Furbey 1975:2). The ‘town and country fed each other’ and were linked by the ‘umbilical cord of trade and exchange’ (Lynch 1992:63). Edinburgh had an array of markets scattered
around the Royal Mile area (Coghill 2017:46) and became a market for both inland trade and imports and exports via the Port of Leith (Lynch 1992:174).

The original Old Town measured 900 by 500 metres from the castle to the Netherbow, to the West Port and the back of the Nor Loch. In 1751, there were 6,845 houses inside Edinburgh, some of vast size, occupied by many families, (Pittock 2019:41), 300 closes or wynds, and 2219 homes in the Canongate. The Old Town area essentially comprises a hill with a main thoroughfare – The Royal Mile – a street with a camber rising to a flat centre, and on two descending strands on these gradients sit closes – houses and squares on either side, packed in closely together. From its origins to the present day, even with the incorporation of the Canongate into the city, the Old Town area has been confined within these dimensions.

Despite the Old Town’s history as a location that predominantly housed the poorest citizens for over three centuries after the construction of the city’s New Town, which began in 1767 (Coghill 2014:143), there is comparatively scant historical restoration of working-class histories. Currently ‘Edinburgh’s contemporary unique selling point is a combination of historical fiction and spectacular geology: a fantasy city of classical and medieval inspiration’ (Scunthorne 2024). It is argued that the myth of Edinburgh as the city of ‘Enlightenment’ is part of the social construction of place (Kallin 2015: 104), typical of the selling of destinations as ‘reactualised’ and reified consumption places (Baudrillard 1988:99). The purpose of culture and leisure is not enlightenment or health but exchange.
The notion of Edinburgh as the city of Enlightenment or the Age of Improvement (Lynch 1992:345) conceals an alternative perspective from the claim, ‘I can stand at the cross of Edinburgh and can in a few minutes take fifty men of genius and learning by the other hand’ (Lynch 1992:352). In the Old Town, during the Enlightenment, the class system was visible vertically, with the poorest living in the attics and the cellars and the wealthier residents taking up whole floors of the middle of buildings (Pittock 2019:46). A house is defined as a ‘vertical being’ which rises upwards and is ‘differentiated by its verticality’. Its ‘verticality is ensured by the polarity of its cellar and attics’, opening up ‘two very different perspectives’ (Bachelard 1994:17). A diverse workforce lived and worked adjacent to the city’s major institutions (Pittock 2019:42). ‘By the standards of 1760, it was a remarkably democratic place’ (Herman 2002:162). The layout of the streets and closes meant that, whilst there were polarities of experience and perspective between the different classes, there was a commonality and exchange that arose naturally from the proximity of peoples living in such a densely packed locality, the layout which still exists today.

It was a place where all ideas were created equal. The class system was, however, an accepted part of Scottish life: the historian William Robertson (1721–1793) is said to have stated, ‘There can be no society where there is no subordination’ (Devine 2012:81). An expression of these class relationships is manifest in the funding for the council’s purchase of the land on which the New Town now sits, which was taken from the city’s Common Good Fund (Wightman 2010:20). Rather than use the fund to build
the equivalent of affordable homes for that era, the city used common assets to buy land to rehouse the elite. After the completion of the New Town, the poorest communities who lived in the original Old Town were rehoused, not in refurbished or rebuilt homes in the centre, but pushed out to the peripheries of the city. The historian Smout described Edinburgh as a ‘city of abnormal spatial segregation’ (Smout: 1977:55). McCrone and Elliot’s 1989 study of the City of Edinburgh’s historic property relations shows that between 1875 and 1975 the city council and the corporation’s elected councillors were invariably landowners making decisions in their own vested interests. Although representation became more diversified during the nineteenth century as the Labour Party grew, property owners tended to sit on the committees related to land, such as housing and planning (McCrone and Elliot 1989: 75–98). It was felt that since they were the property owners who paid rates to the city, they should decide how the money was spent (Ibid: 75–76).

The Edinburgh in which I grew up maintained these class divisions but, over the course of the preceding centuries, rather than living within the same district, social divisions became represented more horizontally. The Centre, and specifically the Old Town, remained a place of conversion and collision between the classes because the city and the transport system had been built around this centre (Richardson, Vipond and Furbey 1975:26), which enabled the people of the city to converge on it, allowing the continued fusion of the social classes in the bars, clubs and places where groups congregated.
‘Civic Edinburgh has an amnesia problem’ (Johnston-Smith 2019:4) not only about the twentieth-century city centre clearances his research explored, but in a lack of recognition of the history of its working-class citizens and, with it, a lack of a coherent nuanced understanding of the past and present, which this research seeks to mitigate. By documenting the experience of residents in this time and producing an alternative narrative. Hobsbawm stated that, ‘it (history) is for the people who throughout history, have entered neighbourhoods as individuals only in the records of their births, marriages, and deaths. Any society worth living in is one designed for them’ (1997:12). Cities were traditionally structured as productive places to generate capital but have now been subverted to become extractive places, associated with economies based on mass tourism and consumption. Edinburgh has become rebranded as a tourist destination and reimagined using a selectively constructed history, manifest in ‘an effort artificially to restore a ‘truth’ or a ‘totality’ (Baudrillard 1988:149).

In the context of the present day, it is staggering to consider that ‘some estimates suggest that in the 1500s fifty percent of the land mass of Scotland was classed as common good land’ (Devine 2012: 136). It is not the role of this thesis to document the histories of over five hundred years that have changed Scotland from a country where half the total land mass was classed as shared by local communities, to the present where what we have left of the commons – parks, democratic spaces, buildings used by and for the community – have been and continue to be gradually eroded.
‘Some hae meat an canna eat,

And some wad eat that want it;

But we hae meat, and we can eat,

And sae the Lord be thankit.’

Attributed to Robert Burns at a dinner with the Earl of Selkirk in 1794\(^1\)

---

I forget exactly when it was in the 1990s, but I remember that my grandmother sent me a tea towel with the Selkirk Grace printed on it, to remind me of home. Years later I recall returning to Edinburgh after more than two decades’ absence, to visit my oldest friend, who still lived then in the same house as she had during our shared childhood, at Chessels Court, situated at the top of the Canongate. It was no longer home: the fish shop nearby had gone, replaced by a clothing boutique. The only remnants of the fishmonger were old fish crates used for its display. No appetising fish glinted at me through the glass; instead, the empty eyelets of a pair of designer trainers I could neither afford, nor needed stared back at me.

As children, we would walk up the Canongate every Saturday, collect our friend and then amble our way from Chessels Court, up St Mary’s Street, to the swimming pool in Infirmary Street. The swimming pool was called the Infirmary Baths because the original Edinburgh Infirmary Hospital had once been situated at the foot of the road. While there was a swimming pool, local people would go to wash in the bathing cubicles, due to the lack of bathing facilities inside the local houses. To get to the baths, you would have to cross the Cowgate and climb High School Yards steps, small feet stepping over lost souls en route. We thought nothing of it, the community ethos was that every Jock, Tam or Jimmy that we would disturb was someone’s father, son, brother or uncle who was just given to the drink. Hostels for those who had fallen on bad times were threaded through the Canongate, Cowgate and Grassmarket. Next to

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2 Stories of going to the baths in Infirmary Street are also relayed in Screen Education’s short film Dumbie Dykes – a community worth preserving.
the baths was our primary school. We chanted the Lord’s Prayer at every morning assembly and were often called to sing hymns. Every autumn we would hold a Harvest Festival, when everyone would bring in supplies of food to share within the community, to make sure that those who were hungry could eat. To go hungry was not uncommon. I recall as a child staring with longing at the delicious food shops on the way to school. I remember the community of people, the places to go as a child, a place where there was art and music and a sense of culture and of belonging. I remember a feeling that this long street, with its closes and wynds was home. Today the High School Yards steps are locked, as they attract what is considered antisocial behaviour. The Infirmary Baths have been converted into a designer weaving mill, teaching centre and minimalist arts café, with corresponding plates of tray bakes, a cappuccino maker and an art shop with exorbitantly priced cards and books.

What seems to remain of that ethos can be found in reproductions of the Selkirk Grace printed on tea towels made in China and sold in the new shops known locally as Tartan Tat which, along with cafés and restaurants, have replaced what were local shops. The smells of hops from the breweries which used to be situated in the Canongate and smoke from burning coal have been replaced by the odours of consumption and abundant delicacies that waft from each eatery if you have the money to pay for it. There is no trace now of the soup kitchens of my childhood, where you could go for free if you were hungry.
My situation as a researcher was deracinated: I had spent my formative years as a resident of the Old Town and was autochthonous, but I had lived elsewhere – in different places – for half my adult life. I was connected by childhood memories, my schooling and family ties to the Old Town. Yet, as we stand in each moment, our situation is interstitial: we are not only composites of different families and cultures but of our experience of places (Hobsbawm 1997:1). I was both an insider and outsider; I was ‘native’ to this place, yet its strangeness rendered it exotic (Benjamin 1999:262).

With a sense of the past, ‘to be a member of a community is to situate oneself with regard to one’s (its) past’ (Hobsbawn, 1997:13). In my own past I had left Scotland, and my career working in Scottish theatre production, to pursue a degree in production design in London. Believing there were fewer opportunities at home, I became part of the Scottish diaspora. As Massey identified, there is a weave of multiple allegiances that defies an either/or characterisation and which recalls that complex and intersecting notion of multiculturalism, (Massey 2005:186). The notion of belonging is not defined by a single factor, place of birth or migration, but by multiple affiliations and influences.

One definition of my role which I explored, in order to situate myself, was that of the psychogeographer: psychogeography is the study of the ‘precise laws and special effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions of behaviours of individuals’ (Debord 1955:5, in Coverley 2018:14). My purpose was, however, not simply to be a ‘native, journeying into the past’, for I had only my inherent values, childhood memories and a few family photographs as evidence of the culture of
my upbringing. Rather, the past was a starting point because it was the process and spectacle of change that I sought (Benjamin 1999:262–3). The Old Town appeared superficially the same but simultaneously alien. My research was not sensory, nor descriptively situated, (Benjamin 1999:232–236). There may be elements of psychogeography in that, as the maker of the film, the work itself represents my activities and selections, but also my research shares the experiences of others that I captured, creating a record not just of my own life and experiences but those of the film’s protagonists. I was not creating an autobiography but exploring a place that had been formative in my life through the ‘problematic’ lens of an ‘integrated embodied subjectivity’ (Lebow 2012:5). The collation of personal material with observed and reactively captured documentary material, therefore, did not just constitute psychogeography but morphed into the construction of bricolage (Levi Strauss 1966:21). As Lebow identified, ‘a first-person film is not always explicitly about the self or autobiographical’ (Lebow 2012:2). The film is not about me; it is about how situating oneself in a place that pertains to the self effectively shows how the place has evolved, from the position of a subjective and personal perspective and a diverse range of perspectives (Daniels 2019:65).

I determined that the project should acknowledge my relationship with the Old Town. This led to the selection of my father as my first protagonist. I had no role in changing the Old Town myself; I was a child who watched my parents seek to affect their
environment. I wanted to show how the Old Town had changed, but I had to find a vehicle that acknowledged my subjective vantage.

While I chose to select my father as one of the principal characters in the film, as a narrative device to situate myself overtly as being from that community, I was, in truth, from a different time zone: neither flaneur (Benjamin, 2002), flaneuse (Solnit 2014) nor time traveller (Wells 1895). I was not journeying through the city, nor simply transporting myself or my father to excavate the past; rather I was situating the film and my father in the present to mediate the relationship between the past and the present, in part to remind my father that his own past bore scant relation to his present. I aimed to hold onto a projection of a more empowered past as a means to provide more clarity to the present. Benjamin notes that descriptions of cities ‘written by natives are in the minority’, (Benjamin 2002:262) and calls for accounts of ‘other deeper motives of a person who journeys into the past’ rather than discoveries of the ‘exotic’ (Ibid:262).
Benjamin describes the city as not just ‘flights of steps’, ‘temples’ or ‘enclosed squares’ but ‘a landscape made of living people’ and ‘split into dialectical poles’: a ‘landscape that opens up’ and ‘a parlour that encloses’ (Ibid:263). The implication is that the landscape of the city represents a home or dwelling. The Old Town was perceived as our home but, in the present day, it became for myself and my family an alien place, stripped of people and familiarity: all I could see were people moving through space, stopping to capture the picturesque. Perhaps I could be accused of seeking to cling to my childhood, of fleeting or illusionary memories, or a past that was no longer contingent on the realities of the present. I could only question why anyone would wish to visit a place stripped of the specificity of the culture of our collective past. ‘Inhabited space transcends geometric space’ (Bachelard 1994:47), inferring that what creates a home, or a place is more than the buildings or the people passing through them but a sense of locality or oeuvre or identity.

Whilst those buildings were still standing, the Old Town was no longer an inhabited area; it had slowly been hollowed out and lost its residents. To my own eyes, it had become a non-place, not just a place of circulation, consumption, and communication (Auge 1995:8). It was reminiscent of how Las Ramblas in Barcelona, or the Bridge of Sighs in Venice had become in recent years: the ethos of culture has been stripped from these city centres which are following the same trajectory. The perspective of the

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3 I visited Venice in 1991 and again in 2010, and the exodus of residents left only the buildings to see.
political hegemony was that this ethos was desirable.⁴ Indeed, I heard Councillor McVey, who had been the leader of the council, state at a planning hearing that he wanted the Royal Mile to become the Scottish equivalent of Las Ramblas.⁵ I questioned then why the Royal Mile and the Old Town could not just be allowed to retain their own unique cultural specificity as a destination.

It was no longer the Edinburgh I had known, which – while never a utopia – was not dystopian either. Rather, as a place, it was distinctly culturally specific. The Old Town was a place where people from all over the city came to congregate, to socialise and be entertained, to protest and to belong and be at home. Auge observed that Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, has been replaced by Hermes, the god of commerce and tricksters (Auge 1995:8). This seems apt for a place that no longer smells of hops and home, but of a range of global cuisines, available only to those tourists and wealthy students who can afford the prices. While the tartanry that pervaded the appropriated

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⁵ I was struck by this statement, which fails to consider how the people of Barcelona viewed the changes to Las Ramblas: https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/oct/20/la-rambla-transform-barcelona-tourist-rat-run-into-a-cultural-hub
shops was made somewhere other than Scotland, the products presented a mirage of
Scottish culture, reminiscent of Calvino’s description of the city of Tunde, a place that
appears no different from the place the traveller had departed from. In the
representation of Tunde, globalisation had eroded what made each place-specific
(Calvino 1974:128). The culture of collective recognition of want and gratitude for the
basic amenities of life had been commodified. The community now had to directly pay
for goods and services, (Hermann 202:63) and the culture of the past had vanished, to
be replaced by a transient culture.

Old Town Tales is a portrait of a formative place at a time of transition and of my father;
both were and remain important to me (Lebow 2012: 1). My father was not just partly
responsible for my existence, he also played a significant role in forming my values and
outlook. OTT is, however, a hybrid form in that the film binds the personal together with
portraits of others, people who were engaged in seeking to influence the way the city
evolved in the present. These tales are merged with representations of protestors,
politicians, and tourists, engaged in different activities. The film includes observational
material recorded by me, blended with media created by other filmmakers or individuals
at different times. OTT also mixes different formats of video and film, captured using
different techniques by me, but then melded again with still photography, both amateur
and professional (Daniels 2019:2).

The work is not just reflexive in the sense of turning back on oneself; the city was
refracted and perceived through different times and perspectives. I have also
experimented with a gathered diversity of media and have explored the inference of opacities, and redirected the focus of moving montage and layering and different effects to reflect not just a place that has been shaped through time by different communities and cultures, but also to reflect on how we experience the world today. In our lives we constantly engage with and mediate different realities, from virtual to digital, moving images to print and the experiences we have in our homes and streets and the places we visit. Whilst the notion of the documentary is that it is made from evidentiary material and claims to represent the truth (Daniels 2019:2), how we perceive and represent truth is mediated through subjectivity (Haraway 1991:184). Whilst OTT is constructed using diverse media and from diverse perspectives, it is I who has assembled it and decided what material to use and determined its relational historicity due to my own relationship with place, (Daniels 2019: 82).
Methodology

The purpose of this text is to describe the broader predominant theoretical approaches adopted in this research project, and outline some of the ideas arising from the research and identify their practical application to the methodology of this work. The transdisciplinary nature of this research determined that the making of the film was informed by and interspersed with diverse theoretical disciplines which, in turn, influenced and transformed the practice (Smith and Dean 2014:21). The project required me to gather existing quantitative data to support aspects of the qualitative research. Much of the focus for this came from the community and the references or knowledge that they relayed through the lens of the camera and outside the camera’s frame. Reflecting Cahal’s observations, I wished to create an academic research project
that ‘challenges dominant narratives’ in the form of a film which makes the project accessible to different audiences and explores a methodology while also providing an output (Cahal 2023:2).

This results in a work of art that is layered, and which weaves and meshes different research methods, strands and threads to create a work that could be defined as bricolage (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:437) except that ‘representation documentary is additionally troubled because, unlike art, it remains situated within the world’ (Nash 2011:237). Whilst some documentary films can be defined as works of art, a constructed montage of shots juxtaposed into one coherent form (Chanan 2007:47), the term ‘documentary’ or, as one broadcaster terms it, ‘Real Life’, 7 often represents an engagement with an unfolding world that must be considered, navigated and responded to. It is also troubled because, in representing real people and events, it is not merely the production of an art image, structure or object because those real people and events must be represented ethically.

Documentaries have implications for the people who are documented. Offering alternative narratives can be seen as challenging or problematic either because people have different perspectives or because the social context may have specific challenges. The process has never been linear, or even systematic, but, rather,

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7 Scottish Television – part of the Independent Television Network
investigative, responsive, adaptive, creative, inductive, sometimes random, arbitrarily organised around the practice, and informed by research (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:418; Haseman and Mafe in Smith and Dean 2014:223). ‘The field situation is a dialogue, where we are talking to people not studying sources’ (Portelli 1991:X) and informed by the unfolding history we gather on tapes. A researcher seeking to capture real events and people must accept that they have no control over the schedules of institutions or individuals; to succeed, they must be adaptable and responsive to the possibilities of the context within which they are functioning (Kerrigan and Macintyre in Daniels 2019:57). To create such a project from a personal and subjective perspective ‘leaves behind’ the documentary’s claim to ‘capture reality’, although it is argued that it was already left behind ‘many decades’ ago (Cahal 2023:4).

When creating a documentary in the framework of an academic research project, the filmmaker is working largely as an outsider, even though, in this context, the research itself, my situation and my approach derived from my association with the locality. Daniels defined the scope of Independence as being apart from the main practices of filmmaking and creating a film as an academic research project is outside mainstream practice (Daniels 2019: 34). In my approach to this project and in considering theories about documentaries or autoethnographic academic research projects (Ibid: 66), no matter how much I planned a structure or how to execute my ideas in advance, once production began the process itself, the subject or subjects, or the terrain of the location ultimately shaped the form of this project. The participatory nature of the
project derived from my relationship with my subjects on an individual basis, rather than through the university. There is also a view that ‘capitalist systems are founded on a hierarchical system’ (Cahal 2023:10). Some of my subjects had had negative experiences with other academics previously or had concerns about the commercialisation of the education system (Ibid: 11). Therefore, my personal integrity and the community’s trust in me as an individual played a large part not just in my own work as a documentarian but in the access to archives and personal collections, I was able to obtain.

