Five 'Exits' from Brecht: Towards New Brechtian Subjectivities in Film

How can Brechtian v-effekts be developed or adapted in the light of contemporary understandings of subjectivity?

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Table of Contents

Exhibition/ Practice-led Research Material

The film works can be accessed online at the following address:

https://www.aliceevansfineart.co.uk/film-exhibition-gallery

Password = Gallery2020

1.   *Gaslighting (2015)*
2.   *Letters Home* (2016)
3.   *Somewhere* (2017)
4.   *Devon Gothic* (2018)
5.   *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019)

Table of Figures

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Abstract

I am an artist-filmmaker working in, and against, the Brechtian tradition. My practice experiments with ways to repurpose the alienation technique, the *Verfremdungseffeckt* (v-effekt), challenging the limitations of the continued use of formal critical methods in the Brechtian tradition. For this reason, my films have incorporated various non-Brechtian techniques to both supplement and subvert the assumptions of Brechtian theory.

This thesis interrogates traditional Brechtian alienation techniques such as non-diegetic sound in film, disjointed or displaced props, and non-Aristotelian narrative techniques. My interrogation of alienation extends it from a set of techniques used to construct a critical subject for the theatre to enable a rethinking of how critical subjectivity can be repurposed to other areas of research. These critical subjects are understood through reflections on psychology (neurodivergency), psychoanalysis (desire, and gaze), political philosophy (alienation), feminism (performativity, intersectionality, and language), cultural tropes (madness), and literary criticism (nonsense). All of these topics are examined insofar as they are expressed in film.

Subsequently, moving in an experimental and exploratory way from the formal use of Brechtian methods towards an investigation into artistic techniques centred upon alienated or imaginative realms, this thesis investigates several new ways of approaching Brechtian techniques - and thus multiple ways of rethinking Brecht. For instance, I have looked at feminist methods of representation that acknowledge Butlerian ideas of subjectivity developed since Brecht's era. These strategies also draw on JJ Lecercle's theory of nonsense.

This practice-centred Ph.D. explores ways in which Brechtian techniques can be applied and interrogated in new ways to create a novel language of alienated art. The investigation embraces alienated working methods which emerge through Brecht's more formal techniques to create a resistant critical method. Each film is therefore conceived as an attempt to reanimate Brechtian film for the twenty-first century, and, also, as an exit from his ideas.

Introduction

Outline of the Contribution to Knowledge of this Study

As an artist-filmmaker, this thesis has emerged from practice-centred research. In my five films, I experiment with ways to repurpose the v-effekt and challenge the limitations of familiar Brechtian techniques. Each film also proposes a different approach to audience subjectivity. These approaches form sub-questions, or 'exits' both through and from Brecht. These exits provide openings into new knowledge in the form of five film works.

Each of these filmic 'exits' demonstrate how Brecht may be re-invigorated through contemporary understandings of subjectivity. The filmic approaches include practice-centred insights into topics such as feminism and neurodivergency, in the context of artists' filmmaking. To support my argument, I also analyse the work of other artists using Brechtian-style effects and their own responses to notions of subjectivity in film and photography.

My research interrogates Brechtian alienation techniques such as allegory, non-diegetic sound, disjointed or displaced props, and non-Aristotelian narrative techniques. This interrogation of alienation extends from techniques for constructing a critical subject for the theatre, to a rethinking of how critical subjectivity can be repurposed through filmic method for our times. A gap in knowledge is identified suggesting that artists must change the

way in which they are using Brecht if they wish to re-invigorate his critical method.

This re-invigoration is achieved by identifying the influence of Bertolt Brecht's theatrical and critical practice (specifically the v-effekt) in both my own filmic art works, and those of others. This thesis thus systematically, (chapter-by-chapter and film-by-film) explores and identifies how the v-effekt can be re-ignited in a way which takes account of contemporary theories of subjectivity. This interrogation of the v-effekt through film-making practice extends from techniques for constructing a critical subject for the theatre, to rethinking how critical subjectivity can be repurposed through filmic method for our times.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a critical reassessment of various stages of Brechtian film and photography, specifically in relation to advertising, cinema, and postmodernism (arguably, the dilution of the original politics of Brecht). Many artists have used Brecht's techniques in a formal manner that is often either divorced from his politics or distanced from what he was proposing in terms of an affect upon his viewer or audience. This chapter argues that an investigation into the revitalisation of Brecht in contemporary filmmaking must address the waning of the political effect of the Brechtian tradition, beginning by outlining the significant body of existing Brechtian scholarship within fine art practices which has worked with the v-effekt since Brecht's era. The chapter then proceeds to identify the significance of Brecht for the 21st century artist.

The following chapters describe new approaches to Brechtian filmmaking and photography. These chapters demonstrate how the v-effekt can be reinvigorated through practice *via* contemporary understandings of subjectivity absent in Brecht's own era. Each chapter focuses on differing or colliding ideas of subjectivity within filmmaking and their relationship to Brechtian critical method. Subjects discussed in these chapters include feminism, post-colonialism, neurodivergency, allegory, and alienation. Each

chapter serves to introduce reasons for the need to re-assess and reinvigorate Brecht, identifies the approaches taken toward Brecht *via* subjectivity and, finally, outlines how a re-invigoration of the v-effekt has been achieved in the course of my own filmmaking practice.

An Introduction to a Practice-Centred Approach to Brecht through Earlier Critical Photographic Practice

Prior to embarking on this project, my work was ideas-led insofar as I considered that the critical political strategies of Bertolt Brecht could be directly utilised to form a critique of contemporary forms of documentary style photography. My short career as a photojournalist informed this perspective. I was frustrated with the formulaic structure and contexts of documentary style photography and wanted to consider a method that challenged conventional forms of image making. I felt that too much faith was placed on documentary-style photography as a representative or political tool. Having worked in that field, I was only too aware of its limitations.

When working as a photojournalist, I was sometimes asked to eliminate the specifics of subjects' lives when making a portrait. The advice was to always photograph against a plain background and remove any visible indicators that people were not middle class. A portrait session would turn into a practical exercise in removing any obviously dated décor and dressing people in their smartest shoes and clothes. The intention was to remove any details, so that those viewing the photograph could project their own lives on the blank spaces that the generic portrait allowed. To me, this was dishonest. Such methods tended to generalise people who often came from very different backgrounds and situations so that they could all be presented as generic or stereotyped for newspapers such as *The Daily Mail*. The truth of real lives was thus erased to fit with the design and politics of the right-wing press. I came to believe that this technique was the contemporary equivalent of Brecht's horror at the way in which naturalism in theatre 'papered over the cracks' in society,

hiding difference and inequality by making that which was unequal seem 'natural' in theatrical contexts[1].

The photographs I made in my earlier years as an art student borrowed from Brecht's techniques of reflexivity and distancing in order to challenge the ready absorption and proliferation of similar images. Instead, they made an attempt to create photography that encouraged their audience to receive images slowly and, through this, to reflect on the problems of the medium itself. At that time, I believed that Brecht's formal methodologies (as described, for instance, in his writings on set design) could be applied directly to form a critique of more conventional modernist documentary style photography. The form of photography I produced as a photojournalist was emblematic of this, leading me to question the methods in which photographs were mediated.[2] This in turn

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[1] For Brecht, the naturalistic is interchangeable with the term naturalism in theatre, and was derived from 19th century ideas of naturalism in art and literature. Brecht saw naturalism in the theatre of practitioners such as Henrick Ibsen and August Strindberg. For Brecht, naturalism worked to cover up inequalities in the world by making them seem 'natural' or an inevitable part of life. Brecht considered that naturalism was a false method, one which did not represent the world as it actually was. In his essay 'The Popular and the Realistic' (1939), he describes how the proletariat are not fooled by the naturalism of bourgeois theatre, and that his brand of 'epic theatre' is much more appropriate to transforming the world. In his discussion of naturalism, he explains:

> The sharp eyes of the workers saw through naturalism's superficial representation of reality. When they said in *Fuhrmann Henschel*, 'that's more than we want to know about it' they were in fact wishing they could get a more exact representation of the real social forces operating under the immediately visible surface. To quote from my experience they were not put off by the fantastic costumes and the apparently unreal setting of The Threepenny Opera. Brecht ([1964] 2013)

Here, Brecht demonstrates his belief that the world is full of social contradiction and inequalities. His non-naturalism sought to emphasise the inequalities and contradictions of life, so that people were aware and critical toward them. This theory of realist theatre provoked ambitions for dealing with reality in a new way, one which revealed the unequal system of values that underpin society rather than hiding them – as he believed naturalism to do.

[2] For Brecht, realist set design in theatre was at fault because an audience for realist theatre was engaged in experience itself and not in social reality. In contrast, Brecht's epic theatre method provided the foundations where "Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things" Brecht. B, ([1964] 2013, p.23). By "things" Brecht means that the audience must comprehend social reality ahead and above emotional reaction. Like Brecht, I needed my audience to both understand and 'get to grips' with the photography I was creating - much in the way Brecht had done with his plays. The aim was to comprehend the social reality of the images and the way they were constructed.

led to an analysis of how photography may become more productive as a critical political form. My research became influenced by Brecht's considerations of photography, both as a practical medium in texts such as *War Primer* Brecht ([1945], 2017) and in theoretical writings such as those in John Willett's edited *Brecht on Theatre* ([1964], 2013). Each chapter of the latter text provides a comprehensive account of Brecht's thought and engagement with his own practice and method.

Documentary photography has shared some of the problems raised by Fredric Jameson (Jameson, 2011) since the medium itself has a physical fixity of process[3]. However, alongside its reception as an objective method through process, its cultural-historical status as a bearer of objective truth also adds layers of obfuscation for an audience when understanding photography as a propagandistic tool. This is discussed fully in John Tagg's *The Burden of Representation* (1988), the works of Roland Barthes[4], Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977), and in Paul Strand's work. In Strand's discussion of documentary form in his essay on Edward Weston in 1917, he claims that

> photography finds its justification, like all other media, in the totally unique quality of its resources. In this case, that means absolute and unrestricted objectivity. While other arts are really anti-photographic in this regard, this objectivity is the true essence of photography, its specific accomplishment and at the same time its own limitation. (Strand, [1917], Ed. Kohler, *Constructed Realities, The Art of Staged Photography*, (1995), p.9)

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[3] Frederic Jameson's *Brecht & Method* (2011) discusses the problems with film as a medium due to its lack of liveness which he considers means that its fixed process has a less critically engaged effect on an audience. (Jameson, 2011) This is discussed in greater depth on p.64.
[4] Among his considerations of photography, Barthes discusses photography in terms of deconstruction of the image in his collection of essays *Image, Music Text (1977).* In this text, Barthes decodes an advertisement for Panzani pasta (Barthes, 1968, pp.152-163). In doing so, Barthes demonstrates to the reader the way the images are constructed in ways that manipulate or direct the audience. He extracts these hidden messages in order to show how messages are conveyed in parallel types of image.

Other theorists have shared my approach to the discussion of documentary realism in the work of Brecht[5]. For example, in Tom Kuhn's essay "Poetry and Photography: Mastering Reality in the Kriegsfibel" (published in Broomberg, A. and Chanarin, O. (2011) *War Primer 2*). London: MACK) Brecht's use of lyric poetry is discussed as forming an unexpected critique of more traditional forms of documentary realism[6]. He describes Brecht's *War Primer* as reflecting

> Brecht's long-standing interest in photography and the pictorial, and his
> preoccupations of the war years: realism and the lyric. The work emerges on a
> very considered and carefully constructed cycle with a crucial place in

[5] For Brecht, 'realism' in theatre refers to the expression of social realism derived from Marxist theories put into a practical form within his theatre. Brecht considered that realism was different from 19th century ideas of naturalism, of which he says: "We must not cling to 'well-tried' rules for telling a story, worthy models set up by literary history, eternal aesthetic laws." (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p109). By way of a counterpoint to the literary modes of the 19th century, Brecht made social contradictions appear obvious on the surface level of his theatrical productions. For Brecht, the machinery of capitalism created social inequality, therefore this needed to be made obvious in his theatrical method rather than obfuscated through mediation in naturalistic aesthetic practice. Brecht's realist method was an aesthetic manifestation of Marx's theories through theatrical expression. Brecht sought to provoke a Marxist revolution by promoting the social contradictions within his own brand of 'realist' theatre, so that this would be transferred to action outside the theatrical realm rather than waiting for this change in society. He says of realism:

> Our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic
> convictions and independent of convention. *Realist* means; laying bare societies causal
> network/ showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/
> writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for
> the most pressing problems afflicting human society/ emphasising the dynamics of
> development / concrete so as to encourage abstraction. Brecht, [1964] (2013) p109.

This indicates that realism was linked to dialectical process, as it relied on emphasising contradictions within theatrical method that would result in progressive change.

[6] The links between photography and lyric poetry also became important to my own work - as will be discussed further in later chapters. For me, poetry became a way of experimenting with ways in which an audience might receive images differently: more slowly, more reflectively. This was part of my later experiments to see how critical awareness might be formed in an audience through new methods and techniques. Some of these techniques borrowed from modernist writing. I was also interested in the ways a critical subjectivity might arise through the use of poetic language; a language which could be specific to the needs of audiences whom I regarded as being made of varying types of subjectivity rather than being general or a mass group. Further discussion of this emerges in chapter 7 regarding *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019).

Brecht's ongoing reflections about a cognitive, even interventionalist realism. Kuhn, (2011, p.19)

I was also influenced in this investigation by Susan Sontag's seminal text *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), which puts forward the idea that the manner in which images are disseminated is vital to understanding the effect they create. In this text, she challenges what she considers the ignorance of theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, who claimed that images are all that exist. Instead, she asserts that there is a truth to images, and thus it is vital to consider their human context alongside their larger political culture[7]. This is significant to discussion of Brecht. As discussed in further detail on pages 101-102 of this thesis, Sontag seeks to identify in photography, as Brecht did in theatre, how naturalism is an illusory concept. For her, any type of representation is mediated, and this mediation can be made obvious and thus assist an audience in better comprehending how images 'work.' For Brecht, "(epic methods) become methods of making (an audience) use his critical sense" (John Willet on Brecht, (1964) p. 172). Similarly, Sontag's argument for the power of photography states that **"**Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us." (Sontag, 2003, p. 86). Sontag's analysis promotes empathy for the dispossessed. She also reveals how photographs work by encouraging an audience to become aware of the human reality behind the image. Brecht and Sontag take slightly different approaches, yet both aim at the same critical awareness of the action of media - whether focused on theatre in the case of Brecht or photography in the case of Sontag.

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[7] Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) discusses how war imagery does not necessarily result in a horror of war or create the ability to change attitudes towards it. She discusses how meaning is created *via* artifice, experience and context; the photography of war is pre-edited by image takers. She also acknowledges that war is real, and suffering must be acknowledged, despite the fact that war imagery is used by governments for propagandistic purpose sometimes without audience awareness. She also talks of the almost pornographic fascination with war photography, arguing that war is articulated through photography.

Brecht considered that social reality could be in danger of being ignored through straightforward representations of it. He believed that in order to bring out a political consciousness in the viewer or audience, social relations between them must be deliberately revealed rather than merely reproduced. He drew attention to the fact that a photograph of a factory (in the following case, the Krupp munitions plant) cannot teach us anything about the social relations of those working within it.
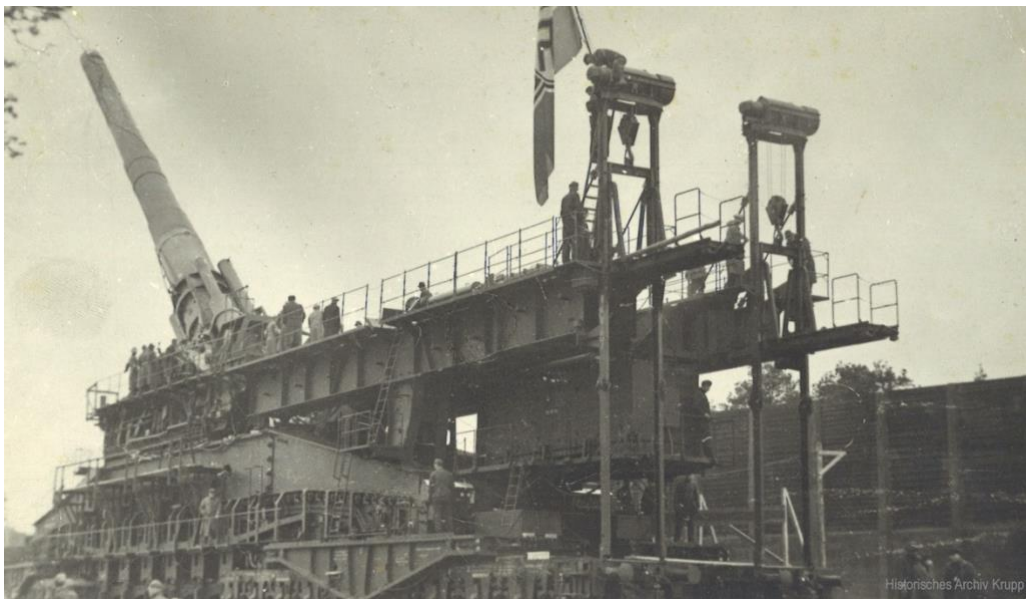
Figure 1:Unknown. (1941) Krupp Munitions Plant Essen. *Available at: URL https://www.thyssenkrupp.com/en/company/history (Accessed: 5th March 2020).*

This photograph reproduces an image of a place of work but cannot tell us anything of the social reality of the lives of people who worked there. Walter Benjamin discussed Brecht's views on photography in 1931, explaining that

> for… Brecht, the situation, is 'complicated by the fact that less than at any time does a simple *reproduction of reality* tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp [armament] works or AEG [general electricity company] yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory,

let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore, something has actually to be *constructed*, something artificial, something set up" (Benjamin, [1931] 1972, p.24).

The photograph of the Krupp plant seeks to reproduce social reality through an "experiential reality" (Silberman, 2000, p.164) that does not necessarily reveal social contradictions in its structure. In contrast, Brecht interrupts both these structures within his *War Primer* (1945) in order to emphasise the social relations between people[8].

Similar to his description of the Krupp munitions plant, Brecht attempts in the *War Primer* to form a counterpoint to what he saw as propaganda within contemporary news media. Within these works, he used poetry as a foil to what he saw as the propagandistic use of photography. This poetry is used by Brecht to counteract the message of the original imagery and to expose (and thereby interrupt) it.

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[8] The following Brecht quote from Mark Silberman provides evidence for this in Silberman, M. (2000) *Brecht on Film & Radio*. Edition. M. Silberman. London: Bloomsbury:

"The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works, or AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So there is indeed 'something to construct', something 'artificial', 'invented'. But the old concept of art, derived from experience, is obsolete. For those who show only the experiential aspect of reality do not reproduce reality itself. It is simply no longer experienced as a totality. But speaking in this way, we speak about an art with a completely different function in social life– that of depicting reality." (Brecht *on Film and Radio*, (2000) M. Silberman (ed. and trans), London, Bloomsbury, pp.164-5).

Figure 2: Brecht, B. (1945) War Primer *[Photograph]. London: Verso.*

For example, next to the above image of bombed out buildings in city streets he writes:

Unblock the streets to clear the invaders way!

The City's dead there's nothing left to loot

There's never been such order in Roubaix

Now order reigns, it's reign is absolute!

(Brecht, [1945] (2017), p.14).

Other of Brecht's texts, such as essays on stage design, also seemed applicable to this method at the time. This technique is visible in his ambitions for stage design in "Stage Design for the Epic Theatre" (1951):

It's more important nowadays for the set to tell the spectator he's in a theatre, than to tell him he's in, say, Aulis. The theatre must acquire qua theatre the same fascinating reality as a sporting arena during a boxing match. The best thing is to show the machinery, the ropes and the flies

Brecht, B ([1964], 2013), p. 233.

Via epic theatre, Brecht wishes to break the illusory element of theatre by exposing how theatrical illusion is constructed within stage design methods [9]. He asserts his desire to remind audiences that they are "in a theatre" and not transported or absorbed by the setting of the play. This provocation to critical awareness in an audience was vital for the dynamic that he wished to create.

Within my own work, I have also experimented with revealing the way in which photography itself is constructed. This is shown in my photograph *Beach* (2009) which reflects on photography as a constructed medium rather than its assumed status as a method of non-intervention.

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[9] Exploration of Brecht's term the 'Epic' is made by several of his biographers. Raymond Williams in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1993) and David Barnett in *Brecht in Practice* (2015) both enlarge upon the term. Williams describes how Brecht produces the 'epic' in theatre in contrast to what the practitioner terms the established 'dramatic' theatre (Williams,1993). It is interesting to note that Williams critiques Brecht's delineation between the types of theatre as rather "arbitrary" particularly in the way he gathers or generalises his predecessors "dramatic-style" to describe specific traditions in theatre which may in reality differ. Williams suggests that Brecht uses a clear delineation in order to define what epic theatre is *not* rather than what it actually *is* (Williams, 1993). Brecht himself presents the difference between dramatic and what is termed the epic in his chapter "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre." This text defines the differences between the two styles of theatre. Here the 'epic' is a style which promotes a particular active engagement in politics for the audience as opposed to the non-epic or "dramatic theatre" which Brecht considers absorbs his audience through its form and stops them thinking or acting beyond what is happening on stage. According to theorist David Barnett: "After 5 years work with the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht proposed replacing the key term 'epic theatre' with 'dialectical theatre'" (Barnett, 2015, p15). This definition is more representative of realism as an active process within theatre rather than a static process of reproducing the naturalistic along the lines of 19th Century realism.