As a filmmaker, I maintain that, when making films, it is not what is in our head or what we plan that is important (although our head influences what we do and our choices); it is ultimately what we record that counts. What we record is, in turn, determined by our subjects, how we perceive them and how they perceive us as much as it is by us as filmmakers. In other contexts, the commissioner or funder may also influence these choices. As individuals, how we perceive is often based on the literatures or approaches that we are, as researchers, exploring or challenged by. A film or project is also limited and shaped by who is willing to engage with it, and who wishes to be excluded (Ibid: 18). Although an idea or theory may appear reasonable on paper, my own practice and practical application demonstrated that the process determines the end (Candy 2006 in Smith and Dean 2014:5). Stylistically, whilst that freedom results in and requires experimentation – and thus, inevitably, mistakes or failure (Daniels 2019: 154) – it is this process of navigating and constantly renegotiating reality that leads to
innovation and creative problem solving (Daniels 2019:160). Stylistically, my approach was to capture what was unfolding: while I interacted with the subjects and engaged with the locality, I was always documenting what occurred, which was far more interesting and engaging than anything I could ever have imagined or constructed myself. The moment of recording and noticing what is unfolding in front of me, framing it, capturing it, can be thrilling and highly stimulating. At that moment I am editing in my head as I shoot.

Although documentary-making as a research process is also a participatory process, informed by the subjects of the research and the place they occupy, the finished documentary or research cannot make any claim to objectively represent reality. Rather, the finished film can only offer a subjective representation based on the process and the people involved in creating it at a specific time and place. The product itself is not isolated from the time in which it is created or the person who creates it in space and time. ‘Place is a space where meaning has been ascribed’ (Daniels 2019: 82). Yet the meaning ascribed or the ‘identity of place is also often contested and constructed where power is situated’ (Massey 2005:148). The value of creating projects which are subjectively shaped histories of places is that such endeavours demonstrate a ‘view of place at a given moment in time’, that ‘will be a particular articulation of social relations’ (Daniels 2019:84). Documentaries or research that capture and provide an alternative representation of place and peoples broaden our understanding of a place at a specific juncture in time.
The indexical link is the representation of place in time and the researcher’s ability to show or represent that culture: to be situated in that moment and to show how a person living at that time understood what it is they represented. An important aspect of this research was that whilst the research gathered evidence in the present, it was my own culturally situated understanding and memory of the past that enabled me not only to understand the evolution of the locality, but to represent my own alienation from the present that I was showing and the struggle experienced by some of the protagonists in attempting to preserve the integrity of their own locality.

**Framework**

Reflexive research as creative practice is an established methodology. The researcher is ultimately subjective, acknowledges their specific background, and is aware of its influence when gathering, constructing and interpreting research materials and data in the course of their research (Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Ruby 1992). Indigenous filmmaking or research into one’s own community has ‘created a new corpus of visual representations’, created ‘independently’ (Lutkehaus and Cool in Gains and Renov 1999:126). The development of what Renov terms domestic ethnographies enables the makers of documentaries and other genres of moving images to represent autochthonous subjects and to represent more personal relationships and characters (Renov in Gaines and Renov 199:140). Proponents of qualitative research suggest that the creation of a cultural product as a form of research has long-established traditions.
Erikson cites operas such as *The Marriage of Figaro* – a work said to be based on aspects of Beaumarchais’ own life – or Grimm’s collection of German fables as early examples of social physics (Erikson in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:89). Artists and scientists who engage in research as an activity (as do many other professionals) all exist in specific contexts and times and respond to the cultural stimuli and debates of their own age (Sullivan in Smith and Dean 2018: 41–42). What distinguishes the process of research is that this is also an integral part of the construction and form of the completed work, as demonstrated in my documentary archive and textual product (Biggs in Smith and Dean 2014:67–69). However, what is produced is ‘historically situated’, rather than ‘abstract knowledge’ but the process perhaps ‘reflects the continued tensions between the aims of practice and the aims of theory’ (Daniels 2019:156) as well as the stimuli of the process.

To understand and explain why the Old Town of my childhood has become transformed from a largely residential place to one dominated by transient communities could not be explained by making a stand-alone film. To explore what has occurred and consider its implications, other forms of research and detailed study were required to support the documentary research. I wanted to hear and share the voices of the community, represent their experience and portray that change to audiences (Brown and Sorensen in Smith and Dean 2014:164). It was also a priority that, rather than setting structured research questions or working to defined parameters, I allowed the community to lead and set the agenda, (Cahal 2023: 19). This approach, whilst perhaps less defined or
manageable, was fundamental to treating each participant equitably – and thus fundamental to documentary practice, where the maker captures what is found, rather than imposing their own view or hierarchy on the subject (Ibid: 31). If there is any aspect of the work that gives it an indexical quality, it is the dynamic of creating a context where the participants can be self-determining or share power (Davies 2006:233 in Cahal 2023: 37) as part of the process of capturing and gathering photographic or audio representation.

My own role in the film emerged as the process of creating the film evolved. I did not set out to situate myself within the film and the stylistic choices I made therefore excluded my role initially. However, the process of revelation became both a narrative device and a means of portraying the degree of reflexivity in the project and my own emotional connection to the OT. It enabled me to portray how what is seen on screen is always constructed and intentional. The way we film or document is as significant in editorial terms as the editing or construction stages. My research, based on literature, informed my interpretation of events as they unfolded; without that textual research into the theory of documentary film, I would have made a very different film.

Textual research led or informed the practice and the decisions and choices made in filming and editing, and the two activities of textual and practice-based research combined in an interactive process. What I filmed and edited led me to textual research,
or to explore archives. I also studied reports, legislation, news articles and statistical data and benefitted from the industry of other researchers. The knowledge I gained from practice, in response to stimuli, then informed how I interpreted or applied theories or data.

The initial aims of the project were not only to create an audio-visual record of the process of transition for the Old Town of Edinburgh, using the medium of documentary film, but to condense the research conducted into this supporting paper, which references quantitative research, qualitative research, descriptions of practice and explanations of this change. My hope is that both the film and the textual product enable civic leaders, politicians, officials, residents and audiences to consider not just the process of transforming the city centre population from residential to transitory, but the impact and potential consequences for the City of Edinburgh, cities in general and the democratic ideal (Mitchell 2003: 130). The amalgamation of captured and archival material into a single cohesive representation of one finite place offers a collective ‘public acknowledgment and recognition’ that would not have occurred had I not created this work with the potential for screenings and discussion (Sandercock and Attili 2014:26).

The United Kingdom is organised around a system in which each area is represented by elected representatives at local and national levels. If the occupiers of dwellings are
transient rather than residential, what does this imply from a representational perspective? Do the political processes work in this context? The changes to the Old Town have been and continue to be controversial, and are well documented in print, photography, civic forums, and other academic studies. To date, no situated reflexive and detailed study of documentary film has been conducted that specifically features an accumulated residential perspective, representing the residents’ experience over a prolonged historical or contemporary timescale, and made by someone situated within that community of residents. This study also aims to offer some formal explanation of this phenomenon. Most readers and audiences will appreciate that the issues portrayed in this film and paper are not unique to the City of Edinburgh. The transformation of cities since the 1980s, with tourism as a primary income generator, is an international phenomenon and one that has been widely researched.

4.2 Post-it Note Map, Old Town Tales, Timeline of whole film. Photograph JGS
Qualitative research is broadly defined as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, to interpret what is found through a series of representations that make the world observed more visible (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:42). This approach can also be viewed as post-positivist and constructivist. In practice-based research, the creation of an artistic product or artefact has the potential to generate new knowledge or experience (Smith and Dean: 2014:4) and can be transformative in terms of creating and propagating new knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:42).

The definition of what knowledge is – whether it is generalised, restricted to numbers or verbally based – is not fixed. Questions as to what other forms of communication can generate new knowledge must include the notion that knowledge itself is often unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional. Knowledge can be emotionally charged and cannot necessarily be conveyed with the precision of a mathematical proof (Smith and Dean 2014:3). Creating a cultural product, in this case, a documentary, is not just the product of thought, of moving from the unknown to the known (Sullivan in Smith and Dean 2014:48) but of selecting and capturing media in the form of different types of spoken input or street scenes or other images. This process is not only the creation of a documentary but also the gathering and construction of an extensive archive of audio-visual material exclusively about, or recorded to show, the
Old Town of Edinburgh and specific individuals related to the location in the past and present.

The debate as to the merits of qualitative research is well rehearsed, but it is an established methodology in academic study, and increasingly relevant as a research process (Crang and Crook 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Haraway 1991; Smith and Dean 2014). The notion of the act of research as an objective endeavour seems to have been repeatedly demonstrated as unrealistic (Aull Davies 1999:23; Denzin and Lincoln 2018:46; Haraway 1991:183–201; Ruby 1992:6). Even the scientist looking through a lens is affected by their prior knowledge and experience. As suggested by the narrator in Denzin’s essay ‘The Elephant in the Living Room or Extending the Conversation About the Politics of Evidence’, which is structured in the form of a three-act play, ‘We are each blinded by our own perspective. Truth is always partial’ (Denzin in Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 1451). Rather than arguing that research is only valid if it can be portrayed as impartial or objective, this project asserts the contrary: that the research’s unique character lies in its situated subjectivity, which results in a unique documentary film project (Ibid:1459). This creates an alternative history and the thesis reflects on the inferences to be drawn from the events depicted and the form of the work, which offers in effect new knowledge and social history. The project supports the thesis by exploring the changing landscape of the city and holding that we can make the ‘everyday world more visible’ by seeking to represent both the autoethnographic and the subjective perspective of residents (Ibid:1455).
The notion of objective research has even been presented as oppressive, as a neoliberal imposition on the process of research (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:72). Although Erikson argued that the ideals of Enlightenment thinking are central to claims for the need for rational objectivity (Erikson in Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 87–141), he does not consider in this text the context from which the Scottish Enlightenment sought to break free: a country led by a harshly repressive Kirk, where blasphemers could be hung (Herman 2001:1–10). This research, situated in a location shaped by these very divergent belief systems alongside the ideologies of every other epoch, led me as a documentarian to consider the most appropriate means to capture and research the present: I situated myself within the work and in a place which appeared to be undergoing a process of metamorphosis for the residential community, into a branded landscape. Reconstructed into iconic images of a Scottish identity which was in itself a confection, as most Scots do not wear tartan or live in baronial castles. To reflect all the dimensions of experience, for each competing community, reflexivity became the most effective device to represent the research area.

Reflexivity is employed in this research in numerous ways which will be discussed further in the course of the text. Reflexivity is broadly defined as meaning a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference (Aull Davies 1999:4). Reflexive research is not one single phenomenon but assumes a variety of forms (Ibid 1999:6). Research is situated and subjective to researchers who have the agency to conduct it autonomously (Haraway 1991:192). The nature of the central research enquiry
identifies a before and after narrative, in which my own lived experience and memories form a subjective perspective by situating myself and my father within the film and revealing the degree to which I seek to direct him, and to ‘accentuate the fact that the camera’ and myself ‘are inevitable intrusions that alter ‘the representation of reality’’ (Bruzzi 2006:190). Representations of the self and the familiar are juxtaposed with other scenes edited using more illusionary techniques, such as observational material; thus the film offers contrast, which is in itself a form of reflexivity. Reflexivity in the context of the mode of a documentary film is a form where the filmmaker discloses themselves to the viewer or portrays the constructed nature of the film to the audience in a form appropriate to the film’s narrative (Nichols 1991:57).

There is a distinction within the ontology of the reflexive research paradigm between situating the self and the epistemology of research practice, which this paper seeks to explore (Bell 2011:6). *Old Town Tales* is epistemologically reflexive, as the research process has followed a route to develop the project theoretically and to consider it methodologically: evolving a theoretical discourse during the process and production of the documentary film. Simultaneously, my research explored theoretical discourse to consider the evolution of cities, specifically the City of Edinburgh (Bell: 2011:11). The research has explored and amassed new historical references and constructed narratives from oral and visual evidence to document a residential community that is in gradual decline, becoming replaced by a newer hegemony dominated by the model of commodified consumption. The theoretical inquiry was challenged by practice when
confronted with a terrain of unfolding real events and people. As a sole producer, I had to respond and adapt to what I found. What is specific about this project is the degree to which it explores the transition of one area of Edinburgh over a forty-year time frame. Covering the end of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, by combining archival material from the earlier era with observational recordings taken in the latter period.

The employment of bricolage in documentary film is a natural convention when the focus is on gathering what is found or puttering (Varda in Kline 2014:139). Bricolage is defined as the interpretive, narrative, theoretical and political piecing together of a series of representations (Denzin and Lincoln 2018:45). The potential outcomes of a research product created by a bricoleur are further defined as complex quilt-like bricolage, reflexive collage, montage, a set of fluid, interconnected images, and representations. The bricoleur constructs what is found or gathered (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:46). Daniels refers to the bricoleur as a ‘handyman’, which aligns with the responsive and adaptive nature of documentary production on location and more generally (Daniels 2019:158).

Bricolage can involve fusing different types of media from different projects or in different formats to form a cohesive whole (Daniels 2022:127–129). It is a technique that I have employed in this work, not just in having to adapt to different cameras
through circumstance but by embracing what began as a technical problem (my camera broke) to identify and recognise the narrative connotations that working in different formats would provide. I also had a significant gap in the production and editing phase because I took time out to care for my father and to cope with the tragedy surrounding his demise. During this period, I snatched moments to film, and I was there in the Old Town observing and gleaning fragments of data, which led me to consider how I could adapt the project to the new circumstances. I concluded that I could make use of the passage of time and incorporate this into the structure and narrative of OTT.

I reasoned that the weaving of different formats would demonstrate that the images themselves were constructed in different eras and I used various pixel and image qualities appropriate to the diverse times and contexts in which the recordings were made. Although this approach risked breaking the conventions and aesthetics of cinema, the formats and images from different devices would aesthetically alter the illusion of reality that is customary in the majority of films made, including works of fiction. All the uncovered archives and pictures were presented in different formats, solidifying the fragmentary and reflexive approach I wove into the visual aesthetic of the work. In the morphic present, where we mediate so many aspects of our lives or reality through screens, whether on cameras, monitors or phones, the limitations of technology challenge how we experience and what we can claim exists (Acland 2012:168). This led to the possibility of creating a collage of historical representations.
and juxtaposing them as a means of reflecting on how cities change over time, and how
time and place are represented.

Levi Strauss also observed that the process of bricolage also involves how we think
and approach the development of production and defined scientific and mythical
thinking. The former involves reasoning based on evidence and the latter a more
intuitive process based on experience, knowledge and instincts. They are equally valid
realms of contemplation in which we can solve creative or intellectual tasks, and lead to
reinvention (Levi Strauss 1966:24). Bricolage can, in the forum of academic study, lead
to invention in any format – whether film, text or any other medium employed by the
researcher – and has the potential to lead to unique solutions to limitations or
setbacks, such as broken cameras or interrupted production timetables. I have no
power to change events or avert tragedy but, as a bricoleur, I brought a flexibility of
thought and action to adapt and develop all forms of research and formats as the
project developed.

It has been argued that the criticism of mixed-method approaches to research (Aull
may be based on the false assumption that the world is stable and unchanging (Huber
1995 in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:40). A counterargument is that, as the world is on the
brink of imploding, the collective need to reclaim and create solidarity is beginning to
support a new dialectical refashioning of previously misunderstood material (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:419). It seems apparent that in a world that is constantly represented in different forms – online, streamed, broadcast, read, represented and experienced, what we see is shaped by a cacophony of stimuli, not all of which are necessarily objective or based on quantitative or tested information, and we need to explore new ways to represent how we experience and engage with reality and, to this end, consider relevant theories and existing practices.

Denzin suggests that ‘qualitative researchers are caught in an international conversation’ relating to ‘the meaning of data and the ethics of evidence’ and the role played by qualitative research in ‘addressing matters of equity and social justice’ (Denzin 2018:1445). He then proclaims that ‘the evidence elephant is dead’ and that ‘data died a long time ago’ and that we must consequently create our own standards of quality, and our own criteria (1446). However, as Denzin astutely explains, for science-based researchers to deny or ignore the approaches taken by qualitative researchers risks the creation of a co-dependency or ‘othering’ or ‘needing the negative presence’ in order to justify ourselves. This equally applies to the opposing position (Denzin 2018:1452) where the derision of qualitative researchers towards opposing research paradigms which they refuse to accept contributes to the ‘othering’ not just of researchers but also of oppositional perspectives.
The need for communities to evolve with more understanding and acceptance can equally be applied in the context of the OT, where there are opposing sides. The dichotomic polarities or othering create conflict rather than generating acceptance or accommodation. However, to change this, we must create a different form of engagement and new narratives and accept ‘that ways of knowing are always partial’, in order to create not just new perspectives but new outcomes (Denzin in Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 1453).
The Mediated Indexical Link

‘Since documentary space is historical, we expect the filmmaker to operate from the inside, as part of the historical world rather than the creator or author of an imaginary one. Documentary directors do not create an imaginary realm so much as a representation of the very same historical world as the one they themselves occupy’.

Bill Nichols 1991: 79
The purpose of this chapter is to explore the notion of the documentary as an indexical link and to consider the relationship between the documentary as a referent to the historical world and the perceptions and preoccupations of those creating the film (Nichols 1991:27,149–151). In principle the index can only exist if the origin exists. Therefore, there would be no footprint on the beach had a person not walked towards the sea. If nothing takes place in front of the camera, then there is nothing to see, hear or perceive. Documentary theorists often framed their explanations of the documentary index based on the semiotic discourse of C.S. Pierce (Chandler 2007: 29–35; Nichols 1991:149). While many symbols that we perceive as signs are arbitrarily evolved by societies and must be learned, an index is a secondary sign vehicle resembling the original source, such as a painting or a photograph.

The photograph has been viewed as a guarantor of ‘ontological integrity’ but there is a slippage between the photograph as evidence and as simultaneously demonstrating evidence of trace. Bruzzi – reflecting on the positions of Bazin ‘because he believed reality could be recorded’ and Baudrillard ‘who believed reality was another image’ – asserts that the ‘idea of pure documentary uncontaminated by subjective vagaries of representation is forever upheld’ (Bruzzi 2006:6). Bruzzi identifies that what is of interest is to explore the complexities and productiveness of the relationship between the two (Ibid:5). Gains, for example, argued that ‘the problems with the concept of painting, photographing, or “recording” reality is that this assumes there is a “real” out there’ (Gaines 1999:2, cited in Daniels 2019:165). Bruzzi, in contrast, states ‘and sometimes it becomes necessary to remind ourselves that reality does exist and that it
can be represented without such representation either invalidating or having to be synonymous with the reality that preceded it’ (Bruzzi 2006: 5).