Following Brecht, I was trying to make the materials of the photographic process visible so that an audience were aware they were looking at a photograph - a mediation of reality.

In the same essay, Brecht states that "The materials of the set must be visible. A play can be performed in pasteboard only, or in pasteboard and wood, or in canvas, and so on; but there mustn't be any faking" (Brecht, [1964] 2013*,* p. 233). The demand to show "the machinery, the ropes and the flies" (Brecht, [1964] 2013*,* p. 233) is a method of encouraging critical awareness by making the set reflect the fact that it is a construction of reality. By revealing that the set is a construction, audiences should not empathise in a conventional way, and therefore, not be too immersed in events on stage. This has parallels with the use of mirrors within my film in *Gaslighting* (2015), in which I used a mirror to remind the audience they were watching a film – as with Brechtian

epic theatre, it functions as a version of reality and not reality itself.

Figure 4: Gaslighting (2015) *Directed by Alice Evans [Short film]. London: Unpublished.*

This sums up Brecht's broader attitude to naturalistic theatre. He believed that contemporary naturalism in theatre masked societal inequality both formally and politically by implying that inequalities are natural, rather than the result of unequal social and economic relations. Against these inequalities, he advocated that the exposure of the mechanisms of theatre should draw attention to these differences, rather than concealing or disguising them, stating that "The essential part of epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p. 23).

Methods

This thesis re-evaluates Brecht for a contemporary era and assesses, through practice-centred research, how we may adopt and adapt Brecht for the current times – and what we might leave behind. The thesis asks what is left of the Brechtian tradition within artworks, in relation to changing conditions of cultural critique. In asking this, it is necessary to consider what has changed and also to ask what aspects of the Brechtian method are still relevant.

This thesis' original contribution to knowledge is produced by reflecting on Brechtian methods through an analysis of how Brecht conceives of the subjectivity of his audience. It asks how this may be related to the way in which Brecht's conception of subjectivity can be reconsidered for a current era. Practical and theoretical discoveries made in the course of the research undertaken have indicated that it is especially pertinent to consider the relationship between Brechtian v-effekts and contemporary understandings of subjectivity. This is because (as will be further explained) Brecht's understanding of subjectivity was very different to discoveries made in more contemporary eras.

In the course of this project, a range of research methods allowed me to rethink Brecht through film. These methods are employed in five different pieces, providing a combined practical and theoretical approach towards resolving this lacuna. The aim of this methodology was to test theories which offered a route through and from Brecht, by way of an exit into a new space of understanding with regard to subjectivity. This methodology allowed an approach which retained some of Brecht's politics, but also abandoned some approaches to Brecht which use his original practical methods in a formal manner.

I discovered in the course of making my early films and photography, how widely Brecht's v-effekt had been adopted by broader culture. For instance, Hollywood filmmaking and advertising are areas which may look akin to Brecht's theatrical strategy, but have been subsumed.[10] [11] Examples of this include revealing stage construction or what people commonly and inaccurately refer to as 'Breaking the 4th Wall' (the relevance of this is discussed further on page 66). I was guided in developing each film by using theories that seemed to offer something additional to contemplate. These theories were approaches available to 'exit' through - and from - Brecht. For example, as mentioned previously, my first attempt to 'exit' Brecht was the film *Gaslighting* (2015), which used Judith Butler's more recent understandings of performativity as a creative methodology.[12] I adapted and adopted both Brechtian and non-Brechtian ideas in my endeavours to create each 'exit', realising this *via* understandings of subjectivity which have developed since Brecht's own era.

My method for research involved testing theories in practice through the creation of different films. It also involved adapting Brechtian theatrical techniques to the field of film making. This method demanded the importation of non-Brechtian techniques, to interrogate and add to Brechtian ambitions. This aimed to move through and from Brecht into a new space of critical

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[10] The opening scene of Hollywood Blockbuster *Deadpool* (Deadpool, 2016) uses ironic revelatory credits to expose the problematic aesthetics of similar films and lend the audience a sense of authority and reflexive control over what they are viewing. This is similar to Brecht's call to expose "The machinery, ropes and the flies" (Brecht, 1964, p.32) within theatre. A comparison between these techniques is further discussed on p.60-61 of this text.

[11] The advertisement for the *Sony Camera Perfume Bottle* (Sony, 2008) shows both photographic apparatus and the process of photography with the frame. This will be discussed and expanded upon further later (p.63).

[12] Judith Butler's theory of performativity is informed by J.L. Austin's "How to do Things with Words" (Austin,1962), which argues that language does not simply describe the world, but instead forms a kind of social action. Judith Butler relates this to the case of gender, which she argues is not simply fixed, but performed as a social gesture. Rather than being male or female in an essentialist sense, every person performs rather than embodies their gender status. In contrast, Brecht has a more essentialist position on subjectivity. In contrast to Butler, Brecht implies that the actor's outward method of performance can speak of the internal or essential psyche of a character. In contrast to Butler, this implies that there exists an essential self. Butler contests this, arguing instead we are our performed selves - and that these selves are both changing and mutable. As such, there is not an interior separate to our performed selves. This debate is further discussed at a later point on pp.96-97 of this thesis.

practice.

This project began at the point where I had discovered the limitations of the current uses of Brechtian techniques in my work - and also in that of others. I discovered that I was using Brecht's methods in a formal way, which resulted in techniques divorced from his original political ambitions. It struck me that the techniques I was using (such as revealing the construction of the film or photograph or the employment of montage) needed to be re-examined. This re-examination was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, I discovered that these techniques were now absorbed into forms of culture that Brecht would have found 'culinary,' which includes advertising, television game shows, or conventional Hollywood film (these uses of Brecht are further discussed on p.66). Secondarily, the ambitions Brecht had for creative practice did not acknowledge some more recent understandings of audience subjectivity.

These issues compelled me to examine what might be considered potential 'exits' through and from Brecht for the current time. I had the ambition that these 'exits,' would retain some of Brecht's original critical politics, but also, move both through and from his techniques to a new space in terms of contemporary understandings of subjectivity. For this reason, methods were adopted that were both Brechtian, in a more traditional sense, such as non-diegetic sound, but also were non-Brechtian, such as the acknowledgement of contemporary understandings of subjectivities such as neurodivergency.

For example, the film *Gaslighting* (2015), took into account new processes of critical subjectivity, such as the feminist use of the body as a critically resistant tool. It accomplished this by making what is personal political, following the Carol Hanisch phrase that became emblematic of second-wave feminism. Each of the five experiments undertaken examine potential exits from Brecht in consecutively different ways. There are five exits to this project as it took five attempts to navigate the field, with each film raising further questions as to how a Brechtian 'exit' might be achieved. As such, there may be further ways to develop these methods beyond the remit of

this project. Suggestions of possible routes to further research are outlined in the conclusion to this thesis.

In order to outline the trajectory of these research methods, I will now demonstrate what I discovered in each film, and then map what I discovered in each area of the research through the methods employed. The need to allow Brechtian practice to change according to the demands of each epoch in the theatrical realm is explored by Stephen Unwin in *The Complete Brecht Toolkit* (2018). This text allows theatre practitioners ways to discover Brecht for 21st century theatre practice by 'updating' his techniques in the light of new discoveries in theatre. This is the closest in intention to the investigation in my thesis since it reflects on Brecht in relation to contemporary ideas in this realm. While Unwin's work is invaluable, it did not examine the use of Brecht in contemporary art.

My first film experiment, *Gaslighting* (2015), identified that Brecht's understanding of subjectivity was different from contemporary feminist understandings of subjectivity. I discovered that the view Brecht had of the subject could not incorporate the post-modern and post-structuralist understanding put forward by Judith Butler that the subject is constructed in a multiplicitous manner. Butler's view is that there is no original or essential nature to the individual, but that subjectivity itself is constructed through the performance of gender. For this reason, I began the task of planning my film *Gaslighting* by considering methods which contested Brecht's position on subjectivity. This was achieved by applying non-Brechtian methods alongside more conventional strategies.

Non-Brechtian practical methods included using myself as actor within my own films and recycling (or re-appropriating) an earlier film as a model to reflect on contemporary politics. This enabled me to experiment with a feminist theoretical approach to discover whether a form of contemporary Brechtianism could be achieved through this method. It also investigated whether Butlerian

methods could provoke a possible exit through and from Brecht, *via* these new understandings of subjectivity. In doing so, I aimed to provide a toolkit for other artists.

From this first experiment, I extended the model provided by a Butlerian approach to subjectivity to include a further, expanded view. Although a Butlerian approach had proved fruitful, I was curious as to how other aspects of the v-effekt might be changed and adapted. I was aware that props and banners had been used within Brechtian theatre practice in order to encourage a viewer to take a critical analytic position concerning the action occurring onstage. This compelled me to explore new versions of this technique which interrupted the action and yet took into account views of subjectivity which encountered the intersectional. This was rooted in the idea of using epistolary techniques as an exit through and from Brecht. Letter writing and analysis of the use of various forms of written text within film making were used as theoretical approaches to provide another 'exit' - another route through and from Brecht.

Whilst I did not follow Brecht in using props and banners, I wondered if other methods could be used to prevent the ready absorption of the contemporary culinary. I began to investigate if this could be extended to include the written word, incorporating it onscreen as a contemporary v-effekt. This approach examined both the rhetorical and temporal effects of letters within film, informed by Linda F. Kauffman and Hamid Naficy's texts on the use of letters within films. In some cases, these effects would have been methods which Brecht may have considered culinary in his own time. For example, a love letter or a letter home from wartime (used within the film) seems at odds with the formal use of Brechtian method. This is because of the romantic or somewhat archaic association with letters in a contemporary moment bombarded with digital culture and more efficient forms of communication.

The use of the written word was a research method informed by the thought that coherent identity can be considered a disabling fiction. *Letters Home* (2016) attempted to destabilise the idea of the self in order to show that what appears 'natural' is socially constructed. The film asked if the letter within film making could provide something more urgent in this regard. Key to this approach was Linda F Kauffman's *Special Delivery, Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* (1992), which analyses how letters are used in novels to explore notions of desire. Kauffman exposes how these texts, all based on the epistolary form to a greater or lesser extent, expose the ideologies of individualism and commercial culture in their explorations of romantic love. Brecht may well have considered the epistolary as a form as culinary at the time of these texts' publication, yet each of the examples Kauffman explores (including Nabokov, Barthes, Lessing or Walker) all take a politically engaged approach to the epistolary format. I thus discovered from both my research and my practice that letters can be used for both culinary and non-culinary purposes.

The written word itself, as featured within my films, could both distance a viewer (in the classic Brechtian sense), and also bring a degree of intimacy that Brecht would at the time have been compelled to reject as culinary. For example, in using writing on windows in one scene, I draw attention to the medium of film itself, and this becomes an intervention akin to a Brechtian v-effekt in its original context. However, more confessional moments, where conversations happen between the actors in the film, would perhaps have been originally considered as culinary. Thus, in the light of more recent understandings of subjectivity (such as that provided by critics like Kauffman), the personal life is considered a valid positioning in relation to politics. As such, this use of letters is not necessarily as reactionary a statement as it could

have been at the time of Brecht's resistance to the realism of Aristotelian theatre, which he rejected as culinary.[13]

Alongside Kauffman, I was also informed by Hamid Naficy's text *An Accented Cinema* (2001), which describes the process of letter writing within cinema, as a way to express the challenges associated with post-colonial diasporic filmmaking. Naficy's text discusses the letter as a way to communicate the subjectivities presented by the postcolonial within film. The text dedicates a chapter to the importance of letters within film. In this chapter Naficy emphasises how letters can be used to cause a disparity between what an audience knows and also, what the character on screen might understand. He

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[13] Brecht rejected the culinary in Aristotelian Theatre in that it left an audience satiated or emotionally satisfied, but unable to be critically aware of the socio-political situation due to its soporific and cathartic effect upon them: In *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, Willet describes how "Brecht treats the 'epic methods' as more than narrative aids; they become means of breaking the magic spell, of jerking the spectator out of his torpor and making him use his critical sense" Willett, J. (1977, p.172) Brecht uses the term 'Aristotelian' as a way to describe a traditional form of narrative method typical of what he terms dramatic theatre. This narrative structure is progressive in its story trajectory as it follows a hero's journey from beginning to middle to end. Yet, as explained below, despite Aristotelian drama producing movement *via* narrative trajectory, Brecht considers it 'static' in its' political effect since he considers that this narrative style doesn't reveal social contradictions. It is termed Aristotelian because it was first described in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Brecht says: "The Aristotelian play is essentially static; its task is to show the world as it is. The learning play is essentially dynamic; its task is to show how the world changes (and how it may be changed)." Brecht ([1964] 2013). Brecht's narrative methods were often placed by him in opposition to Aristotelian methods since he interrupted action flow within his drama as a way to produce what he saw as an awakened, thinking or active audience. Brecht expands upon this process in an essay concerning the Learning play *Die Mutter:*

> *Die Mutter* is such a learning play , and embodies certain principles and methods of presentation of the non-Aristotelian or epic style, as I have sometimes called it; the use of the film projection to help bring the social complex of the events to the forefront; the use of music and of the chorus to supplement and vivify the action on stage; the setting forth of actions so as to call for a critical approach, so that they would not be taken for granted by the spectator and would arouse him to think; it became obvious to him which were right actions and which were wrong ones.

> Brecht in "The German Drama; Pre- Hitler" *Brecht on Theatre*, ([1964] 2013, p79).

As described above, the methods he used such as fragmentary costumes, props, songs or banners were designed to interrupt the narrative 'flow' of production as a way to prevent his audience being absorbed in the spectacle of the Aristotelian flow of action.

describes this as an 'accented cinema' that considers letters as a way to create different ways to address the audience.[14] This variation in address can reveal the constructed nature of ethnic, gendered or national identity.

Naficy also discusses the ability of the letter in filmmaking to comment on the representation and construction of identity, be this in terms of the self or the other. Ideas of displacement and the concept of what home means in the case of exile, also have relevance, and also, the relationships enabled between places and people by letters. Naficy analyses the epistolary in *An Accented Cinema* (2001, pp 101-151): "Exile and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation. An e-mail message becomes, in the words of Linda Kauffman, a 'metonymic and a metaphoric displacement of desire'" (1992, p.38)—the desire to be with an 'other' and to reimagine an elsewhere and other times. Epistolarity is defined as "the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning (Altman 1982, p.4), with absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps. Whatever form the epistle takes, whether a letter, a note scribbled on a napkin, a telephone conversation, a video etc". This was significant to my practice as it was another challenge to tackle conventional assumptions concerning epistolarity. It also encouraged me to explore the formal use of letters beyond their content as a technique for critical reflection within film. Further techniques inspired by these debates included the contingency presented by the use of the letter, the delay presented by reading archival materials, temporal confusion produced by the juxtaposition of old and new forms of writing and, finally, the displacement of the historical object in a contemporary era (and *vice versa*).

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[14] 'An Accented Cinema' is described in Naficy's opening chapter as made by filmmakers who are "situated but universal" figures who work in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices. A majority are from Third World and postcolonial countries (or from the global South) who since the 1960s have relocated to northern cosmopolitan centres where they exist in a state of tension and dissension with both their original and their current homes." (Naficy, H. *An Accented Cinema:* "Situating Accented Cinema" (pp. 10-39)

At this point, a discovery was made that the letter was a useful form for exploring contemporary Brechtian subjectivities, in that it allowed a certain mediation on elements of film form, namely framing, image and sound. It also produced an interesting relationship between the vocal, the visual, and text within the film. However, it was difficult to find methods that did not emulate what was already seen in classical film narrative and were therefore culinary both in the original sense and the sense of a contemporary culinary. This proved a somewhat unwieldy method for my own filmmaking practice, as it was neither consistently Brechtian in its presentation nor consistently culinary. Such methods did not reveal enough about contemporary Brechtian subjectivities in the context of my own filmmaking.

This film experiment indicated how I might employ the epistolary as a critical form within a larger project. However, a singular focus on the epistolary, in this case, presented its own problems. It was unable to cater for a broad perspective on new Brechtian subjectivities if it was the only method of doing this within a film. My methods moved on, following this revelation, to creating a film which dealt with issues concerning intersectionality. This was achieved through an understanding of unreliable narration as a critical method, which was developed in the treatment for my film *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2016).

The use of unreliable narration was formed through methods relating to neurodivergence as a contemporary subjectivity. I was informed in this by the writings of Judy Singer, who first coined the term neurodiversity in 1996 within the field of autism studies. This was then developed to the later term neurodivergency and extended to include other subjectivities. Neurodivergency campaigner Nick Walker (2018) describes on his website

> *Neurocosmopolitanism* that "Neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."" (Walker, 2018, n.p).

The chapter also relied on insights into intersectionality provided by Audre Lorde.[15] I incorporated Lorde's idea that it is not possible to challenge a system from the position of being entirely dependent upon it. This is introduced in the essay "The Master's Tools Cannot Dismantle the Masters' House" in *Sister Outsider* (1984). My reasoning was that, in order to challenge a political system that had been pre-established and oppressive, new methods for tackling the system need to be introduced that would not depend on the language of the oppressor. In formulating this, I considered the idea that language itself could become an oppressive institution re-enforcing existing prejudice. In the films *Devon Gothic* (2018) and *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) I therefore experimented with ways to investigate unusual or uncustomary uses of both the linguistic and visual strategies, in order to challenge established narrative forms. This method used the language of my own neurodivergent experience as a resistant tool. This approach again tested theories in practice (or adapted Brechtian film techniques) by importing non-Brechtian theories to develop my practice. I explored neurodivergency to try to understand how subjectivity might be applied as a critical method within film. This involved reversing the traditional roles of the reliable and unreliable narrator within film making.

A perhaps surprising addition to this method was the investigation I made into Joseph Conrad's novel *Under Western Eyes* (1911), in which an unreliable narrator is prominent. This forces the reader to doubt their own perspective on the situation presented in the novel, challenging the natural omniscience of a more conventional form of narration. It may seem somewhat contrary to use a novel as the basis for my filmmaking; this is especially

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[15] Audre Lorde produced ideas of intersectionality within the context of feminism. For Lorde, women are not solely oppressed due to gender, but multiply oppressed in many cases due to the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. Black women, queer women and disabled women may be doubly, or triply oppressed because of the intersection of multiple forms of oppression or exclusion. In combination, this made some people more challenged in society than others who may share one aspect of oppression (e.g. being female) but do not experience multiple forms or the action of these combined oppressions. She explains: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." (Lorde, Audre: "Learning from the 60's", 1982, online: blackpast.org).

complex as there are numerous examples of films using unreliable narration that could have served as a model. Examples of this trope include *Fight Club* (1999*), Memento* (2000*), Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *The Fisher King* (1991), and many others. However, my specific interest in this literary source was that Conrad's presentation of the character Razumov was unique, in that Conrad uses the unreliable narrator within *Under Western Eyes* to doubt the authority of what is happening within the novel. In this instance, the *'*Under Western Eyes' of the novel's title refers to inaccurate post-colonial (white/western) interpretations of the Russian nation. For example, Tony Tanner describes Conrad's Razumov as "a man forced into wide-awakeness, a man unwillingly made intimate with the nightmare which hovers forever under the complacencies of civilised existence" (Tanner, 1962, p.185).

I asked if the unreliable narrator (in this case, a language teacher reflecting on the plight of Razumov) could be used as a Brechtian method when making my own film. I contemplated whether Conrad's use of Razumov's character incorporates the same 'wide-awakeness,' that Brecht describes in epic theatre, and explored whether this was a method I could employ in my film practice. In Conrad's text, the language teacher Razumov is shown to be unreliable from the beginning of the novel. Moving away from this, I sought to design the treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2015) as a revelatory situation wherein the audience is asked to question both narrators and yet discovers that the schizophrenic Selwyn is more truthful than the authority figure of Grant.

The next method involved applying notions of allegory to form a contemporary Brechtian subjectivity**.** In developing this method, I was informed by Walter Benjamin's reflections on allegory. According to Howard Caygill, Benjamin's conception of allegory is complex and inter-relational, incorporating different methods to reflect on a larger understanding of modernism:

For Benjamin, allegory is a concept with implications that are at once philosophical, religious, aesthetic, political and historical. In many ways it is emblematic of the internal complexity of Benjamin's work, which is rooted in the attempt to bring together the approaches of philosophy, aesthetics and cultural history. While the manifold senses of allegory are never bound unequivocally together into a general theory, it is clear that they depend upon each other, often in quite astonishing and illuminating ways. It is also evident that allegory is central not only to his understanding of modernism in art and literature, but also to the shifts of religious and political experience that for Benjamin constituted modernity.