Although the photographic image, whilst theoretically remaining indexical, is both evidence of demonstration and of trace (Chanan 2007:30), images cannot be regarded as factual proof. An example of the plasticity of images and why they cannot always be considered evidentiary proof is described in the 1979 novel *The book of Laughter and Forgetting* which opens with the description of a photograph taken of two Czech politicians, Vladimír Clementis and Klement Gottwald, on a balcony. In reality, Clementis had cordially given Gottwald his hat to protect himself from the rain. Some years later, after Clementis was hanged for political reasons, he was erased from the photograph by the state propaganda machine, leaving his hat as a symbol of the moment in time (Kundera 1979).

Kundera, a novelist and – at the time of writing – a political refugee, describes a factual event. The original photograph and its negative is truthful. The second image, portraying a selective history, also has an indexical value in that it demonstrates not only the manipulations of the state propaganda machine but also the subjective desire of states and individuals to project selective and subjective histories. The images become both evidence of an event and trace. The conception that cameras are merely objective scientific instruments (Winston 2008 133–134) rather than tools which can be used to achieve various effects is from a different era.
A moving image in any format is essentially a range of photographs or frames per second (25 in the UK), run rapidly across a screen to give the illusion of movement, (Anderson 1996:54–61). This motion, it is argued, is more recorded than created by the illusion of animation, and is therefore indexical (Trahair in Moran, Gaines and Renov 1999:268). Yet from an ecological perspective, the origin of the camera is that it produced mechanismed stills using a shutter to trick optical perceptions (Anderson 1996:7, 10, 44, 54–61, 63). Most computers today have a similar capacity to simulate the motion of a drawing or a three-dimensional object, and Artificial Intelligence can simulate the drawing or the object entirely, almost dispensing with the need for the artist. Questions have been asked as to why documentary theory appeared unable to accommodate the digitised image (Moran in Gaines and Renov 1999:267). The suggestion that photographs are uncoded while a painting is coded has also understandably been subject to challenge (Ibid:267) not least because photographs are themselves subject to mediation.

Plantinga (2005) questioned whether the documentary can be defined as an index in his essay ‘What is a Documentary After All?’ in which he explores various definitions of the documentary, for example, the Documentary as an Indexical Record (DIR). He also observes that if the photograph is to be defined as an index, this equally applies to the photography of fiction (Plantinga 2005:105–107). Plantinga goes to some lengths to argue that the ‘veracity’ of the photograph gives it a stronger claim than a painting to be perceived as an index (205:106). Yet, DIR is not a satisfactory definition because all
elements of cinematography involve creative choices in both fact and fiction films. The act of making creative choices, Plantinga claims, subverts the purity of the documentary, making it not an exact reference or index but a pro-filmic event (Plantinga 205:106). DIR, according to Plantinga, however, is only possible in specific types of film, such as the observational film, which – he claims – involves minimal intervention because of its allegedly non-interventional style of production but cannot be applied to other modes such as the expository mode. Plantinga also observes that DIR cannot apply to historical films classed as documentaries, on the basis that technology and context limit many filmmakers to reconstructions of scenes, rather than the observational modes made possible by lightweight technology (Plantinga 2005:109).

The claim that the observational film is a purer form of documentary has some veracity in the sense that, if the camera is capturing people or events as they unfolded without self-consciousness, we can see the people or the events in space and time as they unfold. Yet anyone who has attempted to make an observational film will recognise that these films are just as constructed, if not more so, than other genres of documentary. Equally, it does not seem logical to conclude that historical, observational, archive-based works – or any other type of documentary – are incapable of providing a situated representation of the time of production and the filmmaker as well as the historical world represented. Shub’s ‘Fall of the Romanov Empire’ (1927) represents what is considered the first historical archive film using Romanov archive footage to present the subject matter through the eyes of a Soviet (Chanan 2007: 259). The film portrays
different classes of society during the Romanov Dynasty. The structure of the film, with its captions, offers insight into how the overthrown regime was perceived in 1927 by Shub, who was presumably editing for a specific post-revolutionary audience. Aaltonen takes the same view in stating that ‘compilation films of historical pasts often through the voice of the filmmaker and their own perspective’ provide a documentation of their own time (Aaltonen 2016:175). Moran explores the contradictions of reconstructed representations of ‘ethical proof’ (Moran in Gaines and Renov 1999: 255) by exploring the reconstruction of dinosaurs based only on fragmentary evidence of bones and DNA and the impossibility of offering an insight into the past based on such fragments (Ibid:256). He questions the notion of the photograph as an index in the context of questioning whether history existed before the invention of the camera or the notion of the camera as the ‘preserver’ (Bazin 1960:6), and the role of cave paintings as a substitute preservation of a ‘profilmic event’ and ‘historical referent’, citing Barthes that ‘the photographer had to be there’ (Moran in Gaines and Renov 1999: 257).

Yet Shub demonstrated much earlier that the presence of a photographer does not necessarily indicate the presence of an editor as one can photograph something without editing it into a narrative form. The narrative form or archive material can be changed by whoever edits the material in their own time. Moran argues that ‘documentary practice is often driven by fear of absence’ and that there is an almost impossible ‘congruence between prehistoric subjects and current documentary practice’ (Moran in Gaines and Renov 1999:258–259) which was certainly the case both
with OTT and the documentation of my father, but these were also driven by a desire to show and develop understanding and to capture events and people through the unfolding moments. However, documentaries such as *The King in the Car Park* (Osmond 2013),16 instead of seeking to reconstruct the past, portrayed an archaeological research project as it unfolded, to discover whether a skeleton found in a Leicester car park was that of Richard III. The film offered an important historical truth – that of a nobility skewed by the desires and rhetoric of power – in showing that this king was found underneath a car park, on the former site of a Franciscan monastery, rather than buried in the same state splendour as his conqueror, Henry VII. ‘The bone is signifier’ of ‘absence and referent’ (Moran in Gaines and Renov 1999: 261).

The notion of the index ought not to be restricted to a pure referent but encompass how a range of cultural products and cultural artefacts and stories are represented and interpreted by both filmmakers and spectators.

What is seen in the frame by the viewer is a photographic representation of the historical world. What is seen in a photograph or still is an isolated frame capturing one instant in time, and the moving image only captures the reality that can be represented within the frame of the camera. The frame of the camera, or the Kino Eye itself, is considerably smaller than the human eye (Pudovkin 1929:146–145). Even if we accept that a person depicted is as they are, and not playing a part, the representation of them

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16. The king In The Car Park, broadcast on Channel Four, 4th of February 2013, Dir: Osmond Louise, produced by Darlow Smithison Productions.
is still highly selective. Unless the filmmaker shoots the entirety of the documentary in long shot, they will always exclude much of the reality which surrounds the image; as soon as they introduce a different shot or frame size, they exclude aspects of the scene depicted (Chanan 2007:51).

Like all art forms, once something is placed in a different context, like a can of soup or a Brillo pad (Warhol 1962,1964), it will infer new meanings perceived outside the normal engagement of, for example, eating soup or cleaning the cooker. When we frame and isolate an image in a frame or defined dimension, even if it is an everyday object, we tend to think of it differently because someone has isolated and selected that image for a reason. Equally, if someone comes from another cultural background, they will extrapolate different meanings, (Kemp 1991;17 Berger 1975: 8–10). This is in essence what makes the juxtaposition of visual photographs in moving images a cultural product and not specifically a representation of eating or cleaning. However, Sobchack argues that documentaries are not just products or cinematic objects but an experience which ‘treats the spectator’s phenomenological sense of the “real’, (Sobchack in Gaines and Renov 199:241).

17 David Kemp - Sculptor Out of Order exhibition and film Maclellan Galleries, Glasgow 1991, where a person from the future comes to the present to reinvent everyday objects as artefacts with new pertinent or sometimes comical reinterpretations of their cultural meaning.
Accordingly, it may also be more useful to consider why the soup is in a can, or why cleaning products such as Brillo pads are marketed in a box, as a comment on the commercialisation of culture and how society has evolved from a more agrarian, home-produced and mutualistic culture to one where purchasing products and the substance of life or cleaning products become necessary commodities. It is what we learn from the image and how it informs us, offers insight, stimulates thinking or offers a reflection of the world that renders film or any art form indexical. This can be applied to any genre of art and is, in essence, the social comment that Warhol could have been making (Honnef 1993:30,33–35). Often, the properties of a work of art are subject to perceived interpretation; Warhol may just have liked the design of the packaging.

Should we seek to differentiate between art, fiction and documentary given that they are all representative of what the creator saw, thought or wished to communicate at one moment in time, situated where they were, socially and geographically? Any one of these media can be potentially ‘realistic’ and rendered more so by copyists adding more details (Ruiz 2005:43). Does photographing or filming a work of art suddenly render the image more indexical? As Benjamin argued, art has always been reproducible in some form (Benjamin 202:102) and the more reproducible it becomes, whilst still expressing what the artist wanted to show or say, the more it becomes aligned in a reproductive sense to photography. Chanan suggests that ‘what appears on the screen is not reality but a sign’ (2007:51) and that the documentary is both indexical and iconic. ‘Index, because it is automatically a product of a mechanical and chemical process; icon
because it’s graphic likeness which encodes a symbolic response’ (Ibid:52).

Presumably Chanan is referring to older technology in his reference to mechanics and chemicals, but his broader assertion is that ‘questioning the integrity or authenticity of a documentary sooner or later comes down to the truth value of an individual image’ or, if not truth, then at least a message or symbol, a representation which is understood in the context of the moving image in juxtaposition to other ‘fragments’ (Ibid: 43).

The indexical link, if this is what a documentary or art provides, may differ in form or potency: the metaphorical footprints on sand as a signifier may have shoes and not be barefoot, or the person who walked on the beach may deliberately paint with their feet, or stamp as they walk, or tip toe to make a creative mark. However, whatever the purpose or style of those imprints on the sand, they show that someone was there and represent a trace of their presence. We may return to the same beach ten years later and find it significantly eroded by environmental factors such as climate change or, in the case of the UK, sewage.

It seems incomprehensible that a painting such as Guernica (Picasso 1939) could not be considered to provide a striking representation of the horrors of war or be less effective in depicting war as any of the seven films from the Why We Fight series, (Capra 1942–1945). Paths of Glory (Kubrick 1957), produced just 12 years after World War II ended, probably gave a better insight on a technical level into trench warfare than
any documentary maker trying to shoot in impossible conditions. It probably also reflected how the war was perceived at that moment in history. The proliferation of art and documentaries means that the majority of creative representations never become as potent a symbol or historical reference as *Guernica* or *Paths of Glory*, or even the *Zapruder* footage, which has become a significant series of images (Chanan 2007:49).

From its inception, the factual film has shown many stylistic similarities to the fiction film. Winston notes that John Grierson, (1898-1972), the founder of the British Documentary Movement, had recognised the American press’s ‘capacity to turn a report into a story’ and transferred this concept into producing documentaries (Winston 2008:99). Plantinga observes that, due partly to the limitations of earlier cameras, films produced ‘under the aegis of Grierson used recreation and the staging of’ events (Plantinga 2005: 109). Films are always the product of the times in which they are produced, and we can learn as much about a culture from the production as we do from the storytelling or the film itself.

Nichols highlights that, in some respects, all recordings captured by a camera and then edited into a filmic narrative have a ‘historical authenticity regardless of the historical status of what it represents’ (Nichols 1991:150). He reasons that the establishing shot of Mount Rushmore in the USA, depicted in the fiction film *North by Northwest*, (Hitchcock 1959) is ‘every bit as bound to their historical referent as any similar shot in
a travelogue’ (Nichols 1991:150). In a modern context, the construction of the famous crop-dusting sequence – a mix of live filming with studio footage of the close-ups of the Thornhill character hiding in the crops – is now visible, as digital technology creates increasingly dimensionally and pixelated images. The film is situated in the stylistic and technical parameters of its time. Winston acknowledges that fiction films are equally historically relevant as factual films, stating, ‘After all we share the world depicted in any Western’ (Winston 2008:231). Whilst most Westerns made are fictional and constructed on stages, they reflect the imaginations of their makers; they were also produced within specific timeframes and created by filmmakers situated in that moment in time, using technology and conventions of the moment and often providing more indexical references to their own time than the one they depict (Miller 1986:28).

It is generally argued that all films provide indexical links or reflections of the world, regardless of their genre or degree of creative construction. The recordings themselves – with the filmmaker’s connection to their milieu, subjective interpretation, and representation of the material in conjunction – create the indexical link. If we consider a semiotic framework, surely the artist or filmmaker is also the signifier because they created, found, or captured the image and chose to represent it in a specific way? They are a person, or persons, capturing digital representations of the world they inhabit during the moments in time in which they live. Films provide a narrative index to the time of production, even the technologies of that time and the preoccupations and culture of an era. This is specifically pertinent to the observational documentary
featuring individuals existing in their own time, but the creative treatment of actuality is just as specific to the time as the actuality represented (Grierson 1933 in Scott 2014:6). Even in scripted genres, events occur, we respond to circumstances or collaborators make investments that transform the work into what is ultimately the outcome of a process. Artists also respond to movements, thinking and styles from their own era which imbue their work. Consider two polarised documentaries: *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922) and *Handsworth Songs* (Akomfrah 1986). The former portrays a distant land and paints a portrait of otherness and the exotica of empire. The latter portrays the concerns of those from the United Kingdom’s former colonies who are now living in the United Kingdom sixty-four years later.

*Nanook of the North 1922*

(Robert Flaherty 1884–1951)

Film in this era was a vehicle for explorers to publicise their discoveries. Flaherty’s films romanticised rural communities. Their popularity with the public of the time reflected the narrative of modernity, as described by Mennel: ‘Films manipulate time and space whereas trains collapse space and require the concept of universal time’. In the context of *Nanook of the North*, the film projected an insight into a different culture and ‘collaps[ed] a projection of space’ (2008:8) to portray a harsh landscape inhabited by peoples that survived in spartan, cold conditions in a post-war Europe setting.
The film is semi-fictional and partially staged (Erikson in Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 98) and has been described as an early representation of ‘Salvage’ where a vulnerable culture must be ‘rescued’ or their ‘voice will be lost without the intervention of outsider ethnographers’ (Chambers in Clayton and Mulvey 2017: 174). The film was created in an era when sound recording had not yet developed, and its visual narrative was punctuated with subtitles. *Nanook of the North* stylistically portrays the struggle to survive as observational but appears staged in places (such as the igloo scenes). The subtitles tell us what is happening in each scene, giving us the information that Flaherty believes relevant.

*Nanook of the North* is cited by Ruby (1992:43) as a collaborative film, an example of a work that speaks about Nanook. However, Flaherty was an ex-prospector. His film work was funded by governments and corporations. He was also a white, American male, a demographic group that dominated the narrative. The central character and his family were obviously happy to be the subject of the film but there is no sense of Nanook’s own voice, not just because of the restrictions of sound, but in the way he is represented visually and textually. The scenes with the family disembarking the canoe are represented as a curiosity, as if a magician were pulling rabbits out of a hat. The scene with the gramophone, where Nanook is confronted with modern technology, is portrayed as a source of comedy to accentuate cultural differences. In this film, we see the world from the perspective of Flaherty, not Nanook. Just as a photograph can be doctored, so can a documentary.
Handsworth Songs 1986

(John Akomfrah 1957–)

Handsworth Songs is an essay film ostensibly about the 1985 Handsworth Riots in Birmingham but which moves on to depict the civil unrest at Broadwater Farm in London and explores the experiences of racism endured by citizens of former British colonies. Both events centred around the deaths of individuals from black and ethnic minorities amid police and state oppression. Handsworth Songs also depicts the hopes of the immigrants from the British colonies for better conditions and harmony in the United Kingdom but who find on arrival lives predominantly limited by discrimination and prejudice. The film’s innovative style – fusing observational footage, interviews, newspaper cuttings, archive photography and film and interwoven sound design – resulted from a lack of resources but intended to portray the experience of discrimination.

Akonfrah was born in Ghana and came to the UK because his parents, who were political activists, sought asylum because their views conflicted with the existing regime in Ghana. He was educated in state schools in London and studied for a degree in sociology, which significantly influenced the layering of the film’s narrative. Akomfrah describes his background21 and how he set up the Black Audio Film Collective with

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21 Interview with John Akomfrah - Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt3dn9z6544
friends in the 1980s because no one in broadcasting would employ him or his friends due to their ethnicity. Akomfrah and BAFC did not receive direct funding, other than support with equipment from funded bodies, and received no finance to make *Handsworth Songs* until the postproduction phase when he received support that was only available in the unique context of the foundation of Channel Four as a new broadcaster in the United Kingdom (Thomas 2014:10). *Handsworth Songs* is not just about the topic of racism: the director has authored an audio-visual essay about the experience of racism from not just his own perspective but representing the different communities depicted in the film to articulate their experiences. This is what Ruby describes as a film by the other (Ruby 1992:54).

These films have no relation to each other in structure, narrative style or technical format but, when juxtaposed, reveal the range of representation in a situated context. The distinction between the films is that, over a sixty-year period, various developments, the increasing accessibility of travel and post-war labour shortages led to greater migration. Instead of travelling to faraway lands to find other cultures, those other cultures became part of our communities. Technological advances in transport and communications, including widespread access to the means of representation, contributed to the compression of space and how it is represented (Harvey 1989: 241). The realm of representation is no longer limited to that of Flaherty or Griersonian sensibilities in the United Kingdom but is diversified. Akonfrah, and specifically *Handsworth Songs*, represents a stage in the predicted expansion of self-representation,
which has today increased considerably with the phone camera (Astruc 1948 in Scott
2014: 852). Bourland argues that the ‘hegemonic forces led to a greater valuation of
domestic archives and photographs’, specifically for ‘post-colonial’ contexts and
signifiers of alternative narratives (Bourland 2018:181–182). Handsworth Songs
articulate the perspective of a person from a background once portrayed as ‘other’,
transformed into ‘self-representation’, offering an analysis of context and manifesting
the changing landscape of the world. Equally, the growth in films made by filmmakers
from diverse ethnic backgrounds and about cultural diversity has been led by pioneers
such as Akomfah, and is manifested in a range of productions made in this era which
not only represent diversity but increasingly articulate a subjective perspective in films,
rather than portrayals of ‘others’ (Lebow 2012:7). As Miller argues, even if it were
possible to recreate the past, we come from our own context and time, and can only
produce our own interpretation (1986:19–58).

Both works are rooted in their own time and, in terms of their indexical link, the situation
of the maker and the circumstances of production are as relevant to the work as the
final filmic product. Post-modernity is ‘tied up in representation … and a shift from
meta-narratives to fragmented explanations’ (Mennel 2008:13). Both films were
significantly influential in their period. Handsworth Songs, with its use of montage and
representation of alternative history, is stylistically closer to the means of
representation chosen in OTT.
As Aatolen demonstrates in his analysis of Finnish documentary-making, the films of each era reflect the social changes of which filmmakers are aware in their societies, such as industrial change, which over time represent societal change (Aatolen 2016: 174–75). The Amber Collective’s body of work representing salvage film, documenting past industries in the Tyneside area, reflect social change through the eyes of both subjects and filmmaker (Chambers 2018:66). Without the researcher or filmmaker to document and interpret what they are capturing and their ability to distil what they have accumulated and gathered in terms of material, the evidence of the historical world becomes assigned to a record which remains unorganised, without consideration and ‘meaningless’ (Weber 1904/1949: in Christians from Denzin and Lincoln 2018: 72: 148).

The values shaped by our time-bound social conditions determine ‘those realities’ we prioritise or ‘consider significant ‘and the cultural values with which we approach the reality’ we find (Ibid: 78:148). The suggestion that a filmmaker’s interventions ‘detract’ from the ‘value’ of the indexicality of documentary is contrary to the enhancing role that the subjectivity of the filmmaker adds to the narrative evidence. Sobchack, citing Merleau-Ponty, also identifies that audiences’ or spectators’ experiences of documentary are ‘modified by their own personal and cultural knowledge’ of a film’s ‘existential position as it relates to our own’ and, I would add, the experience of reality (Sobchack in Gains and Renov 1999:242). Therefore, we can assume that all films represent reality and reflect the views of the people who make them and are made to be received by audiences situated in the same timeframe. It seems that this is not a binary
question: both Bazin and Baudrillard can be right, or equally Gaines and Bruzzi. As Aaltonen observes, ‘documentary films are always created in a social, cultural and ideological context, and the filmmaker cannot work outside society or ideology’ (Aaltonen:2016:176).

Stylistic Modes of Representation

If representation is situated within contexts and determined by filmmakers and participants, how do specific modes of representation impact OTT as a situated
alternative documentary history project? This segment of the thesis explores the different theoretical frameworks and films which have relevance to OTT.

Erik Barnouw details a chronology of the documentary from inception, organising its genres usefully into specific decades beginning with the ‘Prophet, Explorer, Reporter, Painter, and Advocate’ to list but a few, and identifying the observer. This chronology contextualises the documentary within specific timeframes, suggesting a situated relationship between a documentary and the time in which it is made (Barnouw, 1974). It does not, however, create definitions of what are now defined as modes. The specific modes defined by Nichols in 1991(32–75) range from observational, expository, reflexive to interactive and were later expanded to include poetic and rename interactive as participatory (Bruzzi 2006: 4). Nichols is also attributed with developing the notion of the performative documentary associated with the 1980s and 1990s (Nichols 1994: 95, in Bruzzi 2006: 4). Bruzzi further defined the notion of ‘performative’ modes, which she suggests are in part a stylistic development because filmmakers have ‘unease about the very assumption ‘that ‘documentaries can be portrayed as representing unmediated reality’ (Bruzzi 2006:186). Nichols’ modes, however, group styles of films or methods of storytelling across the spectrum of history, which undermines their capacity to refer to the time of production or situate how we understand the film in the context of the time it was made. Whilst stylisation can transcend time how the styles evolve or can be perceived is surely always situated in time. Aaltonen states that Nichols decided documentaries can be defined not by
narrative content, action, horror, or comedy as fiction films are, but rather their relation to the historical world and to an audience. That being the case it seems contradictory or gravity defying not to situated documentaries in the time of production, because each epoch will interpret terms like reflexivity differently and develop the form of documentary (Aaltonen 2016:171).

The observational model has become more ethically questionable as, according to Nash, it ‘privileges showing over telling’ and gives the impression that they viewer is witnessing lived time (2001:227). Nash further argues that observational films invite audiences to engage in spectral intimacy, where increasingly intimate moments of subjects’ lives are portrayed (Ibid:229), enabled by the documentary-maker’s investment in making subjects comfortable with cameras (Ibid:229). The veracity of observational material is dependent on the material. For OTT observational material on the street or in specific settings is totally unmediated, whilst other material involves intervention, such as when I handed Simon a phone in one scene to call the newspapers. Other films appear observational but use shots from different timeframes to cover a cut.

The expository mode, which is generally defined as the use of voice-overs or ‘voice of God’ narration, according to Nichols, includes films as diverse as *Listen to Britain* (Jennings 1942) and *Harvest of Shame* (Friendly 1960) (Nichols 1991: 35–37). Whilst
*Listen to Britain* begins with a short speech from Leonard Brockington and is a war propaganda film designed to instil a sense of a stoic national identity, it also shows or appears to observe the British people. It begins with fields of wheat, rustling from the motions of war planes overhead. We also see Britons dancing and going to concerts, a strategically placed Queen Consort and many other scenes showing Britons during the day and night. *Harvest of Shame* is also a propaganda film, but seeks to advocate or explain the plight of migrant labour and black Americans in the 1960's. It is narrated by Edward R. Morrow and features spoken interviews and the views of farm workers, teachers and officials from various institutions. Both films have a voice, but they are stylistically very different.

Nash (2011:227) cites Nichols as suggesting that the distinguishing feature of expository films is rhetoric and the ‘direct address of the audience’ (Nash in Nichols, 1991: 37). Plantinga defines this as ‘the formal voice, and explanatory and assertive, authority’ (1997: 105–108). The question arises as to whose voice is being asserted as an ‘unchallenged mediator often chosen for the purposes of propaganda’ (Nichols 1991:34). Nash also states that the ethical issue with the expository method is that it places the speaker as representing others ‘within the documentary’s argumentative structure’ (2011:227) Ethically, the expository documentary focuses on the responsibilities of speaking on behalf of others, placing them within the documentary’s argumentative structure. In contrast, my reading of *Listen to Britain* is that it is significantly more poetic than *Harvest of Shame* and expresses Humphry’s and
McAllister’s voices, even if it is a propaganda film. There is a degree of affection shown towards its subjects in *Listen to Britain*; it may be rhetorical, aimed to help the country survive the war, but it speaks to them and others, not for them.

The principle of the reflexive mode is that the viewer can see the mechanism of film itself, as the film not only explores the subject but the nature of the process. Nichols cites *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov 1929) as the first example of the reflexive mode because Vertov referred to the mechanism of production. *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris 1988) also uses different points of view and reconstruction to question the representation of truths. They are both reflexive works but they are stylistically very different. The Vertov film is largely observational, whilst the Morris film is interview-based, and shows stylised perspectives of the murder, re-enacting each witness’s account to show the contradictions in and the absurdity of the conviction of Randall Dale Adams. Nichols determined that ‘documentary as a practice required no fixed territory ... and no known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes’ (Nichols 1991:12–13) which is perhaps why he believes these diverse themes fit into these specific definitions. Yet if documentaries are to reflect the historical world, perhaps we should consider them within the context of the times at which they were made, as the more we delve into films defined as one mode or another, the more we begin to recognise that most films incorporate a hybrid of approaches and that these definitions create an opaque framework, as Nichols acknowledges (Bruzzi 2006:4).
Renov defined his modes differently; rather than defining styles, he defines a mode as an approach or demeanour ‘to record reveal or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express’, (Renov 1993:21). Renov is keen to promote the idea that these principles are interlinked and to quash standard distinctions or generic labels applied to the documentary (Renov 1993:28). Renov argues that the role of the historian is ‘fragile’ and that we cannot ‘embalm’ history; rather, we must record visible evidence of the world because what is remembered by history remains often bound to institutions, and history is selective. History cannot simply be a collection of individual voices but must have public relevance (Ibid:25-26). To my own interpretation, Renov is arguing that the voice of a work should reflect and have be substantially relevant to the historical world, which implies that we should consider the work we make as situated within it.

Aaltonen suggests that modes, rather than being defined stylistically, should be divided into ‘six different modes according to their relationship with the real socio-historical world and their relationship with audiences’ (Aaltonen 2016: 170). Here, Aaltonen also argues that modes are not stylistic choices but are specifically about voice. In a broader sense, he defines documentary modes as voices, representing the different vested interests between filmmaker (s), participants, institutions and financiers, political voices, victims, history and memory, and the degree to which films are open in terms of representation and the array of ‘polyphonic’ voices depending on the formation of the film and the forces which form it (Ibid:170–178). I would interpret the concept of
documentary voice as being both universal and traversing time, despite the ethics of each era and how voice has changed over time. In terms of the differences in the use of space and time compression, we are much more concerned with representation because this compression has both limited and expanded our cultures (Harvey 1989: 240–253).

Renov explicitly states that ‘documentary persuasion must be understood as an effect of history within precise discursive conditions’ (Ibid 1991:29). Renov appears to encourage the filmmaker to probe and create work that does not accept the status quo either narratively or in terms of approach. Renov (1993:29) makes specific reference to the cityscapes of the 1920s, such as Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), or Vigo’s *Propos de Nice* (1930). He also stresses the ‘authorial voice’, which need not supplant the role of the preserver of history but, rather, embellishes it (Ibid: 35).

**A Propos De Nice (Vigo 1930)**

*A Propos De Nice* was a reference point for OTT, as were many city films of this genre. Vigo’s film is a specific critique of tourism and class and it articulates its perspective entirely through its selection of shots, from the opening sequence of fireworks to the aerial shots, cutting to the montage of the model tourists on the toy train being swept away by a croupiers rake and cutting to the waves of the sea sweeping away the footprints on the sand followed by an array of montage. ‘This kind of social
documentary demands that one take a position because it dots the i’s. If it doesn’t persuade an artist, at least it will compel a man’ is said to have been Vigo’s intention (Ungar 2016:66).

Chanan also selects *A Propos De Nice* as a film with ‘a perceptual logic which is the visual equivalent of a voice’. As a film without sound, its ‘intensely photogenic montage’ conveys Vigo’s disdain for the holiday makers promenading along the sea front, for example by inserting a clip of an ostrich in one sequence (2012: 27). Whilst we see the people represented, we never hear them or see subtitles of what they are saying. Therefore, the film is entirely from Vigo’s perspective and shows ‘the way he and Boris Kaufman looked at the world through the camera and the way Vigo organises the materials. He is commenting, but ‘not with words’ (Aaltonen 2016: 174), rather using images, juxtaposition and rhythm. The film adopts a position by showing the workers working or playing games in alleyways, rather than enjoying the promenading and leisure associated with tourists. *A Propos De Nice* demonstrates that voice is not limited to sound or spoken word.

By exploring the city ‘as both metaphor and embodiment of the modern world’ (Chanan 2007: 82), city films have the capacity not only to tell human stories about the historical world but to explore our changing societies. The form of city films has evolved from largely observational films showing the voice of the filmmaker, such as or *Manhatta* (Sheeler and Strand 1921), described as a ‘national self-portrait’ (Gestner 2006:158 in Rocha:61 in Lebow 2012), *Berlin – Symphony of a Great City* (Ruttman 1926) or *The
Man with a Movie Camera (Vertov 1929). In the 1960s, films such as You Are on Indian Land (Mitchel 1969) and Who Cares (Broomfield 1971) represented the impact on working class communities who were either contesting land or being removed from their homes. In more recent years, films such as Finisterre (St Etienne 2005), London (Keller 1994) and My Street (Bourne 2008), have captured different aspects of city life. The range of documentaries about contested land or our lives framed around space and within cities is vast. Over time, except for films such as Housing Problems (Edgar and Anstey 1935), we have moved from a portrayal of cities from the perspective of the filmmaker or artist to more collaborative work as technology and ethics have evolved.

**Estate - A Reverie (Zimmerman 2015)**

This film is episodic in part and reminded me of my own 2001 film The Block, made when I was living on a social housing estate in Islington North, the London Borough adjacent to that of Zimmerman’s work. My intimacy with many of my neighbours enabled me to tell their stories about their lives in our block. Both films present portraits of residents with some returning characters, which collectively depict overarching themes of stigmatisation and badly maintained housing, with tenants experiencing local authority landlord neglect. The two films share the same thematic polyphonic narrative defined by Aatoelen.

24 Link to the Block on Vimeo https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/47869617
However, *Estate – A Reverie* is a far more sophisticated film which also incorporates textual slides which give the history of the estate and its connections to Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) the novelist and writer of *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, which were names given to different blocks on the estate. The film also incorporates art installations and a bespoke, sometimes situated and performed soundtrack, and runs for eight three minutes, compared to my modest eleven-minute film. *Estate – A Reverie* tells the story of the council’s gradual decanting of residents, presumably to sell or build on the land for profit as opposed to social use and follows the same thematic trajectory as OTT; unlike OTT, however, *Estate – A Reverie* is confined to the geography of the estate. The style of filming is equally observational and includes pseudo-monologue interactions with the filmmakers whose voices can be heard in an empathetic, engaged way, rather than the discursive familiarity of my own discussions with my father or my comments and questions in response to residents in *The Block*.

*Estate – A Reverie* was made in partnership with residents and a not-for-profit collective called Fugitive Images, which was also associated with the Haggerston Estate and gained funding and a production team to develop the ideas and refine the final film. Despite the subtlety of the filmmakers’ interactions, there is no sense that the filmmaker is in any way seeking to hide their relationship with the estate or their neighbours, nor their compassion for many of them, nor what appears to be dismay and sadness at how the people and the estate are treated. It is a film with a strong collective voice and the perspective is ‘central to the film and accounted for’ (Aaltonen
What *Estate – A Reverie* does not do is seek to engage with the council’s position. Although the viewer sees buildings boarded up and tenants decanted, there are no planning hearings or protests, although the outcome or sense of inevitability of the residential decline is never in doubt.

**The Soil Remembers** (Cardoso 2023)

This is a twenty-nine minute documentary portraying the schisms created when the South African apartheid regime displaced local residents of the De Vlakte neighbourhood in order to build Stellenbosch University. The university is also closely associated with senior political leaders of that regime including, we learn, De Klerk and PW Botha. The film establishes the injustice and then shows residents seeking reparations from the university. The film conducts interviews and observes where possible. Its relationship to OTT lies in the use of intercutting, sometimes unexpected, archival media that is also distorted, stretched or pixelated. In one striking scene, residents recount their violent removal whilst the screen shows in slow motion nubile, athletic white youths in swimming trunks running out to a pool. It is a strangely violent representation. *The Soil Remembers* does not seek to represent reality in any illusionary aesthetic, it contains jump-cutting and does not conceal its limitations. The voices of the documentary are predominantly those of the subjects, but the filmmakers are not confined by documentary traditions or rules.
There is a belief that there is now a new form of documentary, or that we are in a ‘post
documentary age’ (Corner 2002: 257 in Bruzzi 2006: 9), one where documentaries are
more ‘stylistically overt’ (Bruzzi 2006:9) and which adopts new, experimental forms and
modes (Aaltonen 2011:170). Re-enactment, animation and different forms of archive
are incorporated to produce a hybrid style of documentary, reflecting the plasticity of
digital technologies which, it is argued, ‘undermines Nichol’s compartmentalisation’ of
documentaries, or which make truth claims (Bruzzi 2006:3). Gaines also discusses how
filmmakers are ‘scrambling up modes and the degree to which these modes have
effectively been surpassed by digital technologies’ (Gaines 1999:1). The extent to which
this ‘scrambling’ reflects post-modernity, post-structuralism or a belief that we are not
bound by a need for ‘resemblance’ in showing and reflecting the historical world is
unclear (Ibid:2-4). As Chanan observes, despite the growth in first-person films, often
either ‘exploring identity, witness, or participant observer’, without being centred on the
autobiographical self, these films explore a specific point of view and not an
institutional one (Chanan 2012:24).

Many documentaries made on broadcast television still reflect traditional filmmaking
modes: *OJ: Made in America* (Edelman 2016) and *Mr Bates v The Post Office – The Real
Story* (Richards 2024) are just two examples of classic interview-based
documentaries supported by various forms of archive. The latter film by Richards also
incorporated scenes from the popular drama series of the same name, without the

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25 Broadcast on ITVX on the 1st of January 2024 and 4th of January 2024 on ITV UK
‘Real Story’ banner. The drama itself was based on factual events and experiences endured by sub-postmasters at the hands of their employers and acted as a re-actualised simulation of their experience (Bruzzi 2006: 187).

First-person work is more generally represented in the form of travelogues or the discoveries of Broomfield or Theroux as presenter characters, or histories presented by professional historians (Chanan in Lebow 2012:19). They represent a version of what is described as the performative mode, which Nash defines as a ‘logical extension to the representative tradition, where it is accepted that representing actual reality is an unreality’ (Bruzzi 2006:187). They are both documentarian and performer, revealing the transaction between themselves and the subject, and in many cases becoming a brand or having a named identity as a filmmaker.

Whilst broadcasters do show films that are authored which represent a directorial voice with a specific approach to working with participants, such as the work of Longinotto, Gaunt, Watson, Dineen, Issacs, Fiennes and Grigsby, for example, interview-based, observational and expository films are more reflective of institutional broadcast branding. Issacs, for example, expressed his frustration with the BBC for not envisaging an audience for his docufiction The Filmmaker’s House26 (Isaacs 2021). Aaltonen considers the role played by funders in commissioning films, not only influencing

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individual documentaries and editorial decisions, but also acting as gatekeepers for which films get made (2011:180). It is common for commissioning editors to be involved in editorial decision-making in broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Non-compliance can have serious consequences, as Michael Grigsby found out to his cost when refusing to remove an offending scene from *Lockerbie – A Night Remembered* (1989) despite the film going on to win a British Bafta for editing in 1999.

An archaeology of the self, or more alternative histories and projects such as OTT, remain very much part of the products coming out of alternative forums such as academia and film festival circuits and fringes (Lebow 2012:6). Some films, such as *The Alcohol Years* (Morley 2000), secured mainstream funding, specifically from Channel Four. This film was influential as a reference for OTT and led me to reflect on the capacity to reveal something about myself through the vehicle of my father.

**The Alcohol Years (Morley 2000)**

This film resonated for me on a personal level; although I did not share Morley’s promiscuity, I too spent my coming-of-age years in the bars and cafés of the OT, and could probably have produced an autobiography of my drunken exploits and those of others during the 1980s. Underage drinking was very much the norm in Edinburgh in that era and I began going to bars when just fifteen. I can attest to the sense that there was ‘a scene’, where musicians, artists, social commentators and writers converged on
the OT as it appears they did in Manchester. I remember so many musicians and gigs and saw The Chimes, Goodbye Mr Mackenzie, The Cocteau Twins and many more bands. I recall the Cowgate being very much a haunt and meeting people including Irvine Welsh or Shirley Manson, and so many other memorable people — less famous but talented, representing the Scottish cultural producers of that era.

What resonated stylistically in terms of modes was how Morley created a documentary about that period of her life, thus situating herself, creating a legend and immortalising her identity as being part of that cultural scene by interviewing people she had known then. We only see her in photographs, reflections and reconstructions of places she went and lived. She thus creates a self-image in which she preserves her youthful self. Morley also reconstructs places she once knew, such as bedrooms, and cuts away to archive video or scenes from a more modern Manchester, linking herself to the culture of youth. This stylistic choice may be because she is behind the camera, as is the case for many other filmmakers creating documentaries either about themselves or family members (Chanan 2012:20). *The Alcohol Years* is essentially an interview-based film that largely removes the voice of the interviewer. Therefore, in the main, the viewer has no idea whether some of the crueller remarks were prompted by questions, demonstrating that even within traditional modes it is the handing of the subject that makes it both reflexive and autobiographical. The film essentially consists of placing a camera in front of people and asking questions, with additional scenes and some staging.
Modes in Old Town Tales

There was never any intention on my part to make an autobiographical film, and it never occurred to me, in making The Block or my feature-length documentary, Park – a portrait in a small space in a big city (2008), that there was an autobiographical element to my work. To me, I was simply showing that the subject of the documentary was on our doorsteps and accessible. I would therefore not define OTT as autobiographical because the film is not about me; rather I am situated within it – I am ‘a submerged self, that deploys autobiographical vignettes within films that focus on other issues’ (Gadihoke: 145 in Lebow 2012). If they were not told, the viewer might not realise I am represented, other than my voice, the fallen umbrella, photographs and reflections, until my cracked, grief-stricken voice. In the Morley tradition of creating an onscreen persona, most of the photographs are of my more aesthetically youthful self, because these were the photographs of me that my father preferred to be reminded of and were also related to the time before he was sick – a holding on to the past and preserving and projecting an identity that had been taken from him, not through narcissism but regret of a lost life, reflected in the aesthetics of his children (Di Tella, in Lebow 2012:65).