Caygill H. (2010) "Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory, Part IV the Fall and Rise of Allegory." pp. 251-253

I was already aware that allegory could be a useful way to explore Brecht's ideas, thus it was of interest to see the relation between allegory in Benjamin's work in comparison with Brecht's conception of a critical method. I applied allegory to my film *Devon Gothic* (2018). This entailed using elements of allegory within the work for a reader or viewer to reflect upon and attempt to decode. As will be enlarged upon later, what I considered to be allegorical within the characters and events I portrayed on screen became a method of reflecting on a contemporary Brechtian subjectivity.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I explore how poetic form can develop a subjectivity, as expressed through a stream-of-consciousness. This method was developed through an understanding of the modernist poetry of Dylan Thomas, James Joyce, Antonin Artaud, as well as the philosophy of nonsense provided by JJ Lecercle's (1985) theory of délire. I also explored aspects of Antonin Artaud's thought as presented in his *Theatre of Cruelty*, comparing this critique of realism with that of Brecht. In this section, I applied methods of film making that significantly diverged from Brecht's own method. Despite this, as I

argue within the chapter, this approach could be considered more appropriate to contemporary ideas of subjectivity when producing an exit through and from Brecht.

To summarise, my overall method for research in all these examples was to test theories in practice for adapting Brechtian film techniques by importing non-Brechtian theories to explore contemporary ideas of subjectivity – for example, the unreliable narrator, délire, and nonsense. These are the methods by which I develop a toolkit for artists, which can enlighten a reader to 'exits' both through and from the Brechtian method.

Chapter 1
Brecht in the C20th

A Short Introduction to Brecht

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a theatre practitioner and poet who radically altered the field of theatre, but whose work has also been applied to revolutionise photography and film. He developed pioneering methods that addressed audiences in new ways through his comprehension of the dynamic socio-political relationship between the audience and the act of performance. His techniques of the v-effekt were different from previous theatrical method, as they aimed to transform theatre away from the 19th-century realm of the proscenium stage and towards the live world of politics.

Brecht abhorred the traditional realist theatrical methods that were conventional in his time, arguing that realist theatre made audiences passive to the dire socio-political situation that surrounded them. He referred to the predominant type of theatre as 'culinary', a concept referred to a number of times in his writing. Culinary theatre left an audience satisfied in a sensual manner but did not enable them to achieve a change in socio-political awareness, or the ability to provoke change in their lives. In Brecht's explanation, this was largely because the sensual was almost hypnotic to the audience, preventing them from being politically aware. For Brecht, it was of considerable importance that opera, as with any form of theatre, should engage an audience in the practical side of politics and make them critically aware

rather than being subsumed in sensual distraction. For example, in *Brecht on Theatre,* he speaks of the culinary in opera as follows:

> The element of philosophy, almost of daring, in these operas was so subordinated to the culinary principle that their sense was in effect tottering and was soon absorbed in sensual satisfaction. Once its original 'sense' had died away the opera was by no means left bereft of *sense* but had simply acquired another one - a sense *qua* opera. The content had been smothered in the opera. (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.39)**.**

Brecht acknowledged that not all opera is culinary, but believed that the way it was treated in his era created a dynamic which removes political potency. He suggests that his contemporary opera producers took a Wagnerian approach, to the detriment of the opera's political and social potential, eventually claiming that "Those composers who stem from Wagner still insist on posing as philosophers. A philosophy which is of no use to man or beast, can only be disposed of as a means of sensual satisfaction." (Brecht, 1964, p.39). Brecht wanted to retain opera's practical political use in his own work; his conception of the potential of opera is Marxist, and this quote echoes Marx's famous call to arms that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it" (Marx, K.,1845, *Theses on Feuerbach* (VII)), which centres thinking on philosophical ideas concerning social issues within history, rather than as a separate entity from it.

It is well known that Wagner's work was admired by Hitler, and Brecht's horror at Wagner's work may well have stemmed from this situation as well. Brecht saw the way people were stirred up or satiated by Wagner's work in the way some were by Nazi rallies. He was horrified by the audience's passive absorption in these events, their avoiding the adoption of a practical and

active resistance to the events surrounding them. He stated: "The content had been smothered in the opera. Our Wagnerites are pleased to remember that the original Wagnerites posited a sense of which they were presumably unaware" (Brecht, [1964], 2013 p 39).

The opposite to Wagnerian style theatre was seen by Brecht in the musical work of his frequent collaborator Hans Eisler. Brecht saw Eisler's work as politically productive rather than being hypnotic or absorptive as was for Brecht typical of what he describes as "the general drug traffic of bourgeois theatre" Brecht ([1964] 2013, p.89) He says of Eisler in the essay "On the Use of Music in the Epic Theatre" (1935):

> "[He] wrote *song* music. This music too is in a sense philosophical. It too avoids narcotic effects, chiefly by linking the solution of musical problems to the clear and intelligible underlining of the political and philosophical meaning of each poem." Brecht ([1964] 2013, p.89)

For Brecht, Eisler's 'underlining' of the political was aimed to act against bourgeois Wagnerian style theatre by making the work understandable and relatable for the audience in a politically productive sense.

Contrary to this, Brecht considered that Wagnerian types of 'culinary' theatre left their audiences satisfied through cathartic processes but not politically active. They were "satiated" through cathartic processes, but unable to change their socio-political position. For Brecht, Wagnerian style opera had become both a political and situated philosophy separate from its historical and political circumstances. As a result, it was an emotionally numbing or satiating process, rather than a method of political engagement or a process for political awareness and resistance.

Brecht developed a group of techniques to overcome what he saw as the culinary passivity of an audience, collectively known as the verfremdungseffekt (hereafter v-effekt). Further details of the components of the v-effekt and the v-effekt as a whole will be discussed later in this chapter.

In an age where we are arguably absorbed and pacified by an omnipresent polarised social and political culture, there is considerable evidence that Brechtian calls to provoke an audience into political and social consciousness remain prescient. There is also much to suggest that the methods for achieving this need to be different and more specific to our own political moment. Despite being engaged in the dynamic between audiences, theatre and politics, this thesis argues that Brecht did not engage with aspects concerning the individual subjectivities of his audience, viewing them as an undifferentiated group rather than in terms of differing subjectivities. Therefore, methods in contemporary art that are required to resist the ready absorption of spectacle are different from those of Brecht's era. My research indicates that the subsequent discovery of intersectionality enables us to approach methods of critique in novel ways. Intersectionality emerged first in feminist critique and came to be an aspect of broader debates surrounding subjectivity. Intersectionality indicated that people can be multiply oppressed by societal forces. This is enlarged upon in later discussion, but for now it is sufficient to suggest that Brecht did not fully comprehend intersectionality in his understanding of the makeup of his audience. This thesis argues that it is intersectionality which gives the potential for Brechtian critique to be updated for a current era and explores this through the construction of five film works.

Brecht considered an audience in terms of a mass or group, relating to the audience as an undifferentiated collective.[16] In contrast to this, current

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[16] This is evidenced in the way he refers to the audience of Aristotelian theatre. In his essay "Alienation effects in Chinese Acting" (1964), Brecht describes the process of bourgeois theatre as being "bound by the 'eternally human.'" Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man, of every period and every colour." Brecht, B (1964, p. 97) It is not this universalising process that Brecht

theoretical understandings place an audience in terms of a locus of varying subjectivities, arguing that it is through these emerging subjectivities that we recreate our social world. In addition, although many artists still use techniques related to v-effekt in their formal approach, these techniques have arguably been subsumed by the wider culture. As such, they lose their recognisability, power, and political bite. Brecht himself was not a formalist his practice was designed to change in ways appropriate to the conditions of each era. The fixed use of Brechtian techniques has led his original strategies to be used in a way which is faithful to his original practical method, but no-longer appropriate to the social 'awakening' of an audience in the current era. There is a difference between Brecht's socio-political ambition for the non-culinary and contemporary methods used to achieve this. For this reason, it is necessary for artists to address what the 'culinary' comprises in contemporary visual culture and the current political moment. This new version of the 'culinary' is necessarily different from Brecht's original construction.

This thesis hypothesises that the route to understanding the needs of the current age in producing the non-culinary (and thereby a re-invigoration of critique within artists' film) is produced through an understanding of contemporary subjectivity. The contribution to knowledge provided by this practice-led investigation is to examine Brecht's v-effekts through filmmaking practice. This contribution provides five 'exits' through and from Brechtian method, to new spaces of film-making practice, which take account of contemporary ideas of subjectivity. The artist's role in social change and critique remains important; however, the strategies needed for provoking social

accuses the bourgeois theatre of exploiting: this instead reflects Brecht's own confidence that an audience can be made critically aware through deliberately provoked conflicts between members of each audience. Although it seems possible that this could be productive, Brecht is assuming inherent knowledge of the internal workings of the individual based on their external circumstance (e.g., class, social status etc). This is problematic in and of itself, because it assumes Cartesian dualism and indicates that Brecht separates what is internal and external to a person. Furthermore, it insists that groups can all be influenced and challenged into active thinking through the same techniques. This dualist mode of thought is challenged by later thinkers such as Judith Butler, who contests that we are made and re-made through the ways in which we perform ourselves.

change need to be appropriate to the current epoch. This practice led project explores ways that artists may achieve a political cinema akin to Brecht's ambitions, but one which diverges from the original methods that have been subsumed by wider culture.

Key Texts Concerning Brechtian Photography & Film

When embarking on this practice-led project, I considered my work to be primarily influenced by the practical and social strategies of Brechtian photography (itself derived from theories of theatre described by Brecht in the early 20th Century). Numerous texts enabled this reflection on Brechtian scholarship by engaging with Brecht's relationship to critiques within photography and filmmaking.

In Brecht's era, the writer Walter Benjamin, a friend and contemporary, reflected upon Brechtian techniques for awakening critical consciousness in an audience. These collected texts from the 1930s are published in *Understanding Brecht* (1977) and provide a contemporary analysis of his work some of which was developed from discussions between the two theorists. Later approaches to Brecht from the 1970s often take a semiotic approach to Brecht's theories. These texts include Roland Barthes essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" (Barthes, 1974) and Stephen Heath's "Lessons from Brecht" (Heath, 1974). The magazine *Screen* had become one of the leading publications in the 1970s and 1980s to explore discoveries in the field of spectatorship. It also included Laura Mulvey's seminal text *"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"* (Mulvey,1975), which revolutionised ideas of spectatorship by introducing them from a psychoanalytic, feminist perspective *via* the concept of the Male Gaze.