My decision to document my father was not based on a wish to become my own subject but my desire to celebrate an aspect of his life – his success as a campaigner – to lift him out of the tragedy of his life in that he was a victim of the Infected Blood Scandal. I wanted to involve him in the film and to be company for him because he had
changed as a person, from being an outgoing and exuberant man to one who carried a great deal of pain and anger. The filming of my father is interview-based, but I took the editorial decision not to edit myself out as I have done in conversations with Simon or Julie or other personalities in the film. My father has a voice, and the recordings reflect how he was. He determined what was discussed: if he did not want to talk about something, it was off limits, even though he did indulge me sometimes longer than he would have wanted. The only times I observed him were when he was voting or coming out of vehicles because he was a stationary man due to his injuries. The editing format is, however, participatory. Similarly, the relationships with Simon and Julie were interview-based except that because they were active people, I also recorded them observationally, protesting, speaking to others, and representing the community. Yet they are presented speaking directly to the camera although the majority of the filming appears observational.

The same strategies were used to film each main character, just edited into three modes: participatory, direct address and observational. The bulk of the material shot was observational: I spent most of the time filming outside on the thoroughfare of the Old Town. I took the same approach as Kaufman in A Propos De Nice (Ungar 2016:67), in that I stopped filming people if they were aware of me. Sometimes I directed the camera at a scene I found interesting but looked in the other direction while actually recording to prevent people behaving self-consciously. The reflexivity mode is explored
in different devices, from filming people filming, intercutting archive, video-layering and the use of television news in sections of the film.

As a filmmaker, although I accept that there are different voices to be blended into one film – primarily my own, and those of the participants and, to some extent, the council and the broader city and culture past and present – I have never been limited by the academy or felt in any way confined by it from a filmmaking perspective (Aatolen 2016: 170–178). I have only responded to events as they unfolded and had no plan other than to follow my subjects, without imagined scenarios or assumptions (Di Tella, in Lebow 2012:38). I literally film what was in front of the lens. The only plan was to be there as a witness. In doing so, I made what could be called a ‘public offering’ of something which became increasingly personal and private as a result of my father’s declining health (Di Tella, in Lebow 2012: 35). However, by filming my father and, inadvertently, myself, I was embedding ourselves in the narrative history of the OT of Edinburgh.
Documentary traditions have placed an onus on the role that documentaries occupy culturally in framing and shaping perspectives of the world and forming historical perspectives (Nichols 2010:39). There is an onus to be truthful, to be factual rather than to fabricate (Nichols 2010:8). Yet in the context of a partially autoethnographic and situated project truth therefore become a subjective rather than objective reality. If so, how is this subjectivity formed? As established modes also represent voice and the necessity to represent the layers of narrative voices in the modes of production, to what extent should equality and shared ownership determine films in the context of the present and within films that are partly autoethnographic? To what extent does autoethnographic documentary referred to as the ‘The Cinema of Me’ (Lebow 2012), expose documentary makers, like myself, to navigate complex ethical questions that originate from life-changing personal tragedies that create dilemmas not just about privacy, but also about self-identity?

In what is referred to as a ‘post-truth culture, where concepts of alternative facts are consistently mooted, and we accept that not only do we each perceive events in the historical world differently, grappling the semantics of the factual film adopt new connotations. From a research perspective the researcher explores a series of questions, and the answers must therefore constitute some degree of facts to support
them, (Hammersley, 2009b, Hammersley 2018:27). The rendition of experience
therefore becomes a factual account of one’s perception of lived events. Denzin
asserts that the ‘politics of evidence and political economy of evidence’ centres around
who defines what evidence is and the methods for gathering evidence, arguing that the
framework of data, and evidence cannot be separated from ethics (Denzin in Denzin
and Lincoln 2018: 1456).

Cautionary tales of classical ethnographic anthropologists treating the communities
they study as passive observed people are many (Erikson in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:
87–141; Ruby 1992: 6; Winston 1997: 19–21) and demonstrate potential ethical
dilemmas for anyone seeking to interpret the beliefs, actions, or words of people or to
treat them as ‘other’. It is argued that questions of epistemology are secondary to
questions of paradigm, defined as the beliefs of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln
2018:105, in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:161). The representation of individuals or groups
who – it may be assumed – can articulate their concerns, raises many issues, and
cannot always be viewed as simplistically hierarchical or defined by power relations
(Ruby 1992:15). From my own experience of working within different communities and
social settings, making assumptions can often lead to false reasoning and a closing of
dialogue and engagement with communities and individuals. Therefore, in my own
approach to documentary production, I maintain what Aetolen refers to as an ‘open
filmmaking process regardless of the style of documentary’ (2016:172). By open I
understand this to mean, based on my own practice, that in order to represent both the
historical world and the people featured in a work, then it is incumbent not to impose an approach or a narrative upon a subject(s) but to let the film evolve from the contribution of the participants.

Ruby contends that the power dynamics between filmmakers and communities always follow a hierarchy: although the director may come from the community being documented, most continue the dominant pattern of maintaining control of the production of a film, while the subject remains passively cooperative (Ruby 1992:15). This perspective does not account for the influence that being from and part of a community can have on the shaping of the content of a film. The filmmaker also has accountability to their own community, which brings responsibilities and potentially social stigma if the filmmaker is seen to misrepresent the community they inhabit.

Whilst Ruby’s concern for the power dynamics between those researched and the researcher raises important questions and considerations about rights and respect for communities, Ruby’s statement is based on the inherent assumption that the power dynamic always lies with the researcher and not the researched. The latter theoretically have the right to set boundaries and determine how they are represented, and they have the right to withdraw. The perception of any community as passive and subservient could be viewed as reinforcing the same stereotypes that the research process often seeks to dispel. Not all individuals seek power or value it. The dynamics between the
researcher and the researched, or the documentarian and the documented, may be mutually beneficial and transformative for both parties. It is also the case that consent is a process that is and should be constantly reviewed and subject to discussion and negotiation (Aull Davies 199:46–51). ‘There can never be a final, accurate, complete representation of a thing, an utterance, or an action. There are only different representations of different representations’ (Denzin in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:1455).

As Poretelli identified, ‘there are always two subjects to a field situation’, the ‘roles of the observed and observer’ (Portelli 1991:30). However, the relationship between those observed and their observer, can be ‘diminished’ when ‘social conditions make equality impossible’ and further, cannot create an equality which does not exist, but demands it’, (Ibid:32). Portelli argues that when the dynamics are inequal, the research will either
'implicitly or explicitly’ reveal more about the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched rather than representing the culture being documented. This is more explicitly informed by the ‘social conditions’ than by the aptitude of the researcher, (Ibid:31-32). What Portelli identifies is that without equality or trust, even if participants have the motive to share their experience, it is likely that the researcher will be given a specific representation of self, which is a projection of how the participant wishes to be perceived, relating in part to the judgements they might assume you might make, if they are themselves making judgements about you. This dynamic is often why filmmakers like Zimmerman might prefer to document what they know. Not only do they care about the subject but have a connection to the subjects or participants.

Films produced from an outsider’s perspective can stimulate outcomes that an insider would not have predicted, because a director with a similar perspective to the community may be unable to comprehend what is distinct about the subject (Kluckhohn cited in Erikson, Denzin and Lincoln 2018:101) as, for instance in *The Fishing Party* (Watson 1986) or *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, Cynn, Anonymous 2012), where the film narrative centres on the differences between the cultural experiences and beliefs of its central protagonists, and the people documenting the events and audiences themselves. The contexts of *The Fishing Party* and *the Act of Killing*, however, differ significantly although both films were controversial because the people being filmed clearly had no insight into how their actions might be perceived by people whose morality was created by differing social conditions.
The Fishing Party (Watson 1986)

The Fishing Party came about because some brokers from the city rang the BBC’s documentary department one day demanding that someone from the BBC document their fishing trip to Scotland. The director acknowledged that, in the context of Thatcherite Britain, this seemed like too good an opportunity to be missed. Watson sought to gain an insight into the lives of the wealthy and how they treated the people with whom they interacted.31 The subjects were shown a copy of the film before it was broadcast and did not express any concerns about how they might be perceived.32 The controversy over the film caused an impact on some of the participants. Ten years later, the BBC gave them a right to reply33 and to make a follow-up documentary to coincide with a second broadcast. The Fishing Party did not portray physical violence; rather, it represented the cultural divide between wealthy brokers from the city of London and Scottish workers catering to the brokers needs on their trip.

The Act of Killing (Oppenheimer and Anonymous 2012)

In contrast, the director Oppenheimer had set out to make a film about the historical mass killings of communists in Indonesia from the perspective of the bereaved but had been unable to secure the cooperation of the victims’ families. The local community

31 The director Paul Watson tells the story of how he made best use of the circumstances that led to the production of The Fishing Party in a retrospective of his work held in Central London in the mid-2000s. I remember what he said more than the date, time or place where he said it.
32 https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/paul-watson
33 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPN81ofWUqi (The Fishing Party Ten Years On)
were fearful of reprisals because the killers were still living within the community.\textsuperscript{34} In contrast, however, the killers were not only willing to speak about the mass murder of their victims, but to openly describe it, boast about it and re-enact it, as the film shows. Whilst the film has won awards and provoked reflection,\textsuperscript{35} the question again arises as to the rights of participants to be fully informed of the consequences of taking part in the filmmaking process. Oppenheimer described taking the material to the airport hoping that he would not be blocked from leaving Indonesia with the recordings. I have no explicit knowledge as to whether the participants were given the opportunity to participate in the editorial stage of the project and or see an edit of the film before it was released. I did attend a screening where Oppenheimer was questioned about consent, where he stated he felt the process had enabled the participant Anwar to gain some self-awareness of his own responsibility for mass killing.

Does the creation of the \textit{Act of Killing} and films that broadly represent impunity and state disregard for rights mean that the perpetrators themselves, because they are killers, should forsake their own rights to make fully informed decisions about taking part in a film? The ethics, or lack of ethics, in creating a film that not only represents violence but re-enacts it, risk perpetrating and celebrating barbarism rather than creating something that prevents it. Daniels argues that representations of violence can

\textsuperscript{34} \url{https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/articles/review-when-perpetrators-speak}
have the impact of normalising violence rather than representing the consequences of violence, (Daniels 2019: 132 & 142). It appears from the film that there is no national remorse or accountability in Indonesia for the taking of so many lives based on their political beliefs (Butler 2005:34). The killers are free to appear on television programmes celebrating what is represented as a good, thing, (to rid the country of communists by mass murder). Being recognised for these crimes incurs no consequences for the murderers and no risks, (Butler 2005:23). There is no exposure domestically even if internationally many people were horrified by the film’s revelations.

It is difficult to condense much broader research and theory in context with the ethical transactions relating to documentary film. However, Butler asserts that we, in turn, cannot know ourselves or the ‘I’ without definition by our relation to others, but we do not in fact ‘give an account of ourselves’ without ‘the necessity of ‘knowing’ the conditions of our own emergence’ and or ‘becoming a social theorist’, (Butler 2005:7-8). Our sense of morality and what is normal is bound not just to our social conditions but to our relation to ‘other(s)’, In reference to interpreting Nietzsche, Butler states, ‘I begin my story of myself only in the face of a “you” who asks me to give an account’ (Ibid: 11). Subsequently Butler asserts ‘telling a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself’, (Ibid: 12), because a narrative is not necessarily a justification for something we have or have not done.
As was the case in OTT, I was not asking any of the participants to give an account of themselves, or to delve deeply into their personae. I was following a snapshot of their lives. For Julie and Simon in relationship to campaigns against planning consents and exploring the impact that the loss of the locality they knew as home. They were not giving an account; they were giving voice to their own concerns and beliefs about a specific issue and how it impacted them. For my dad, I was asking him to give commentary about what was unfolding in front of him, as someone that lived opposite the Scottish Parliament and a place where political change occurs. I never asked him probing or personal questions, other than on the last occasion we see him alive when he votes for the last time. Even then it was a gentle question and once he set a boundary, I then asked him why voting was so important to him, now how he had derived cancer. If there is a single character that gives an account of himself, it would be Councillor Ian Perry who justifies his actions by making universal claims about protecting the city in relation to growth. In interviewing him I was not accusatory, rather I asked him for reflective perspectives.

Whether it is possible to know oneself without significant reflection and the degree to which many people must have this degree of self-awareness or self-actualisation is not something I could claim to know, other than on an individual level. We seem to be in a process of partial self-knowledge. Butler through exploring Spinoza, asserts that the degree to which humans share a desire to be ‘recognised’ or seen, or perhaps to have their individual or collective rights acknowledged implies that ‘any theory of recognition
will have to give an account of the desire for recognition, remembering that desire sets the limits and the conditions for the operation of recognition itself’ (Butler 2005:10). Recognition can be interpreted as to be seen or recognised, but it can also infer that one’s rights are recognised or respected both on an individual and legal level. Butler citing Adorno also suggests that claims of universal rights can often conflict with individual rights, (Ibid:5). As in I have the universal right to make a film, but it might impose on your rights as an individual, if I am filming in a place where your identity might be represented, without your consent.

If I have the universal right to make money from the land I own and if my use of that land impacts you as an individual, then you have no right to challenge my universal right to make money. Or, if a local authority, as an entity, owns the land – for apparently universal benefit – the local authority can lease or sell the land it manages on the behalf of the city, to a company or for individual benefit. You, as electors or the people whom the authority, as an entity is elected to represent, have no legal or social means to be represented or influence the decisions the authority make, even if you lobby, other than through an election every five years.

If we translate in scale from the individual to the notion of recognition of the self to recognition of the nation-state, my own historical research (Bambery 2018: 97, 139-140. Devine 2012:86, 262-263, Lynch 1992:53,192, McLaren, Roy and Wilson 2022:2,
Meiksins Wood 2017: 102-104, Hunt, 2009: 98, in Slater 2012:371, Smith (1776) 2012:854, Smout 1986:31, Wightman 2015:14, 23), demonstrates the inherent power relations which were foundational to the political hegemony of Scottish culture: wherein its institutions and laws had been founded and established in the interests of the existing elites of each era, which in this instance also appeared to be those of large corporations and brands. The history of Scotland (in terms of clearances of population) is not limited to the Highland clearances of 1750-1860, but rather has been a pattern of our social history, as it is the world over.

It is unequivocal, from the many documented voices, that there is a great deal of local recognition as to the lack of agency or consideration afforded to resident interests. In the context of the production of OTT to stimulate debate or radical change to planning legislation remains to be seen (Sandercock & Attili 2014:19). If we translate Butler’s discussion as to the role that punishment or violence plays in regulating ethics, there is limited capacity for residents to punish the state for failing to protect what they saw as their right to the city and to live in their communities other than electing another political party to implement similar policies. Although as my father states in the film, these policies can radically improve or limit our lives. What the film can do, is crystalise their views as an address, not just into a film or social product, but to be retained in a historical document and context (Butler 2005: 63)
OTT as a project was not a structured reconciliation project and it was never devised as a co-ownership project (Cahal 2023:18) and I did not set up a management advisory group, (Cahal 2023:30). I was a sole researcher, building relationships with individuals and without the resources or infrastructure to manage both creating the film and to raise funding and initiate social change via a film project which remained incomplete. In the sense that the screenings and discussions, I hoped the film would generate have yet to be realised.

From an ethical perspective, the events in my own life have led me to have to adopt not just the role of researcher, but also to become a subject myself and to have to become the source of newsprint, and national news stories on television. Beyond the scope of this film, but in relation to my father’s death which forced me to suspend this research project in the middle of it for four years. My family’s case has been raised in our national parliament and I have had to listen to and read about myself described as a victim which has completely altered not only my identity but broadened my awareness of the consequences of ethical violence. My father became infected because he was used to test and develop blood products being made by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service without consent. He was later severely injured in a clinical trial without giving informed consent and died completely unaware of the facts of his injuries. For me as a researcher who always secures informed consent, which is documented and continuously checked, for someone to materially affect someone bodily so significantly without consent was an abomination.
In terms of self-awareness the enormity of these events, and my recognition of how my own morality had in some ways led to these circumstances, because by taking what I thought was a moral path, I had placed myself in danger and altered my father’s life. My egalitarian upbringing in the OT had always enabled me to speak to anyone, and it never occurred to me that I or my family was in any way privileged. I operated wrongly on the assumption that our own family values were universally shared. The question posed by Butler, ‘How ought I to treat another’ (Butler 2011:12) is demonstrably dependent on the circumstances of the exchange, the social relation between the polarities and the objectives or type of knowledge sought. The consequences for the researched and the degree to which those researched were informed of the potential consequences to them for consent to be secured and maintained.

In giving an account of myself: - the traumatic care of my father who attempted to commit suicide several times when I was taking responsibility for his welfare completely altered the trajectory of this research project. The ordeal of his care was worsened because of the significant reduction of funding as a result of national and local government policy decisions in health and social care provision. We became direct victims of the council’s indebtedness and the lack of organised state support for my father. The endurance of managing these events and conditions had a significant impact on me as an individual and on my ability to achieve all the ambitions I had for the research project.
I was forced into the role of victim, not because I had done anything wrong. Rather I had been what I was conditioned to be: a dutiful caring daughter. As a result, I had been forced to be held to account for everything that went wrong. To carry the guilt and develop post-traumatic stress disorder because of being forced to contend with the moral dilemma of keeping my father alive so that he would continue to suffer. To have endured the ‘wounds and outrage (Butler 2005:91) by the contempt shown to my father by the state, who having infected him, many years previously had a moral and legal duty to be accountable for what they had done. Yet the state was not accountable, and I was made accountable, despite having done nothing wrong, other than exercise the morality of my conditioning. As Butler emotively describes it:

’It does not mean that I can trace the acts of persecution I have suffered to deeds I have performed, that it therefore follows that I have brought persecution on myself, and that it is only a matter of finding the acts I performed but disavowed.’ (Butler 2005:85)

What Butler then states is that ‘I become responsible for what was done to me’ (ibid 2005:89). With that responsibility I had to negate my own privacy and that of my father in an effort to campaign for justice on his, my own and our kins behalf and for any others in our situation. This is exactly the position of Julie and Simon, in negating the aspect of their own privacy to draw attention to an injustice. In both cases, injustices arise from Institutional, structural, and state injustice. The ‘other’ is not Simon, Julie,
Peter or even ‘I’, it is the state. The state’s role is to manage the country in the universal interests of electors, yet to take responsibility we are obliged to take responsibility rather than spontaneously living the lives we seek, (Nash 2011:235).

In terms of responsibility, I have a duty to hold those actually responsible to account, which is to some extent an intention of creating an alternative history project about the transition of place, as much as it is about defending the rights of my family. Had my father not died in the manner he did, I doubt the ending of the film would depict him or my own voice. In giving an account of myself, I recognise that my own story and subjective situation are embedded in the film, not just because I am the filmmaker, nor is it because my father is the subject, as a form of autoethnography, but because the events that happened to me, and unfolded, affected the trajectory of the work, and which as a bricolage shaped the form and subjectivity of the film (Hildebrand 2011:4).

In terms of the ethics of participation in this film, consideration must, therefore, be given to subjects, especially those who have made significant contributions, and consent must be verified at the end of the process. Consultation to date has only been afforded to Julie, given dad is dead and Simon is still in Cambodia without internet, (Sandercock & Attili 2014:23). It is however not my intention to publish any of the research until this process is realised (Cahal 2023:60, Sandercock & Attili 2014:22). I was however physically not able to engage with people due to the nature of my own
post-traumatic outrage. Old Town Tales as an outcome of the process reveals a complex ethical relationship between individuals and the state and advocates for an ethical way of ‘being in the world’ and a ‘critique of power and social relations’ to form an ‘alternative history’ (Hildebrand 2009:3, 6)

PRACTICE

In the following text, I aim to set out the process of my practice and to describe selective examples of a lengthy practice-based research process, conducted with several gaps over a period of years. Residents suggested I had arrived and captured the tipping point, the end of the Old Town that they had known. During the research period, I recorded how the area became overwhelmed not just by tourism but by corporate controls (Mitchell 2013:5). The process as outlined conforms with the rigours of creative practice; the process of filming interacted with and was influenced by events
and people, how they engaged and, in turn, affected the process. The work itself was subject to real-life events and experiences. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, my experience as a creative practitioner enabled me to adapt and see how I could incorporate setbacks, limitations and adversity and turn them into innovations that expressed the research narratives that unfolded. The process was reactive, responsive, and imaginative in solving technical limitations or difficulties.

The project was moulded as much by what unfolded as by events. I documented the changing nature of place. It is argued that representation is attached to the urban image but not bound by it and reflects the space of the city and that, therefore, the nature of representation is global (Mennel 2008:197). In contrast, this film is a situated work that explores how the global has impacted the specificity of the local. In these circumstances, adopting the techniques of the bricoleur is the most responsive way to complete the research.

As a documentarian, what matters most to me is what is recorded. However, what was recorded was determined by my response to what was observed or relayed. Initially, I started making the film using the same pseudo-monologue style interspersed with observational recordings, as had been my evolving practice. However, as I embraced the theoretical discourses, over time my approach evolved. Thus, this film was formed by incorporating many modes of the documentary genre, and incorporates
observational, expository, reflexive, compilation, and interactive modes. It incorporates and makes use of the archive of media that I have recorded, meshed with material that I have gathered either from capturing the media myself or making a recording of recordings, or a representation of a representation, or where other makers and bodies have generously allowed me access to their archives.

Originally, I set out to create a series of interwoven stories, and this intention was in some respects maintained. However, at the beginning, I had been intent on showing the OT from different perspectives – of a shop keeper, a developer or a resident. As I had obtained consent from my father and Julie, I largely followed their direction and did not introduce a third character until later in the first year of production, and this is reflected structurally in the film. Simon is gradually introduced in the film as my relationship with him developed in real life. It is also of note that the characters portrayed in the film are all white and of Caucasian origin, reflecting the traditional racial bias of the area. I did seek to engage some of the Sikh and Asian shop keepers, and specifically the Gold Brothers who own many retail outlets in the area and had done so since I was a child, but they declined to be involved, although they did offer me access to film the Tartan Mill at the top of the Royal Mile.

Julie determined the structure of the film as she invited me to document planning consultations and hearings. I gained access once to film inside one of the crucial
planning hearings (consents to film later hearings were denied) but I continued filming outside the City Chambers at each controversial hearing because I recognised that these hearings represented the democratic system at least in principle. A subsequent study of the Screen Education Archive revealed (as I already knew from my childhood) that the Royal Mile and the site outside the City Chambers on the High Street had been the location of congregated civic protests for decades. Historical textual research reaffirmed that the use of this locality for protest went back centuries in what Mitchell would call ‘a dialectic between representational space and spaces for representation’ (Mitchell 2003:129).

Yet this space was now part of the central tourist area, or what is referred to as ‘a morphology of the hyper tourist city representing a transformation in temporary capitalism’ (Hofmann, Feinstein and Rudd 2003:61). The locality had simultaneously, therefore, four conflicting functions which formed the focus of the conflict. As the material will show, it was completely cordoned off for festivals and events, a residential area, a place of protest and apparently also a representative space. It is the building where democratically elected people make decisions apparently on behalf of the city’s electors. The right to be represented is based on residency. Residency and the right to enjoy one’s home were contested as each planning consent led to the construction of more hotels and more infrastructure to support the transformation towards temporary capitalism against which the resident electors were protesting. The location represented the conflict. This conflict was not physically violent, as is described in
Cahal’s work on Participatory Practice in Conflict Situations (2023). No one was killed (except my father through an entirely different but structurally similar means), but buildings that were part of the fabric of the community were being destroyed and, with them, homes emptied and depopulated of residents. The Macrae Tenements, built by the renowned city architect Ebeneezer Macrae (1881–1951) and owned by the local council, were emptied of tenants and destroyed at a time when there was significant demand for social housing. Therefore, although the conflict was not physically violent, it represented a catastrophe for the residents and their community and the destruction of their environment.

Julie also enabled me to access the many recordings about the Old Town which she had organised for local community screenings and gatherings, where I made recordings of recordings. Julie and her partner, the filmmaker Ian Ferguson, kindly also gave me access to their own archive of material from SOOT (Save Our Old Town) and the former Bongo Club and artist studios and material shot locally. Julie was well informed about the civic rights of the community and planning legislation and exercised her knowledge in the interests of the community. At one point in the film, after being given one weekend to read volumes of documents relating to the planning application for the New Waverley Development, Julie questions who can navigate this terrain if she struggles to do so as a trained planning officer. However, my documentation of Julie represented her struggle to defend the collective rights of residents in her role as chairwoman of the Community Council. It also portrayed the personal loss of her home, as it became no
longer a place that she wanted to live, surrounded by hotels. It was however not an exploration of Julie as a person, and the film only shows the impact of the development on Julie personally, which she allowed me to represent as she wanted what had happened to the Old Town to be documented. I never sought to encroach on Julie’s private life or other aspects of her life, because it was neither relevant nor appropriate nor would it have been possible. Julie determined not just her own representation as co-author, but the focus of the project (Cahal 2023:8).

Beyond my father’s reflexive function in narrating his experience of the Old Town of my childhood and his views about events in the past and present, he was highly politically engaged for a large part of his life, until he became disabled. In the recordings, he discusses his belief in collectivity and community engagement. Yet, in the context of his death, the schism between his beliefs or values and the reality of his life and experience is another story. As we will explore later in this text, selecting which narrative threads to show and share is part of the creative treatment of actuality (Grierson in Winston 2008:222, Ruiz 2005:117–118). Through the depiction of my father, images of myself and framed pictures of other relatives, the audience will gain an insight into my perspective and cultural background. I also filmed my shadow and reflection in various shots, using windows and mirrors.
Simon has an idealist perspective and, although he passionately believed in his values, and his campaign against the India Buildings and Kings Stables Road development he had understandably less experience of the planning system than Julie. Observing that the traditional methods of appealing against the planning system had had no success on the Caltongate and New Waverley Developments, Simon turned to direct action, such as squatting in trees or on the development site itself. He also organised petitions and mass town hall-style meetings and even risked his home to take the council to judicial review. All these activities were documented but did not necessarily make the final edit. Despite considerable effort and sacrifice, none of the strategies was successful, and New Waverley, the India Building Development and Kings Stables Road were all given full planning permission.

Working with subjects is always a partnership arrangement. If there was a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament that my father thought I ought to film, I would go down at short notice and record. If there was a planning hearing, a charette or community meeting, or some spectacle or event on the street, Julie and Simon would invite me to observe, or suggest I filmed it and help me gain access to it. Julie organised a role for me as the Community Council minute-taker, and this enabled me for ten months of the year to document and record in minute form all the meetings of the Community Council. I also met other community councillors, activists and officials from different bodies at these meetings.
I would go to public meetings to film and or take notes. One meeting that stood out was called by Edinburgh World Heritage and brought together representatives from the Old and New Towns. It revealed not only a complete divergence of experiences but also that the Old Town was being subjected to very different pressures. This meeting was regretfully not filmed, but I took copious minutes as it seemed to exemplify the historic class divide in Edinburgh. Those from the New Town were concerned about how to source doorknobs compliant with a Grade II listing, and how to manage tagging. The Old Towners were fighting to protect their right to the city.

This instinctive interaction with community protagonists reflects Freirean principles. In following these principles, the researcher works in partnership with the communities being researched, and respects that the communities under study are not only autonomous but make significant proactive contributions to the direction of the research, the materials gathered and the subsequent interpretation of the work (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:422).

Functionally, both Julie and Simon, although interacting within the same geography, in the same time zones or contexts, employed different strategies but arrived at similar conclusions in the current context. Whilst my father and campaigners of his generation had more success. The documentary seeks to explore the juxtaposition of these experiences and the inferences we can draw from them, supported by research into the
evolving economic management of land between the 1970s and the present. Steinberg (2010) notes that critical research recognises that Westernised cultures are not necessarily free or democratic (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018). The juxtaposition of these characters explores how much democratic control residents have in the Old Town, the centre of the capital city of Scotland, in the present day.

During field work, I often ask questions, in a pseudo-monologue style (Nichols 1991: 4). The use of the word ‘pseudo’ here is revelatory: I am trying to achieve a true likeness of the person stylistically, but my role as a director is to tell a specific story. This naturally leads to specific questioning which I often hide in my films. When the answer articulates the required information, my question becomes superfluous and is removed. This allows more time for my subject and serves to compress and condense the storytelling. With my father, however, I would ask a question and remind him to put the question into his answer and can frequently be heard doing this on recordings. My interactions with my father will be selectively stylistically reflexive. Some of the scenes with other protagonists will be represented more in pseudo-monologue mode.

When filming Councillor Ian Perry, Convenor of the Planning Committee, I was given exactly thirty minutes to conduct the interview. Just as we were getting to the end of the interview, I felt Councillor Perry began to answer the questions in more depth, but someone came to the door to ask for him, which meant the interview had to end. I
continued filming cutaways and Councillor Perry returned, surprised that I was still in his office. This example, juxtaposed with other material, demonstrates the degree to which the interviewee determines their own representation, which is ultimately their right.

In contrast, I would spend sometimes several hours with the other main protagonists and spend time socially as our relationship developed into a friendship, which is common in intimate settings such as the home, or when attending events or meetings together. It has the benefit that the viewer when they see the person speaking on the screen, see that they are often being addressed as a friend, because that is the dynamic between maker and subject. This also reflected what became a friendship between subject and documenter.

The filming of events depended on practical matters such as safety or logistics. The recordings of the Orange Lodge and the Scottish Defence League were taken from my father’s living room, as I did not feel safe to film among them. Other events deemed to be safer, such as an Independence rally or a Pride march were filmed from within the crowd and proved safe. Given the multiple choices and methods involved in capturing a specific real and lived event, how it can be argued the recording represents reality? The recordings could still miss key moments, or the edit could misrepresent the reality.
The Orange Lodge and Scottish Defence League recordings offer another example of the fluidity of the recording process. I wanted to show the spectacle of the full force of the Orange Lodge, assembled to march against the vote for an Independent Scotland. Pudovkin describes exactly how to film a protest when he describes establishing shots, close-ups and immersion shots inside the protest to give the spectator the full perspective (1929:84). However, I did not follow these and filmed from one fixed position inside my father's house. At that stage, I was still trying to maintain the illusion; only the dirt on the windows and the fixed position of the camera indicated that I was inside.

During the Scottish Defence League march, my father could not resist making disapproving comments about the marchers and we ended up blethering. When I digitised the tapes, while he was still alive, I cut out his comments, not intending to show them. After his death, I realised that these scenes reveal our relationship and add humour in a reflexive sense. The interactions create what Brecht would refer to as the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the alienation or distancing effect, devised because Brecht believed that naturalism in theatre perpetrated a bourgeois perspective on life and thus wanted to remove the viewer from the illusion (Bartram and Waine 1982:132–135). By taking the viewer away from the spectacle of the marches and into the living room, I hope to achieve a similar reflexive affect in the narrative.
An interview with a member of the community would invariably lead the research in different directions. In recordings with Heather, the street weaver, regarding the changes to the Fringe as it became more corporate and how this affected the street traders, the statue of Adam Smith on the High Street appeared as a backdrop, and this led me to read his *Wealth of Nations* (Smith 2012). This led me to understand that geography and economics are interlinked and then to read other authors and watch films that depict and or explore the history of land use and its economic role and to research how and why land ownership is now central to the UK and other Western economies. Playfully, I also filmed Heather, who always liked to be situated behind the statue. I represented her not just as an individual but as an attraction. However much of this material that I really valued is not included in the film; neither are many of the fascinating insights and beliefs of Smith, which provided not just a description of economics, but a history and reflection of Smith’s understanding of the society he knew.

I was not able to film every day in specific blocks because I also had to make time for other research practices and duties. My approach to creating documentaries is to film my subjects in their own milieu. I generally follow my subject’s natural orientation, exercise no staging, and offer no direction. This Freirean mode (Kincheloe et al. in Denzin and Lincoln 2018:422) leads to hours of material captured and considerably expands the investment of time needed both in recording and editing. However, the use
of this approach is more respectful and inclusive of the individuals being documented and produces more engaging material.

The filmmaker and editor are not grand authors but adapt to practicalities. A film is never just a conceptual entity of ideas and how they manifest in practice. The eventual images that are seen in the film depend not on what you imagine, or what you think you shot, but what is on the tape. The reality of the results constitutes ‘fragments of space’ or representation, not actuality, (Chanan 2007:79). My knowledge of editing leads me to film and capture for the edit, I edit in my head while I gather images or street scenes, and the thrill of this process is that reality always provides images outside the scope of what I plan. In one such example, I went to film the city during the refuse workers’ strike at the 2022 Edinburgh Festival. The rubbish was piled up everywhere, but the tourists and market stall holders all tried to pretend they were not standing amidst squalor. Tourists were all around and even went into the centre of my frame to take the perfect picturesque photograph of Edinburgh Castle. Reality is so much more interesting if you just let it unfold and adapt to what is found. However, regardless of how mesmerising filming street scenes in the Old Town could be, so much of this filming never made it into the final project edit.
The film may have three central protagonists and many other secondary but equally relevant subjects, but the central topic was the Old Town itself and, specifically, the Royal Mile area. I wanted to see how it was used and by which groups, and to be able to show the full kaleidoscope or spectacle on the street and surrounding closes. I did not film every single opening of parliament, affair of state or spectacle that crossed through the streets, because these state-organised events could, if needed, be found on television, and then recorded from the television broadcast. In considering the representation of reality, I filmed inside and outside the Camera Obscura situated above the street’s Lawn Market, capturing a series of shots of reflections from a range of illusionary mirrors. I caught not just a cavalcade of characters of all ages traversing the street, but reflections of myself as a filmmaker. I also filmed reflections in shop windows, tourists, trains, transport, night life, buskers, performers, tour guides and historic buildings, and gathered the spectacle of the present-day Old Town. In tandem, I searched personal and institutional archives in photographs and moving images to
acquire what could be used to show the street through the eyes of others and to patch together images from the past.

As the Royal Mile and Old Town are constantly photographed or filmed by broadcast and print media, and tourists, because they are the location of civic institutions, I also made the early decision not just to film what I saw, but to film the broadcast media and other filmmakers and photographers. Where practical and relevant, I obtained or made copies of what they had filmed by filming the day’s news. I felt that revealing the apparatus of other filmmakers and broadcasters would show viewers the multiple facets of representation, especially if these were juxtaposed with my own recordings. I took a specialist stills camera with the capacity to take multiple images per second into places where access was restricted, and where I faced practical issues such as adverse weather. This offered the additional option of using stills in sequences or the opportunity to create animated sequences of movement.
I continued to document the campaign against the India Buildings /Virgin Hotel development. There were many forms of protest, but a banner made by Simon featured the word ‘Endarkenment’ emblazoned across it. This related to the idea that the hotel development would take light away from the Central Library, gifted to the city by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1890. The image and the rhetoric of the banner directed me to conduct textural research on themes around the Enlightenment.

I recall going through the picture library at Historic Environment Scotland and discovering photographs of the construction of the visitors’ centre at Edinburgh Castle. I noted the dates as being in the late 1980s and was prompted to further research the history of the period and explore the influence of the new Conservative government elected in 1979 in other textual research (Beckett 2009; Brown and Cook 1983; Duverger 1972; Gordon 1985; Hill 1974; Ironside and Seifert 2000; Meighan 2012). My connection with and experience of the Old Town informed many of my choices as to what avenues would prove useful.

The process was also informed by what I could not film. I specifically wished to document the clearance of the homeless and services for them through the course of the film. As discussed, there had been a tradition of supporting homeless people in the OT and significant infrastructure to do so. I interviewed several charities providing services and regularly spoke to homeless residents. Whilst they had no home, they
were sleeping in nooks and crannies and hidden places in the locality. They were therefore resident, even though they had no house. As Mitchell observed, homeless people are forced to live their private life in public spaces because they have no private space (Mitchell 2003:142). Over the course of time, I would build up a relationship with individuals only for them to be moved on away from the locality; thus, events led to my hope to represent more homeless people, and the process by which they were excluded from an area that had once provided sanctuary, to evaporate. It became clear that the further the OT was commodified, the more the public space available became contested, even though homeless figures in Edinburgh increased.  

![Image of my father being congratulated for his activism outside Waverley Court, 2015.](image)

In the winter of 2016, my father was diagnosed with cancer, leading to the suspension of the project and my becoming his primary carer. Initially, we supported him in trying to

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find a cure, but he was diagnosed as terminally ill on 4 May 2017. I was only allowed to film my father voting. During his last vote, my instincts as a filmmaker and storyteller overrode my duty as a daughter and I asked him to state that he had cancer during a recording, which he was clearly reluctant to reveal. I can see in the scene what I felt was an extraordinary act on his part, to insist on his right to exercise his vote even though he was near death. This was the last time I was allowed to record him.

At one point before he died on 28 July 2018, I took my digital camera and recorded a few rapid-fire shots of my father in bed, in a foetal position. He raised his hand to tell me to stop and, out of respect, I did. I wanted to document the scene I saw every morning, which was the sight of my father suffering. I deliberately kept the camera at a distance to protect his dignity, but in my representation of my own life, I wanted to convey the tragedy of his experience and my own. However, I was extremely limited in what I could show. My priority was to respect my father and his dignity. Those nine shots taken over the course of a few seconds contain images that haunted my subconscious and represent pain.