Recent, more medium specific approaches to Brecht include the essays accompanying Broomberg and Chanarin's reworking of Brecht's *War Primer* called *War Primer 2* (Broomberg, and Chanarin, 2018) This text includes

essays by Tom Kuhn, David Evans, and Simon Korner, all of whom discuss Brechtian uses of photography and film. Martha Rosler's "In Around and Afterthoughts on Documentary Photography" (Rosler, [1981] 2012) has also added much to contemporary approaches towards a critical photographic method. The journal articles "Believable Fictions," by Maria Walsh, (Walsh, Maria (*Art Monthly*, Issue (342). Feb, 2010-11, pp. 11-14), and Sarah James (*Brecht: Redux* James, S. (2015) "Brecht: Redux," *Art Monthly*, 383, Feb 2015, pp. 6 -10) reflect on contemporary uses of Brecht in a fine art context. Sarah James is particularly notable for suggesting the need for a change in approach to Brecht in order to retain aspects of his radical politics. Contemporary Brechtian Scholarship also includes Roberto Schwarz "Brecht's Relevance: Highs and Lows," (Schwarz, R. (2009) *'Brecht's Relevance: Highs and Lows',* New Left Review, Volume 57, May/June 2009, pp. 85-104), which debates the extent to which Brechtian techniques have been absorbed into a wider culture. In 2010, Frederic Jameson's *Brecht & Method* (Jameson, 2010) reflected on post-modern, multi-layered approaches to Brechtian theory. Finally, an example of a recent philosophical approach to Brechtian scholarship is provided by Anthony Squiers in *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht* (Squiers, 2014).

Following Brecht's death in 1956, Brechtian scholarship has transitioned from a focus on theatre practice to incorporate disciplines such as photography and film. Brecht's theatre incorporated many different art forms (eg literature, acting, music, stage design, costume design), whereas Brechtian film and photography became more medium-specific. There are several possible reasons for this. The first of these is rooted in the treatment of Brecht within theatre itself. Martin Esslin's work suggests it was the result of a change in attitude to political theatre during the Cold War (Esslin, [1959]1980), as a result of which theatre-makers in the West distanced themselves from Brecht's politics during the era of Stalinist rule. Instead, these theatre-makers drew on Brecht by selecting aspects of his formal method and removing some of the

direct references to his politics. Esslin, writing shortly after the Stalin era in 1959, is almost celebratory of Brecht's 'genius', but very critical of what he considers his political allegiances to be (Esslin, [1959]1980).

The change in Brechtian mediums could also be connected to the focus on photography and film as political mediums after 1968 and the Vietnam War, an era which saw the emergence of faster news reports, colour photography, and the political theory of the society of the spectacle. At this time, the critical political potential of photography was beginning to be re-examined. Soft-power conflicts between the so-called East and West also appear to have resulted in greater sponsorship of the arts in the West from the late 1950s to the Early 1990s. For example, ex-CIA Chief Tom Braden discusses State sponsorship of the arts as a method of soft power in 1995 in the independent newspaper[17].

Brecht was working from the late 1920s to the late 1950s. As such, it may seem somewhat anachronistic to consider a theorist who some believe to have little relevance in an era with vastly different artistic and social conditions. Brecht was working in the era of Nazism, whereas contemporary artists are currently facing different challenges. Much writing has been dedicated to a comparison between the two times, most notably the deep analysis of historical precursors in Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes* (1991).[18] However, in order to illuminate the value of working with Brecht's ideas in the current era, it

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[17] "We wanted to unite all the people who were writers, who were musicians, who were artists, to demonstrate that the West and the United States, was devoted to freedom of expression and to intellectual achievement, without any rigid barriers as to what you must write, and what you must say, and what you must do, and what you must paint, which was what was going on in the Soviet Union. I think it was the most important division that the agency had, I think that it played an enormous role in the Cold War." (*The Independent* (October 1995) 'Modern Art was CIA "weapon"'. Available at: URL https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html (Accessed: 24th April: 2020).

[18] *The Age of Extremes* (1991) is a thorough Marxist historical analysis of the history of the early of end of the 20th Century. Unusually, it was written contemporaneously rather than looking backwards. Hobsbawm describes the text as follows: "I have concentrated, if you like, on the rise and transformations of capitalism." (Hobsbawm, History in the "Age of Extremes": A Conversation with Eric Hobsbawm (1995) *International Labour and Working-Class History* This means that, to some extent, it is an almost 'live' historical analysis rather than a retrospective one. It is also containing compelling details of 20th Century events, which became useful for my own background comprehension.

is vital to acknowledge the difference between the two times. One should also consider how Brecht may be useful for addressing the specific artistic concerns of a current age.

As previously noted, Brecht viewed his audience as an undifferentiated group and had a mechanistic conception of how they might be made critically aware.[19] This is a significantly different perspective from contemporary conceptions of audience that stress notions of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the discursive processes by which subjectivities are created. These ideas enable an interrogation of subjectivity itself as a focus for the production of social change. Contemporary conceptions of the ways in which audiences are constructed focus on the way that audiences are different in their social construction and perception and are therefore not a uniform subjectivity. The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, who argued that "the experiences of women of colour are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism." (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1243). This arguably built upon ideas emerging from the feminist campaigner Audre Lorde in 1984 - her work is discussed further in later chapters. Barthes' essay "Death of the Author" (1967) also reenvisaged audience perception as a multiple, intertextual position, rather than a singular viewpoint. For him, to suggest a singular

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[19] Ranciere discusses this mechanistic side to Brecht in *The Emancipated Spectator,* and to some extent I concur. As discussed by Chto Delat, Rancière considers that for Brecht "spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing, for two reasons. Firstly, looking is put as the opposite of knowing. It means being in front of an appearance without knowing the conditions of production of that appearance or the reality which is behind it. Secondly, looking is put as the opposite of acting. He or she who looks at the spectacle remains motionless on his or her seat, without any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is separated from the capacity of knowing in the same way as he is separated from the possibility of acting." Chtodelat.org, URL: https://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-40/jacques-ranciere-the-emancipated-spectator/ (accessed 23rd March 2020) Brecht views the spectator as someone who can be persuaded to understand the production conditions of theatrical events. This in turn, suggests that Brecht can change the viewpoint of an audience in a mechanistic way by changing his theatre, moving away from tradition realist theatre and presenting instead a type of theatre his calls Epic. "True; their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear" (Brecht, 1948, A Short Organum for the Theatre). In this text he also describes the audience as "a cowed, credulous, hypnotised mass" (p.167, Brecht, (1948) Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, Ed Willett, J.).

viewpoint from a singular author is undesirable: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" Barthes, ([1967] (1977), p.147). Instead, Barthes indicates a multiplicity of ways of reading a text. Both intersectionality and post-modern understandings of reading a text became significant to debates concerning post-Brechtian constructions of subjectivity.

In order to expand on contemporary understandings of subjectivity in relation to Brechtian critique, it is necessary to outline how my work, and that of others, appears to conceive of (and work with) Brecht contemporaneously through his technique of the v-effekt. As this thesis will propose, Brecht could be considered irrelevant in terms of the formal methodology used by some contemporary artists. However, his work remains prescient in terms of his ambition to influence the status of his viewer.

The Significance of the 'Culinary' to a Brechtian Critique

As discussed earlier, Brecht suggests that the 'culinary' in theatre leaves an audience 'satisfied' but also unchanged and unmoved by what they have witnessed on stage. For example, in describing a musical production in the 1930s, Brecht describes the reaction of the audience as follows:

> Entire rows of human beings transported into a peculiar, doped state, wholly passive, sunk without trace, seemingly in the grip of a severe poisoning attack. Their tense, congealed gaze shows that these people are the helpless and involuntary victims of the unchecked lurchings of their emotions. Trickles of sweat prove how such excesses exhaust them. The worst gangster film treats its audience more like thinking beings. Music is cast in the role of Fate. As the exceedingly complex, wholly unanalyzable fate of this period of the grisliest,

most deliberate exploitation of man by man. Such music has nothing, but purely culinary ambitions left. (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p. 89)

In order to address this issue, it is necessary to introduce and analyse the purpose of a range of Brecht's techniques and, to ask in turn, what their equivalence may be today. In many cases these techniques were placed in counterpoint to traditional forms of entertainment. These were presented as 'Epic Theatre' against what Brecht termed 'Dramatic Theatre' in his text "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (Brecht [1964] 2013, pp. 33-42). The categories of dramatic theatre to which Brecht refers are largely based on the model of storytelling developed in Aristotle's *Poetics* ([c.335BC] (2013) (Ed.) Anthony Kenny), details of which will be discussed later in this thesis. Brecht sought to overcome this type of theatre by producing theatrical works with the principal aim to challenge the audience's absorption in the spectacle. He achieved this by interrupting the flow of events on stage, revealing the construction of events and the set, and by disrupting narrative flow.

Brecht developed his practice during the political and social upheavals of the First and Second World Wars. These events had a profound influence on the theatre techniques he was to develop. Understanding these events in class terms and in view of Marxist ideas, Brecht sought to invent a practice which would raise political consciousness in a spectator and, therefore, provoke social and political change.

The Specific Importance of the V-effekt to this Study

Although the Brechtian method incorporated a number of different strategies to form what Brecht refers to as the epic theatre, I am focusing most closely on the v-effekt. This is because, it is these strategies which are more commonly

employed in the field of photography and film, the fields of study this thesis is grounded in. Theorists such as John Willett often translated the v-effekt as the alienation effect or a-effect[20], encompassing a range of Brechtian techniques. However, this is arguably not a specific enough translation of the term. Willett's description links the v-effekt closely to processes of alienation, which is perhaps not as useful as some more recent definitions. This is because alienation is a common modernist process in and of itself, and therefore, it is not as specific as what Brecht means when he used the term the v-effekt. The term 'alienation', for example, is equally applied to Samuel Beckett's theatre practice, which engaged with an existential psychological alienation rather than a more directly political form of critical distancing. The term 'alienation effect', as used by Willett may not be specific enough to encapsulate the dynamic that Brecht wishes to create.

Brecht uses the term v-effekt in varied ways to incorporate differing theatrical strategies. In his analysis of Chinese acting in "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (Brecht, [1964] 2013 pp. 91-99) he refers to the v-effekt as follows:

> This method was most recently used in Germany for plays of a non-Aristotelean (not dependent on empathy) type, as part of the attempts being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself

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[20] John Willet was responsible for the early English translations and biographies of Brecht, and he discusses the v-effect as the alienation affect. This was contested by Anthony Squiers in 2012, who explained that this is an insufficient reading of the term as it implies that the audience might be alienated rather than estranged from that with which they are familiar. "The more appropriate translation is Brecht, of course, uses the term Verfremdungseffekt (estrangement effect)" (Squiers, 2012 p.72) rather than the alienation or a-effect. Squiers, in his discussion of Silcox's analysis of Brecht (ibid), notes that this difference may have led to further confusion over the action of the v-effect on an audience. Squires consistently refers to the Verfremdungseffekt as "The Making the Familiar Strange Effect." (Squiers,2012). He sees this as more appropriate to the dynamic of the technique.

with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audiences' subconscious'" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p. 91).