I shot the remaining material as I was clearing out my father’s house after his death, which coincided with the opening of the Infected Blood Inquiry. Revelations that our loved ones had become infected because they were used to test the infectivity of blood
products led me to document my voice, suffering from distress and shock, as I reflected on my dad’s empty home on the last day, we had access to the property.

A filmmaker who decides to begin a project and, specifically, one that is long-term and experimental, is for the most part travelling on a journey without a map or even a destination. They have no idea where it will lead, nor what type of terrain they will experience and endure. I would never have envisaged that Julie would sell her home and leave. The idea that someone like Simon Byrom would end up camping in a tree, only to become embroiled in a failed legal process and then leave the city altogether was unforeseeable, yet in some way predictable. Lastly, I could never have predicted that my own father’s life would end shrouded in so much tragedy. Whether I would have filmed it with the benefit of foresight is questionable. Ultimately this genre of documentary creation is a speculative process, led by events and people and shaped by the decisions of the filmmaker.

The decision to include my father and the story of his life has been an emotional one. His death represents for me a profound and tragic loss that I do not want to share with anyone. Yet not to include his story would deny my father the right to tell the story of his part in a successful campaign to reduce the rents in the Old Town. Audiences would be denied the juxtaposition of different people’s experiences in different times and under different political leadership. We would lose the contrast between the past and the
present. My father would otherwise not have existed; his memory and life would be merely defined by victimhood, and not by the person he was. The film would not be reflexively situated in a personal sense, which would have impacted its veracity. This is a film about an area and a person who has had a profound impact on the person and filmmaker I am, and which situates me in time and place. I also had to acknowledge the contradiction that would arise if – as a filmmaker who asked others to share their lives with me and my camera, to allow me to invade their privacy – I then withheld my personal loss and devastation.

These disparate examples from observational material, reflexivity and personal tragedy, demonstrate the fluidity between ideas, methods, outcomes and representations that have formed the final chronology of the film which is *Old Town Tales*.

How one image or idea stimulated different research paths from practice to theory, and back to practice, is relevant in this context. Bricolage is the idea of making use of circumstances and available resources. Taking ideas and inspiration from the community and my own experiences led the research; theoretical and qualitative research then informed the practice and revealed that the process is far from indexical or purist. The product does not tell the viewer how the film was created, only what the finished film decides to reveal. Without consideration of how films are created and by
whom, documentaries cannot claim to represent reality any more than other genres of film; they are to some degree constructions.

The editing process is where the film is made; while a film can only be created from what is recorded, and the material is thus finite, the editorial decisions are infinite. ‘The foundation of film is editing’, said Podovkin (1929:15). Pudovkin also asserted that ‘films are not shot but built’ (Ibid:16). The editing is broken down into stages which I define in this text. Before the project can be built, the bricks or individual fragments, or shots must be defined. Then, through experiment, it must be determined in what order the fragments should be assembled. This requires different perceptual considerations,
because the film manifests on different levels: there is firstly the story of each individual, what their actions were and how their lives changed throughout the process in a way that best represents them. There is the question of how I situate myself within the film, to what extent I reveal myself and how. Then there is the wider story of the Old Town and how to convey the spatial use, and how that impacts the residents and, further, how the broader themes of the commodification of the Old Town can be represented. Lastly, how can this media convey how the city changes? I identified themes, or as I called them threads, which had to be pulled through the film. These were defined as transition and change, past and present, siege and disconnection from place, loss and grief, impact on the individual and place, commodification, and original culture.

I amassed an extensive archive during this research project, sufficient to make a whole series of films. I also shot hours and hours of media which became both a source of opportunity and choice, and simultaneously a burden. Managing this material became the greatest challenge of the entire project. What contributed to the project’s uniqueness was the depth of work involved, yet the scale of it made the project a monumental task for one person to embark upon. In the hands of other researchers, this archive of recordings and found footage could be transformed into multiple assemblages, endless times over. Ruiz argues that each clip is a film with a beginning, middle and end, as a single entity. When we assemble films, we are in essence creating not just one film, but a reference to hundreds of other films (Ruiz 2005:117–118). The first consideration is not to include in the timeline or edit, but what to leave out, as this
will never be shown or seen by audiences. This selectivity, before the film is even structured into modes, or built frame by frame, is the very essence of the constructed nature of the documentary film and its distinct resemblance to other forms of representation in moving images. The shot's value is often not in its individual properties but in its ‘plasticity’ or flexibility to be intercut with other images to create filmic geographies (Kuleshov in Pudovkin 1929:86). One example is the juxtaposition or parallelism (Pudovkin 1929:70) between the street drummer in Simon’s scene at the India Buildings planning hearing, and the scene where Julie, at home, is objecting to the noise from the construction going on around her. This reinforces the theme of siege. One scene was set in the High Street, the other in New Street and they were filmed in different time frames, but the two residents have parallel experiences from an emerging culture (buskers and hotel construction) that caters to visitors and not to them.

7.2 Pipers and Scots Guards performing at an official ceremony for the tourists, layered with images of Canongate Kirkyard cemetery. Copyright JGS
Mennel defines a globalised city as a deterritorialised environment (Mennel 2008:197). The term ‘deterritorialised’ refers to the idea that globalisation has removed the specificity of the city, and stripped away what would be culturally unique to the place. As this film is structured around the idea of a transition between territories that existed in the past and those in the present, and their former users and those in the present, I have filmed numerous scenes with each principal protagonist and the secondary characters over a lengthy period, which shows how their hold over the territory they are contesting changes. Whilst the focus is on the process of their experience of this transition, the film was built around their experience as individuals, the intention being to create a film driven by people, not polemics. It is very important to represent each person, with a summary of what they actually said, and not to use them as a mouthpiece for the filmmaker’s own beliefs.

In an ideal world, digitisation would occur at the end of the project, not in stops and starts. This project ran into difficulty from the beginning, because not only did I amass a substantial archive, but I significantly overshot when documenting the Old Town. I was forced to shoot on different cameras and formats by circumstance, and the editing was also conducted sporadically due to the need to present work for assessment and clarity. This created considerable difficulty as my editing equipment was not designed for 4K, and I had to upgrade. The project was further complicated by the differing image and media quality among the archive material gathered. I resolved some of this by making recordings of recordings, which was successful when, for example, capturing media from television, but recording live screenings sometimes created image flicker,
which was not only unsightly but resulted in poor image quality. As filmmakers, we seek to create aesthetic illusions and a blended reality which is graded and colour corrected. This is part of the filmic process in which we create a complete world which is ultimately an illusion because all films are fragments of representation given the illusion of coherence. Confronted with different grades of pixel quality and technical glitches, I had to make the decision to go against my natural instincts and make these qualitative differences a stylistic choice.

Consequently, I created images of images; it is questionable how far this can be considered to reflect any conception of reality or whether it rather imitates it, (Ruiz 2005: 43). Rather than allow this to be an obstacle or become concerned that it might affect the quality of the construction of my illusion, I was forced to consider how this could become advantageous. I then found ways to use the difference visibly in formats and to consciously expose it. This went against my natural instincts to make images look real. I made a conscious choice not to disregard an image or clip just because it was stretched or distorted because the reflexive purpose of the project is to reveal the properties of the illusion to the viewer. By assembling a range of images of varying quality, and formats to produce an aesthetic which is demonstrably not one unified illusionary construct, the film distinguishes between and juxtaposes the production of illusion and deconstruction. Yet it is also a means to explore reflexivity and to show the audience that the film itself is a construct.
With hours of material to distil, I created multiple timelines for each character, studied and reviewed them, and gradually pulled out similarities or scenes which could be linked for juxtaposition. I began to build scenes, and again these were cut down. Aaltonen suggests that this process of distillation is where the filmmaker’s voice is ‘constructed’ and where the ‘filmmaker is using all cinematic means for his or her own purposes’, arguing that the subject cannot control the editing process (Aaltonen 2016:173). Had my father lived, he would have been involved in the editing process. Julie saw several versions of the edit and was always in control of her own representation. She told me what she did not want to be used. Simon was the only main character not to have that opportunity, purely because he travelled overseas.

The planning hearing filmed inside, for example, had a running time of one hour, which was condensed to 31 minutes, and then condensed further. Each time, I had to try to represent the unfolding story that had originally been captured. Then I created multiple timelines for events and agreed with my supervisors to restrict these to electoral events such as referenda. It was a case, not of changing the essence of how Julie presented the community’s case at the hearing, but finding a way to distil it.

A film does not reflect the reality of the recording process, because a part has been removed. Consider a series of photographs of an event, one-third of which has been taken away. I had hours of recordings for each person and my first task was to break these down by creating longer timelines of each person and then reviewing each scene to identify overarching themes. The work cannot be determined merely by imaginative
visualisation, but by experimenting and the process of showing whether it works. The principle is that you cannot think it; you have to see it and then check it with participants (Savran 1986:195). In creating a product or an artefact, even if it is written, you have to write it to see if it reads as intended. If you paint something you have to see if it’s as you intended, and if you record something you have to check it. In all creative endeavours, a common approach is to follow a systematic process where an artist can gauge what works and what does not through a subjective series of decisions. In documentary films, choices are specifically determined by what is recorded, not what the film maker conceives (Nichols 2010:3). In terms of representation, there is always an opportunity for the subject to be involved in the editing stage, and it has often been my practice to involve participants in this process. In this case, however, only Julie was able to engage with it, and Covid and other factors interfered with the process more than was ideal. It is infinite in terms of the scale of options but fixed by the technical realities of which recording is more effective and the juncture at which one believes an audience will need to know the information conveyed in the sequence.

As an approach to gathering archive footage for what can also be termed a compilation film (Amad 2015:89), consideration was given to the aesthetic and veracious quality of images, given the scope of technology from the Camera Obscura to today’s digital technology. Many twentieth-century films created scenes with backdrops, models, and live and studio shots cut together to create the illusion of continuous flow but, like the Wizard of Oz when the curtain is pulled back, these illusions are now transparent when viewed on modern technology (Fleming 1939). North by Northwest (Hitchcock 1959) is
a good example because, on modern digital televisions, we can see the interaction between footage of the real crop-dusting plane chasing the character Thornhill, played by Grant, and the scenes of Grant ducking and cowering from the plane which were recorded in a controlled environment in the studio. The films are still imminently watchable but offer some insight into the ingenuity of filmmakers. Do the quality of the image and the number of pixels or frame size lessen the capacity of constructed illusions? Will a film made from woven fragments of media still suspend our disbelief (Bartram and Waine 1982:134)? Do the arguments as to the veracity and actuality of film rest on the quality of the film or the image, or on the overall heuristic, cathartic, or perceptual properties of the film project?

Ruiz, in his *Poetics of Cinema*, discusses the narrative and discursive properties between each joined clip, or what happens between each fragment, and whether the construction conveys montage or mise-en-scène. This relates to the distinction between visual montage or juxtaposition, or whether the edit seeks to offer the illusion of a continuous flow of movement through space. Ruiz refers to the different conventions of editing nationally, describing how French cinema – which acknowledges the time it takes to change point of view – takes frames out, or how the Russians add frames from the previous scene to acknowledge what went before. These debates, described by Ruiz, represent the detail, down to each frame, of how the illusions constructed to convey the narratives of versions of reality are considered and treated by filmmakers (Ruiz 2005:116–118). Does the juxtaposition of images, or the formation of a new image, render the image any less representative or factually situated because I
have assembled or collaged it with other images? Pudovkin refers to filmic time, where images are connected to tell the story. We do not need to show the entire movement because, in filmic time, it is only essential to show what happened, not how it happened (Pudovkin:82). This subtraction from reality is yet another example of why documentary recording and creative choices of filmmakers are what constitute indexicality.

I experimented further with palimpsest (Williams 1993:197), the video-layering of different media to form visual montages, which shows images in different formats and image qualities of the past under those of the present. Created by building layers of media of different opacities woven together, it is intended to create different possibilities in viewing and new perspectives for audiences.
There are distinct differences, however, in the construction of some of the layered montages, depending on their narrative function. The title sequence where OTT is portrayed in the form of a yarn bomb attached to the railings at Edinburgh Castle is intended to suggest a tapestry. These are then juxtaposed with images from the tartan mill and the cityscape. In contrast, other scenes create a montage of found footage and archive material with my own recordings and relate to the passing of time or the idea that the space and place of the Old Town have been used by different communities over time. Scenes depicting events and elections also incorporate different images, but only those taken from the same event or moment in history and are mixed with captured news broadcasts about the same event or moment in history. These are layered and mixed with images of others who were recording those same scenes at the same time as I was. This is intended to be a form of digital cubism to show as much of an event as possible in each moment on the timeline. This demonstrates both the selectivity of the camera or viewer and the limits of representation.

I intended also to portray that history is captured by different agencies for different purposes. News is defined by Nichols (2001:53) as resorting to ‘demonstrative proof’, which comes from, ‘factual evidence brought before us’. However, in the context of the present, where broadcasters are often accused of misrepresentation and sensationalism, the plurality of news providers leads to the ‘news’ no longer being seen as providing the ‘demonstrative proof’ it might once have done, even though this has consequences when factual information is not reported correctly (Dempster, Sutherland
In choosing to employ these techniques, I am not merely arguing that filmmakers are situated and subjective, but that documentaries are constructs whether they capture real events and people or not. Reflexivity can be shown through the construction of a film or situate the maker within it; it can in this instance also show construction by creating new images through the juxtaposition, layering or reflection of different realities representing similar localities.

If an image is superimposed on a series of images, resulting in layers of audio-visual collage, is the constructed image any less of a referent or index to the historical world, than any other documentary image? Does the novel construction of fragments of actuality create new representations of realities, or does it merely represent how I wish to convey layers of narrative in juxtaposition with reality, reflecting the complexity of our society’s use of space and place? Is this also a form of assembling different representations or memories of what the person who took the image saw when they captured it?

Berger suggested that every image embodies a way of seeing, but that an image can outlast what it represents and become part of a consciousness that accepts that all images are a construction of how X saw Y (Berger 1975:10). On this basis, the construction of palimpsest can be accepted as a construction of images, amalgamating different photographs or media from other sources and times. These images and sequences aim to achieve a layered work that is subject and open to interpretation (Savran 1986:53).
Another technique, one that I call ghosting, layers images of old buildings under new ones or shows the previous users of places over the location in its present form to show both how the use has changed and how space is reinvented and used by different communities.
Ruiz argues that language is a discourse about the world and that photography and cinema are languages of the world. Yet he sees each sequence of moving icons as either illusionary or stripped of meaning and discourse because they contain the power of illusion which is essentially unable to change the world. After all, it reinforces the status quo (Ruiz 2005:32). Bazin, in turn, states that cinema today no longer has an anthropocentric utilitarian purpose but, rather, reinforces an ideal world in the likeness of the real and preserves life (Bazin 1960:6). These theorists imply that the construction of modern cinema and television reflects to audiences an image of self that reinforces our reality, rather than questioning it or seeking to reveal what Ruiz also refers to as the invisible or to see with our souls (Ruiz 2005: 32, 36).

The structure of capitalism has created a cinema and television industry that reinforces the consumption and exchange model that fuels and reinforces it. While the function of cinema may be for escape or entertainment, rather than to challenge the construction of this model, the dichotomy between reality and illusion is central to this discourse. The goal of this research is to explore this contested space and the transformation of a place into the capitalist ideal of consumption and fantasy. It is acknowledged by film theorists that what is captured in front of the camera lens is subject to choices made by the camera operator, who determines what the camera captures (Nichols 1991:79). It is also accepted that the decisions of editors, and how they juxtapose sound and image (Ruiz 2005:116–118), will alter how the filmmaker constructs the scene and chooses which techniques to employ, such as montage or mise-en-scène. The realities
of the observational recording process are, however, given less attention in theoretical
discussions about the construction of documentaries.

Tapestry

I chose to make a film about the place I and others once called home. Yet the
landscape of the present was unfamiliar and alien. Both my former childhood homes
had been transformed into holiday lets for tourists; community cohesion was
comparatively threadbare. I sought to explore through film and text how this
transformation had occurred. To seek to understand the present. I gradually found
myself exploring not just how we had progressed from the 1970s of my childhood to
the present but reaching further into the past to understand how societies had evolved.
This investigation was too vast in scope to be confined to a small research project and film about one local area, but it informed my perception of the process and production of the film. I was exploring spatially and discovering through time, piecing together fragments of different histories, like someone rummaging or digging in a form of textual and visual archaeology, but one with infinite depth. The Old Town exists within a framework that is not reductive but relational. I found myself directed to explore the form and theories of documentary production and to contemplate the nature of representation. This final section seeks to interweave the expansive strands of textual research that explore both the history of the city and its development as an evolving place with the social and economic narratives that can be found in Old Town Tales as a film.

In Old Town Tales I am simultaneously conveying the perspective and experience of others in the community seen through my own eyes, and my own subjunctive experience. I am also revealing myself through the device of my parent and documenting my dad, which under the circumstances of his death seeks to preserve who he was rather than have his life defined as a victim, rather than to express his living point of view. OTT is also exploring the fragmentation of communities and of representation itself.

The destruction and reconstruction of place in the image of capital are revealed as the transcendence of use value ‘oeuvre’ into ‘product’ (Lefebvre (1996) 2006:66). My own
connection to the OT and emotional attachment impacts the form of representation of narrative. I am subjectively situated and emotionally affected increasingly as the story unfolds. However, like the audience, I have no foresight, knowledge, or control as to the trajectory of the story. I am both a spectator and a spectacle, with my own attachment captured and editorially situated. The city is threatened not just by the invasion of capital or tourists, but by the exodus of residents (Lefebvre (1996) 2006: 70).

If documentary space is historical (Nichols 1991: 79), then the city is an urban manifestation of our past and present. The opening sequence of Old Town Tales features images of aspects of Scotland’s constructed national identity with views of the cityscape: Edinburgh’s Baronial Castle; the social fabric of interconnecting streets; the horizon of buildings from different dynasties; the distant view of the seascape of the Firth of Forth, the gateway to Europe and the wider world; statues of Robert De Bruce and William Wallace. These images are interwoven with those from a tartan mill and merged with images of a yarn bomb made of threads, depicting the film’s title.

The views from the castle convey a sightline of power from a place of vantage. The images of textiles depict not only the construction of threads to form a tartan, but of fabrics produced on machines, by workers in an industrial setting. The yarn bomb, while referencing in this instance the film’s title, Old Town Tales, is a symbol of protest. Scottish yarn bombs embody a series of words crocheted together to express a collective outrage and have been a familiar sight around Edinburgh for several years.
Old Town Tales is a film that weaves a series of narratives together, not only depicting resident protests and campaigns against development but also exploring the nature of democracy and concern for the future of the city and Scotland.

In choosing to set the title sequence from the vantage point of Edinburgh Castle and using images of the castle in other establishing shots and sequences, I am situating the film in Scotland and, specifically, the city of Edinburgh. Over time, the castle has become one of the ‘most recognisable and reassuring sights in the Edinburgh skyline’ (Coghill 2014:10). Whilst its primary role today is as a tourist destination, Edinburgh Castle’s original role was to maintain power relationships in Scotland’s feudal past and the layout of the original city reflects this role (Thompson 1963:231), as in many other cities.