Brecht thus considers the v-effekt as a counter to what he regarded as subconscious absorption of the action on stage. He argued that Aristotelian drama desired the audience to identify with events, rather than their being alert to the way in which the theatre is influencing them. He frequently referred to the audience as 'subconscious', as if an audience were unwitting victims of an almost hypnotic or addictive process rather than having agency over what they are viewing, and decisions they make outside the theatre. As such, the v-effekt is designed to provoke political agency. For this reason, I use the translation developed by Anthony Squiers in 2014, who discussed it as the "Making the Familiar Strange Effect" (Squiers, 2014, p.243). This arguably gives a better indication as to the original aim of the technique[21].

For my own purposes, the v-effekt is useful as a process for analysing the influence of Brecht on contemporary art and film, partly due to its multivalence. The v-effekt is an umbrella term for a number of different techniques which serve to distance an audience from the ready absorption of

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[21] This distinction is highlighted in the debate Squiers (2014) initiates over the difference between alienation and estrangement in response to Heidi M Silcox's (2010) essay "What is Wrong with Alienation?" (Silcox, 2010) in which he argues that:

> "The estrangement Brecht desired was an internal estrangement from one's current Weltanschauung or worldview. This misconception is likely a result of Silcox's failure to make a distinction between alienation (Entfremdung) and estrangement (Verfremdung). Brecht, of course, uses the term Verfremdungseffekt (estrangement effect). Bloch draws a precise and accurate definition of Verfremdung. According to Bloch, while Verfremdung and Entfremdung "are bound together by the alien," the former is the idea of making the familiar strange—as Brecht does with his Verfremdungseffekt. Verfremdung connotes a defamiliarized conceptualisation, whereas Entfremdung only implies a distancing, as Feuerbach uses it, to indicate a moving away from one's true self; Marx uses the term to indicate the moving away of one's labour product from oneself"

(Squiers, A, Philosophy & *Literature,* Volume 39, Number 1, April 2015 pp. 243-247).

spectacle, including Gestus, banners, placards, projections, disjointed time sequences, fragmentary props, costumes and song .[22] The term also includes unusual narrative methods, such as multiple scenes that take place in multiple places over many days. All of these techniques form a break from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which suggested that an audience should be absorbed in the theatrical event *via* narrative methods that built towards a structured, continuous form. Brecht sought to interrupt, rather than smooth over, social contradictions.

Each of these techniques proved different from Aristotelian method. For Aristotle, drama should create a continuous experience; this is discussed in his *Poetics*. The smooth 'flow' of theatre is practically 'worked out' in Aristotle's three-act method of dramatic structure, which leads from a position of toil to a cathartic resolution for the dramatic hero or anti-hero. Once catharsis is expressed by an actor, it is then shared by an audience. Brecht describes the difference between his own 'Epic' method and that of Aristotelian theatre in detail in "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" ([1930]1964): "Epic Theatre turns the spectator into an observer but arouses his capacity for action and forces him to make decisions." (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p37). In contrast, Brecht describes (Aristotelian) Dramatic Theatre as "Implicating the spectator in a stage situation [and] wears down his capacity for action. (Brecht [1964] 2013, p37)."

Catharsis means to both purge and to purify. In using this as a dramatic method, Aristotelian drama arguably gives an audience a way to escape uncomfortable feelings. For example, Aristotle says of tragedy:

A well-constructed plot should, therefore, be single in its issue, rather than double as some maintain. The change of fortune should be not from bad to

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[22] The term 'Gestus' within Brecht's practice refers to a process of demonstrated or pointed acting, "The first condition of the a-effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite gest of showing" (Brecht [1964], 2013, p. 136).

good, but, reversely, from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character either such as we have described, or better rather than worse. The practice of the stage bears out our view. At first the poets recounted any legend that came in their way. Now, the best tragedies are founded on the story of a few houses -- on the fortunes of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and those others who have done or suffered something terrible. A tragedy, then, to be perfect according to the rules of art should be of this construction. (Aristotle, *Poetics* ([c.335BC] (2013) (Ed.) Anthony Kenny).

In contrast, Brecht wanted audiences to become familiar with the feelings that Aristotle wishes to purge. The dynamic Brecht wished to create through the v-effekt is one where the audience are critically conscious of their own position in the viewing process. In this understanding, the audience is not engaged in processes of catharsis, or sympathy for the emotional journey of characters on stage. Instead, they are engaged in an emotional distance from what they are seeing, and therefore have a detached response which enables an analytic view on events. The process allows for reflection on the political or social context for events on stage, as well as reflection on how these events might unfold in the audiences' own lives.

It is important to stress, however, that Brecht's provocation towards critical reflection in the theatre audience was conceived of within a broader social project of political transformation. The techniques that comprise the v-effekt were designed by Brecht to be revolutionary. Brecht believed that if he changed the way an audience reacted to performance through his theatrical method, this would have a revolutionary effect on the larger world: theatre was therefore revolutionary by default[23]. He considered that the critical distance the

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[23] The v-effect was considered revolutionary by Brecht as it moved politics from theatre to a lived realm of social reality, in contrast to Aristotelian method which cleansed its audience of revolutionary feeling *via* catharsis. For Brecht, epic theatre ensures that "social being

v-effekt constructed could be crucial to the production of socio-political change, insofar as it formed critical subjects from audience members, who would leave the theatre to act directly on the world. In this way, the v-effekt extended from the world of theatre towards lived reality.

The Prescience of the V-Effekt

Brecht's v-effekt included the use (within theatre) of banners, placards, projections, disjointed time sequences, fragmentary props, fragmentary costumes, and unconventional use of music – specifically, song. All these techniques are now commonly used in contemporary film, art and advertising. However, when we consider the effects of these techniques in contemporary commercial culture, it is difficult to comprehend how they may form a critique of dominant culture.

The Lars Von Trier film *Dogville* (2003), is a relatively recent example of how Brechtian formal techniques have been used within film. *Dogville* uses almost all of the formal techniques associated with the v-effekt. We see examples of the use of a different historical time, place, and situation to the viewing audience, as well as songs disrupting the action, stage directions spoken out loud, actors direct address to the audience, costume changes performed on stage/screen, banners explaining events on stage, and non-diegetic sound. It is evident that the presence of Brechtian techniques within *Dogville* is not accidental but programmatic; the influence of Brecht on it has been widely discussed. For instance, Mario Vrbancic claims that "despite the attempts by Jean-Luc Godard in the 1960s to materialise Brecht's ideas on epic theatre and the V-effect in film, the film that finally achieved that in the early

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determines thought and reason" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.37). whereas in Aristotelian theatre "thought determines being and feeling" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.37).

21st century is definitely Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003)" (Vrbancic, 2009, p.45). Von Trier himself also explains in a Guardian interview in 2004 that "Dogville is certainly inspired by Brecht" (Von Trier, *The Guardian*, 2004, np).

Examples of Brechtian style devices within Dogville include mannered acting and gestures resembling Brechtian acting style, as well as a voice-over by John Hurt which interferes with the smooth transition of dramatic moments. This Brechtian narrative disjuncture works in a similar manner to a Greek chorus. While Brecht often used incidental characters to interrupt narrative flow, it is doubtful they are truly Brechtian in this context as they seem more a style or conceit than a contemporary Brechtian v-effect. More of Von Trier's strategies are discussed in detail in chapter 5, concerning my film *Letters Home* (2016) where further critical reflection takes place on the successes and failures of his methods.

The techniques in *Dogville*, I initially understood to be Brechtian techniques, have been used in my own previous work and that made in the process of this project. For example, my film *Hiraeth* (2014) made use of non-diegetic sound and montage techniques such as screens within screens and an historicised narrative structure. *Dogville* is successful in its formal reproduction of Brecht's techniques and yet unconvincing as a contemporary Brechtian form. My analysis of *Dogville* thus contributed to my decision to explore how one can make a contemporary critical 'exit' through and from Brecht that explores how his politics could be maintained though updated *via* methods appropriate to the current era.

Bertolt Brecht has been referred to as an influence on other contemporary artists. This has been in terms of the literal representation of his work, such as Monster Chetwynd's project *Dogsy Ma Bone* at the Liverpool Biennale (2016).[24] It has also been evident in the way in which artists may cite Brecht in terms of influence or inspiration. These artists include Martha Rosler,

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[24] The work of Monster Chetwynd is further explored in Chapter 7.

Broomberg and Chanarin, John Smith, Jeff Wall, Gerard Byrne, Peter Kennard, Hito Steyerl, and others.[25] It is possible to identify how Brecht's ideas have been adopted in both my own work and that of others, particularly in the realm of staged or constructed photography.

Brecht's attitude to set design belongs to his v-effekt, reflecting his desire to "make the familiar strange" (Squiers, 2014). This is a set of techniques designed to encourage his audience to be critically aware that they were in the theatre. Brecht's v-effekt, in my own work, became a way of responding to traditional modernist conceptions of documentary style photography. This technique, as deployed in my staged photographs, enabled me to acknowledge and deflate the principle of an objective photography that dominates the documentary tradition generally and, journalism specifically. The staging of photography seemed more appropriate to contemporary art practice because it has a long-standing critical relationship to realism, representation, and lifelikeness. As such, it can be said to have little or no faith that an objective reality can be depicted through an unmediated methodology.

One of the primary reasons why I believed staged photography had a critical relationship to documentary photography was that it constructs and discloses the transparency of the intervention of the artist over the scene depicted. John Pultz explains this in his text *Photography and the Body* (1995) where he claims that "with the demise in the belief that a photograph can present a privileged window onto reality and truth, photographers have chosen instead to make pictures that admit to being artifices (Pultz, 1995, p145). The history of regarding the photograph as a constructed image has roots in Brechtian theory, but it is also a semiotic insight and owes a considerable debt to Roland Barthes. Barthes mediated how filmmakers in the 1970s understood Brecht in his essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" (1977). This essay introduced

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[25] Martha Rosler's *Portraits of the Bowery District in New York (1980)*, Broomberg & Chanarin's *War Primer II (2013)*, John Smith's *The Girl Chewing Gum, Video, (1970)*, Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women*, Photograph (1979), Peter Kennard's Biography *Dispatches from an Unofficial War Artist* (2000), Hito Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun*, Video, (2016)

film and photography as texts to be read and interpreted through semiotic theory.

> The actor must prove that he is not enslaved to the spectator (Bogged down in 'reality' in 'humanity') that he guides meaning towards its' ideality - a sovereignty of the actor, master of meaning, which is evident in Brecht since he theorised it under the term distanciation (Barthes, 1977, pp.74-75).

Barthes, as translated by Stephen Heath (Barthes, 1977, p.75) refers to the term 'distanciation' as the equivalent to the v-effect. This is a contested interpretation of the term, which may partly explain why subsequent art practitioners have interpreted the v-effect as a process of distancing (which has a political and critical power in and of itself) through its realisation in purely formal terms. Squiers' suggestion that Verfremdungseffeckt is best thought of as the 'making the familiar strange effect' is worth returning to here. He suggests that the process is much more socially and psychologically dynamic in its action than a simple distancing device, as it engages an audience in a process of psychological defamiliarisation rather than simple alienation (Squires, 2014, pp. 243-247).