Edinburgh Castle not only dominates the landscape of Edinburgh, but it is also often used as the backdrop to news programmes about Scotland, serving as an iconic symbol of the country. In terms of the production of national identities, Anderson argued that historically the ‘fall of Latin as a universal language exemplified a larger process’ of the ‘fragmented, pluralised and territorialised’ spatial relationships central to the construction of the notion of nationhood in a globalised landscape (Anderson 2016:18–19); thus, the fall of historical empires with universal languages led to spatial fragmentation and the growth of regional and national identities. Anderson suggests that our cultural roots come from two distinct practices – religion and dynastic
identities (Ibid:10–22) – which are expressed in the geographies of our cities: medieval, Georgian, Victorian and post-war styles, brutalist modernism and now the monolithic structures of post-modernity. The greater our cultural homogeneity, the more we seek to create identities. The further Globalisation encroaches on our lives, the more perhaps we seek refuge culturally in specific national identities.

After the Act of Union, the Scots constructed a specific cultural identity to distinguish themselves within the Union, to become something other than ‘North Briton’ (Morris 2007:56; Hobsbawm 1983:12; Trevor-Roper 1983:15). Morris specifically argues that the Edinburgh Castle we see today was designed during the Victorian era to embody a visual symbol of Scotland (Morris 2007:57). Tartan and the tartan mill also became references for the national identity of Scotland and came metaphorically to refer to the woven construction of the film. Closer study confirms that the use of tartan in forming a Scottish national identity organised around surnames or clans is also a Victorian tradition; no tartans were specifically attributed to Scotland before 1805 (Roper in Hobsbawm, and Ranger 2000:18–20). Woven fabrics were common in Celtic cultures but only the wealthy wore brightly coloured clothes; in general, the fabrics worn by highlanders were brown (Ibid: 19). This being the case, images depicting tartanry, highlanders, or kilts are not an expression of national identity or ‘Scottishness’ but misrepresent a cultural identity for the benefit of the tourists.

Many of the cultural traditions of Scotland were ‘denizened’ (Trevor-Roper 2007: xxi). As Baudrillard describes, tourism often relies on:
… consuming in ritual form something which was a historical event and has been forcibly reactualised as legend. In history, this process is called restoration: it is a process of the denial of history and the anti-evolutionist resurrection of earlier models. Consumption, too, is thoroughly imbued with this anachronistic substance (Baudrillard 1988:99).

History, as a representation of time past, has become a commodity – our cultural roots are in this case part of a constructed identity now narrated and dramatised for mainstream entertainment, targeted at a broader social mass of consumers rather than specialist historians. Histories focused on political intrigues and power struggles between past elites are simply consumed; they stimulate no exploration of broader social contexts or structure. Reviewing a past focused on the working classes would lead many tourists to confront the substance of history rather than to escape it. Our leisure time is a refuge from work, but contextually our recreation is now another mechanism of exchange.

The title sequence, informed by these references and reflections, takes the form of a digital tapestry of an identity formed from the manifestation of myths which, in essence, offer an illusionary construct of Scottish identity and that of the capital city.
My aim is that viewers, given visual intersectional juxtapositions, will form their own interpretation of the combined images created. Our perspectives of time in the digital age relate not just to what we see and experience, but to the parallel universe of the digital landscape. Like the symbol of the train in modernity, the endless chimera of images and consumption of media collapse space and time to create a homogenised universal time. ‘We seem to be plunged into a permanent state of the self-reflexive crisis of representation. What was once a “mirror with a memory” can now only reflect another mirror’ (Williams 1993:10).

Delving into the history of Edinburgh, it becomes apparent that the themes expressed in the film do not reflect a present injustice, but a city built on class division. In Edinburgh and Scotland, at this juncture, it feels as if the discrepancies between elites and ordinary people are not just viewed as entrenched but there is no structural intention to either challenge it or address it (Sandercock and Attili 2014:23)

My own lifespan had bridged the period in our country’s past between pre-, during and post-Thatcherism. The landscape of my past is founded on the inculcation of my parents. My dad, one of the principal characters in OTT, was the product of the post-war consensus, of a time when the British and Scottish people had been indoctrinated in the belief that wars could only be won collectively (The Spirit of 45’, Loach 2013). Imbued with this spirit my dad believed that trade unions and collective bargaining would create a productive future.
Old Town Tales reveals the mechanism of attrition. The film begins with a younger Julie, setting the scene and outlining the complex role of the council as landowner, planning authority and regulator. We see the New Waverley Building, the administrative offices of the council, being constructed, which later becomes the scene of elections and voting in the film. We also see artists being evicted from a building and a man describing the reconstruction of the skip ‘for historical accuracy’. I chose this section as a historical reference, to show how the Old Bus Depot or Bongo Club (as it was referred to) was used historically. If OTT is to represent a social history of the city’s evolution, this scene becomes historically significant (Johnston in Wightman 2015: 4). The wider sequences of shots used to depict the OT portray a city of old and new buildings, with the castle perched above them on the hill.

In a consumerist society the use of the word product in the context of film, whilst appropriate creates a schism between both the notion of production and of art and the consumption of products. Whilst the confection of film revolving around show business and as a form of entertainment dates to the inception of cinema, (Gunning 1986:63), filmic time has often been an antithesis to the bleakness of real time. In filmic times, the labour of work and the actual experience of loss, or cruelty, are virtualised. We can become lost in the beauty of the image: The hero or heroine can defeat the foe, and or fall in hopeless love without risk or pain. For those moments, we can escape our own lives. I witnessed this when my father was dying. How he would rapaciously devour cinema and television, to escape from the torment of living.
In this era, whichever definition or label it is given, many of us use our free time not in the pursuit of collective, or shared leisure activities but increasingly segregated from empirical reality converging, melded virtual digital visibility (Acland 2012:171). Like the symbol of the train in modernity, the endless chimera of image and consumption of media equally collapses space and time to create a homogenised universal time. ‘We seem to be plunged into a permanent state of the self-reflexive crisis of representation. What was once a “mirror with a memory” can now only reflect another mirror’ (Williams 1993:10).

OTT portrays the experience of many communities through history and in the present. How a community fought and lost to prevent a series of buildings and local spaces which were common good assets became privatised and turned to uses that did not serve local people. It may be a constructed work, but it represents a shared reality. OTT reveals the mechanism of attrition. Regretfully we do not have access to the moving image archive of the Old Town as it was when I was a child, or even the streets’ fascinating transformations. The film begins with a younger Julie setting the scene and outlining the complex relationship the council has as landowner, planning authority and regulator.

Simon represents a more idealist perspective, but whilst he has lost faith in state institutions, he embodies someone who holds a moral belief in communities and their ability to transform society. Yet without faith in the system and with a contempt for
money or exchange itself, he was a figure who was alienated from the political hegemony but invested in ideas of universal suffrage and democratic freedoms.

Residents concerned with preserving a living city centre are not merely seeking the protection of their own quality of habitat. It is argued that, when Capitalism is unable to create surplus value, it resorts to exploiting land values (Kuymulu 2014:10), and that the desire to treat land as merely a product of exchange undermines the use value of urban spaces. In Scotland, the transfer of city land to generate income from tourism has grown since the 1980s and corresponds with the decimation of Scotland’s industrial economy, which was instigated during the Thatcher Administration of the era. This process is described as ‘commodification’ 41 of public space. Commodification ‘which is where the ‘market value’ comes to dominate use value’ (Herman 2021:20). This also constitutes introducing the ‘market where none had existed’ (ibid:21).

Meiksins-Wood argues that the origin of Capitalism is from agrarian culture, rather than industrialisation (2017:95-121) There has always been a market for land in the Old Town, but land ownership is in part central to the Scottish class system and power relationship. The Old Town of Edinburgh has in aspect always been a commodity even if this amounted to the capacity to accrue rent by slum landlords. The danger, as Herman sets out, is when the motive of exchange overrides the considerations of use and democratic rights. Specifically, since 2010 the Westminster Government’s policy to

41 https://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/history/case-studies/commodification-of-public-space/
reduce funding for local government and for public services, in general, has led to what Christophers refers to as the ‘New Enclosure’ (2019:2). The New Enclosure argues that since 1979, the Thatcher government sold over 2 million hectares of public assets to the private sector (ibid:2) and continues to be sold at a rate ‘unmatched in previous decades’, (bid: 3). Simon specifically expresses concerns about council debt and the impact this is having on their control of local assets in relation to the built environment.

Research demonstrated that there was a foundation for resident concerns about the City of Edinburgh Council. CEC, as with many other councils, has been forced to dispose of assets to fund public services which we the electorate consider to be our public right as we are charged council tax to fund those services. A proportion of which I have established and which is stated in the film, is being spent not on the provision of services but on the funding of debt. For the people of Edinburgh and, specifically in the Old Town, council taxes are being spent on servicing debt when the scale of interest is around half the value of the entire housing budget. It would thus appear, despite the increase in homes, that the housing budget has been cut in real terms despite increases in taxes and heritable taxpayers.

The question becomes that if land is ultimately finite, what will happen when there are no public lands or assets left to sell? Christophers discusses the consequences of

42 Gleaned from FOI requests Feb-March 2023 EDIR:40433)
inclusion and exclusion of societies arguing that we, the public, require political space
to exercise our legal and human rights (Christophers 2019:29). During the process of
my archive research and my own documentation it was shown that the Old Town,
Princess Street, the Mound, and the Meadows are all historic sites of protest and public
expression of the right to dissent publicly. Whilst the BID in the Old Town has collapsed,
the encroachment of business and the extension of business rights in the Old Town
continues unabated.

In May 2017, in the documented General Election where my father went to exercise his
right to vote, despite that very day being informed that he was terminally ill, the then
Conservative Government called a General Election in the hope of increasing their
parliamentary majority. One policy that attracted controversy and, in my own mind, cost
the government the election was the proposed ‘Death Tax’.\(^4\) This essentially proposed
that, to fund the care of the United Kingdom’s elderly population, the insurance sector
could appropriate ownership of the elderly person’s home. This would deny these
individuals the right to leave their homes to their children. This policy has since been
shelved, but the potential democratic consequences of such a policy on the rights of
citizens are worthy of reflection. What are the consequences to the public if both the
public and domestic realm become owned by corporations? OTT portrays the battle of
local people to protect the realm of their local area, and the consequences to them.

\(^4\) https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/18/the-snap-may-manifesto-time-death-tax
Christophers, citing EP Thompson, highlights the argument that ‘it was not land use, but who uses the land, and for what purpose?’ (Christophers 2019:30).

The central schism of Globalisation is the destruction of the productive economy. Smith argued that the source of wealth was labour, and, in the division of labour, it is cooperation and not competition that creates wealth (Smith 2012:15). My overall thesis is that a city without a centre undermines the capacity of citizens to exchange ideas and generate the kind of intellectual and economic growth identified by Pittock, (2019:17). If the city centre has now become a consumption space and not a place of production or mutuality which was a large part of the culture of the Old Town, then how does a city without a centre which is spatially segregated to the peripheries reproduce wealth when it is argued that creative economies are stimulated by the exchange, not just of ideas, but of social groups (Pitlock, 2019:8, 31,42). As mentioned, the Edinburgh of my youth had a centre, a locus where all kinds of people from every area of the city would congregate socially. Some fragments of this time are interwoven into the montaged sequences in the film to show the distinction between how the city was used in the past and is now refashioned in the present. Now the City is proposing 20-minute neighbourhoods and that we must confine ourselves to our postcodes, further leaving the exchange of ideas to virtual forums and not to social exchange.

In a society that sustains itself on inflated land values, how can Scotland and the Old Town become a productive economy again? Houses are no longer places to live, but commodities. In the power balance, most of the community council and certainly Julie
and Simon, were homeowners although, regardless of their property rights, the council yet again relinquished their rights in the interest of big business and gave away community assets because of the degree of indebtedness, even though there are many other ways open to local government to dispose of the land. What we have in all three developments are bland, inappropriate non-places that do not fit into the existing topography or respect the cultural heritage of the OT which I would proffer makes it an equally unattractive place to visit. The Old Town has become hollowed-out and a non-place, devoid of its history or essence. As Harvey argued: ‘There is duality where Capitalism and Urbanism are self-sustaining of the other, and Capitalism is perpetually producing the surplus product that urbanization requires’. The purpose of Capitalism is thus to generate surplus value but to do so involves creating surplus product (Harvey 2012:5), or at least extracting higher profit margins.

Cities are the domains of workers, not just as producers, but also as consumers, ‘Capitalism needs urbanisation to absorb the surplus products it perpetually produces’ (ibid 2012:5). However, if workers are unable to achieve sustainable wages to cover the expense of higher housing costs and their costs-of-living over time, then how will this impact on the tourism market and leisure time which are themselves now commodities? It is worthy of note that the creation of housing estates is argued to have led to the mode of accumulation over what was a more mutual and cooperative society (Smout 1997:150). The two groups who do not pay taxes to CEC are ironically students and tourists. This thesis has not even addressed the controversies over the construction of student housing blocks owned by various universities and private
companies such as Unite Students. Unless there is a sustained questioning of the status quo of the continued sale of public assets and disregard for Scottish communities, then the City of Edinburgh and the Old Town itself could be in jeopardy. There is a need to create productive places and spaces, as well as those of social and creative exchange.

The development of the Old Town, like other places, could have been defined as being subject to gentrification and degradation, but what is occurring now cannot be defined as such because there are no affluent new residents, but rather transient tourists and students, who themselves reflect the economies of consumption. The film portrays part of the process of residential exodus and the stream of tourists coming to explore what is now largely a hollowed-out city centre in comparison to the city’s past. As Harvey argued, labour has been devalued in ways that have led ‘capitalist urbanisation been driven…. to expand the terrain of profitable capitalist activity’ (Harvey 2012 6).

I would argue that the desire to profit from land in the absence of the land’s productive use has led to what I call transification. Higher values can be accrued from places where there are no longer fixed communities, only transient ones. The use of the space on the land is no longer rooted to place, but rather place becomes attached to the price or exchange value, rather than its use value, as it no longer functions as a place in which to be productive. The items of consumption are no longer produced locally but rather imported to be consumed, as we are no longer producers. In our consumption
spaces, our function is to consume place and extract value from moving through space. Transification is the transformation of the notion of freedom tied up in our relationship with space and land ownership. The notion of being a free person on land to have autonomy in the occupation of space and the freedom to accumulate and consume.

Inflated property values deny millennials from lower income groups the right to own property of their own and, therefore, the search for autonomy is replicated not just in the desire to consume, but to escape through the appearance or simulation of freedom in leisure time. The catch is that without income there can be no leisure because the act of leisure is now no longer about playing with dolls or football on the back green but travelling through space in the mode of consumption. I portray the juxtaposition between playing children and children who stare at themselves in mirrors to explore these ideas in the film.

Our role as citizens is potentially no longer to be citizens, and electorally rooted, but instead, our consumption of space itself is a source of income. We are charged taxes for where we live and taxed for moving through space. Space is now increasingly owned by corporations; our cities comprise Business Investment Districts where the businesses, and not the local authority, are responsible for the management of land and there is no longer any electable accountability. Corporations also are simultaneously taking over the functions of government through the increasing role of the private sector in managing public services (Minton 2006).
Benjamin, in a literal context, presented a series of questions in his essay ‘The Author as Producer’ relating to the ‘social conditions which are determined by conditions of production’ and where the ‘work stood within the production of time’ (1999:769). He felt that a more pertinent question than considering where a work was situated in its time was what the ‘function’ of the work was. Another way to frame that proposition might be to ask what is being signified or represented and why? What is the structural purpose of the documentary, if it is as argued to be an index? Should we be examining theoretically, as documentarians, the framework around representation in terms of its narrative and purpose within social conditions as much as we consider the interstices of how we represent? Both are relevant propositions, but for myself as a documentarian, as, much as representation is of paramount importance: the notion that I am in making a film showing how I perceived and understood my own time and geography and enabled a space for the film’s protagonists to represent themselves. I am as concerned, if not more so, with the narrative of the film, which is that, without effective democratic representation, comes a form of representative democracy as opposed to participatory democracy (Nichols 2010:3)

Conclusion

*Old Town Tales* as an academic research project documents a period of social change and was produced during a research project spanning a decade, from 2013 to 2024. As a research project, it gathers evidentiary audio-visual records portraying the
city centre of Edinburgh and the Old Town dating back to the 1980s and – in recordings of recordings – even earlier. The project has amassed over 140 hours of recordings and forty hours of archive material.

As a researcher, I have experimented with the documentary form, explored, and developed the mode of visual representation in its own mode of bricolage, deriving and creating something new from what is found and shared with bespoke recordings. The use of different types of media and the incorporation of montage, opacities and juxtaposition have developed ways of representing the world to reflect the complex and multidimensional ways we experience the world and produce knowledge that is empirically, relationally, and virtually expressed.

My work offers a thesis on the present, exploring the changing nature of place through film – the diminishing yet consistent lack of rights exercised by residential communities – and has explored the role of local government and corporations in shaping the topography of the city. As a researcher, I have created a situated individual perspective of the past – of a place that I came from and to which I held an emotional attachment. I have pioneered the role of the qualitative researcher in situating myself and my family within my research. Rather than claiming objectivity, I have pursued subjectivity and, with that, created something uniquely individual, not just to myself but in the telling of the story of a place, whilst simultaneously being part of and representing the lives of others.
It is my understanding that we can only use education and research to promote the Enlightenment’s notion of progress by representing all composites of a country and society. Change should not be imposed upon communities but rather developed with them. It is only by working with them and by creating history together that we can avoid the laws of unintended consequences and anticipate the future with more reason. I doubt that anyone, from any social group, desires social inequality or cannot see the broader harm to societies that seek to create different values and wealth by exclusion or disregard. Inclusivity can seem overly complex and time-consuming, but often the process itself is as beneficial as the end.

*Transification* is the fulfilment of the pursuit of exchange over use values and commodification to maximise income from land. The process of commodification and the pursuit of wealth from transient communities specifically as opposed to space being used for and by fixed residential communities creates a landscape that is hollow and transient, and which has diminishing electoral representation and residents to preserve its democratic use. In transience, we are moving through space rather than using it productively or democratically.

If we only think about the outcome of monetary wealth – as opposed to other values such as social, use, environmental or democratic values – we undermine the creation of monetary wealth. If we can only fulfil our roles as consumers and not as creators or users or belonging to somewhere or to each other, why would anyone or any group wish to invest or be productive in our country or city? It is to this end that the undermining of
rights created through geographies needs to be reconsidered. If we cannot generate wealth, then, like the poor laws of the 17th century, we will be confined to one place, forced to live where people are unable to create wealth or sustain themselves through productive means. To this end, I promote the development of geographies produced from situated knowledge and more research projects that can document the experiences of different social groups who appear in few records – other than birth, death, and marriage – but who should in a democratic society be afforded rights. Education has been one of the most important vehicles in developing the potential of individuals. It should therefore be of use also to communities in documenting their perspective.
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