The confusion I had made between the terms distanciation, alienation, and verfremdung is demonstrated in another of my earlier works *Turing* (2006). I initially considered this work to be Brechtian in its formal method. However, I began to question the action of its politics. Insight into the political and psychological dimension to Brecht's work beyond its formal method led me to a re-examination of the psychological action on a viewer of the 'making the familiar strange effect'. This led me to consider how this could be achieved in a contemporary context. I began to believe that, in order to create a Brechtian

artwork, it would be important to consider the psychological process behind his political and social ambitions, above and beyond his formal techniques.

Figure 5:Alice Evans, (2006) Turing, *Photograph on Lightbox: NA.*

Turing (2006) is a staged or constructed image where the photograph is 'made' by my intervention over the scene, rather than being the result of a moment being captured in the more traditional sense of journalistic photography. The image admits to being an artifice, since it shows the method of its own construction within the frame. The artificial snow and the self-conscious framing all contribute to an equivalence of what Brecht described above as the process, in his set design, of showing the "machinery, the ropes and flies" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.233).

Other practitioners have also incorporated this strategy into their work. For example, Jeff Wall's work is exemplary in negotiating this politics of the

photographic image. Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) is created in a mirror so that the mechanisms of the picture making process are featured within the frame. Wall himself is also portrayed in the reflection as an active participant in the picture making process.

Figure 6: Jeff Wall (1979) Picture for Women, *Transparency on Lightbox: Centre Pompidou.*

In this image, Jeff Wall reveals the process of photographing the subject of the image, the artist himself, and the equipment and process of photography. This acknowledges intervention over the scene, both in terms of process and his own role as a photographer. This makes an audience aware of the construction of the image - a method in stark contrast to documentary style photography, where the means of intervention often remain hidden. According to the Tate Modern Website there is also reference to painting, with the woman taking the same pose with her hands as the character in Edouard Manet's famous work *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) (Tate Website, 2020). Although Wall is looking at his subject, the woman returns his gaze through the mirror rather than receiving

his gaze without reflecting it back. As such, she appears as an active participant in the picture making process. Within my own work, this acknowledgement of my own intervention over each scene was important. I compared this with Brechtian strategies of set design and Gestus, where the process became an important way of revealing social contradictions to an audience.

Similarly, Gillian Wearing's series of images *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992-3), also show the influence of Brecht. Wearing uses strategies which challenge documentary style photography by using proto-Brechtian techniques. Wearing's (1997) Monograph suggests that this series "interrupts the logic of photo-documentary and snapshot photography by the subjects' clear collusion and engineering of their own representation." (Wearing Monograph, 1997, p.3). These photographs appear to use Brecht's strategy of the v-effect through their use of placards and signs, in combination with his revelatory processes. In this case, these revelatory strategies of the signs reveal the processes of photo-documentary by allowing the subject of the photograph ownership of their representation.

Figure 7: Gillian Wearing (1993) Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say (Queer and Happy), *1992-1993 Maureen Paley Gallery.*

Following the release of this series, Wearing took legal action towards an advertising company whom she alleged had copied her signs. This is discussed by Mia Finemann in *The New York Times* in 1995[26] and by Paul McCann in *The Independent*[27]. Here VW was said to have copied Wearing's idea to develop advertising for car sales. This led me to inquire as to whether other aspects of Brecht's formal techniques for Verfremdungseffeckt have been superseded by their wider use in advertising. The work of both Wall and Wearing is further discussed and analysed in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

Brecht himself, as described above, considered that by changing the reactions of his audience so that they were critically engaged rather than passive absorbers of culture, he could provoke them to address the inequalities that existed in society beyond the theatre. He saw the techniques of the v-effekt as the means to achieve this dynamic. However, since Brecht's era, there have been a number of significant changes in the context in which his formal techniques are presented. As I developed my research, it became evident that none of these techniques were exclusive to critical practice, and that most of them have been absorbed into wider culture. In advertising, we see promotions for toothpaste which make a direct address to the audience, campaigns for car manufacturers which use banners and placards and insurance companies that show actors performing costume changes in front of the camera. The notion of an historicised narrative structure is also so familiar in contemporary culture that it is formulaic. The evidence from these examples suggests that the critique of mainstream film has been absorbed by transforming it into a technique for producing excitement in the viewer.

For example, the Hollywood film *Deadpool* (2016) has opening credits which produce a Brechtian sense of revelatory practice to play with an

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[26] The New York Times (2008) "The Image is Familiar: The Pitch is Different." Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/13/arts/design/13fine.html (accessed 2016)
[27] The Independent "VW Stole my Ideas says Turner Winner." Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/vw-stole-my-ideas-says-turner-winner-1164356.html (Accessed 2016)

audience's sense of complicity in the knowledge and understanding of similar, less ironic forms of filmmaking. This section of the film works intertextually to reference and break the construction of genre films through ironic reference to them. This is accomplished by the credits replacing the names of people making the film with ironic image cards (like Brecht's interruption through banners and placards) that mimic traditional Hollywood credit sequences. This is an example of Brecht being absorbed into knowing and ironic forms of consumer culture which are ultimately hostile to Brecht's original intentions. This again suggests the absorption of many of his critical techniques into familiar culinary tropes.

*Figure 8:*Deadpool *(Opening Credit Sequence) (2016) Marvel/20th Century Fox.*

When Brecht was active, theatre was a destination for people from many different social strata, and there arguably existed a definable proletariat. This means that the action of his v-effekt was able to address certain differences between his audience members. We see evidence for contemporary problems

with his adoption of these types of critical technique in statements from his own era. For instance, in 1956 Brecht was quoted by biographer Ernst Schumacher as saying that "in most cases, all that remains of the Verfremdungseffeckt is the effects, stripped of their social application, stripped of their point" (Brecht, [1959], 1986 p.186).

With this in mind, there may be a disjuncture between what Brecht sought to achieve through his technical, formal method and his programme for social and political revolution. The adoption of Gillian Wearing's work is not an isolated instance of Brechtian techniques being adopted by advertising. For example, a 2016 advertisement for Sony appears to be reminiscent of Brechtian techniques. Here, the Sony camera-perfume bottle, could be said to reveal the method of its own construction. The woman in the advertisement is photographing both herself and the camera in the same frame, revealing in turn the methods of the photograph's construction.

Figure 9:Sony (2016) Sony Camera Perfume Bottle *[Advertisement].*

For recent Brechtian style contemporary artists, there has been a transition from live theatre to film as a more popular and egalitarian form. The cinema became regarded as the medium of the masses over the theatre. Film and photography are easily portable and therefore more broadly popular and practically accessible; this may have been a reason why many visual artists too began working in film and photography. Fredric Jameson (Jameson, 2011, pp. 69-70) considers that the medium of film itself restricts the potential of Brechtian dynamics. Brecht was working in a live performance form, whereas Jameson considers that celluloid has less adaptability in its capacity to 'effect' a live audience:

> On the other hand, it seems possible that the medium is itself at fault and at stake: the 'acting' has already been done and is now irremediable, forever registered on a film that can be played again and again without the slightest changes or modifications being possible. On stage, however, we are at the very present of time of the performance: it is no longer available when it goes into the past (however irremediable its already acted gestures, they can never be witnessed again, only remembered) - but for this one long moment of its present the actor's gesture can still be modified; any number of possibilities throng the present of the stage, which is surely invested by what Deleuze called 'virtuality' - something far richer than mere possibility, and a kind of thronging within a present in much the same spirit in which Heidegger reinterpreted Nietzsche's will to power as an Aristotelian energeia. Whatever film can do, it cannot give that sense of emergence and praxis. (Jameson, 2011, pp.69-70)

Jameson considers the permanence of the filming medium as a problem for audience criticality. He therefore suggests that, following Brechtian method, live theatre is possibly a better way of creating a critically engaged artform. This interpretation can be contested. A film is a live event in the mind of the

audience, and they each take something different from it according to their own specific understanding and experience. This allows for much more "emergence and praxis" (Jameson, 2011, pp.69-70) than Jameson's understanding allows. Brecht himself also found film and radio an important source of critical potential and wrote much about it. His brief foray into film included directing one of the scenes in *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), a film with a score by Hans Eisler (one of Brecht's most important collaborators), which showed the difficulty of life for the working class during the depression era Berlin. This indicates that Brecht was less reluctant to dismiss the filmic medium as a critically enabling form than might be suggested by Jameson's dismissive description.

The theatre Brecht proposed was indeed a live event, and this fact is essential to the dynamic of his processes. Audience members could view each other as well as the play within the theatre; their self-awareness, alongside awareness of the plays, was a vital dimension of what he sought to achieve. Brecht aimed for audiences to debate and disagree among themselves during the course of events taking place on stage. He emphasised the need for an audience to become aware of their own social position in the viewing process as a part of the v-effekt. He was critical of conventional forms of media, such as news reporting and advertising, which he considered to be working to pacify an audience rather than encouraging them to become critical observers. We can see this in Brecht's War Primer (1945), which criticises contemporary forms of news media by writing poetry that contrasts with the message of the reports. If techniques such as the revelatory practices of staged photography are now being incorporated in advertising, then they run the risk of losing their critical power.

Is it Still Possible to Realise Brecht's Socio-Political Goals by Using his Original Techniques?

The preceding inquiry led to two separate but related critiques of Brechtian photographic practice. Firstly, I identified the separation or isolation of the formal techniques of Brechtian practices from the social conditions of political change. Secondly, I asked whether Brecht's techniques retained their critical function, after they had been absorbed into other fields such as advertising and news media. The more I understood that these techniques are no longer effective as a critique to the commercial forms that Brecht originally sought to challenge, the harder it became to persist in making Brechtian constructed photography.

This chapter has also raised larger debates over the use and appropriation of Brecht's work. While it is possible for writers and artists to appropriate the work of their forbearers (for example in the work of Duchamp's ready-mades, Dada, or Cubism), these narratives may be separate from the historical character of the work; the work re-contextualises original form through appropriation. In the case of Brechtian style photographs, this emerges both in the context of art and advertising. With this in mind, I began to evaluate whether this re-contextualising process was taking place in the same way – whether the form or the strategies Brecht put forward were merely being reproduced from original to contemporary times without the added dimension of reflexivity. This raises two pivotal questions. Firstly, where then does this leave Brecht in the context of artistic practice? Secondly, how can Brecht's v-effekt remain a radical method - and what would this look like?

Chapter 2
Brecht in the 21st Century

Problems with the Continued Formal use of Brecht's V-effekt.

Although Brecht was clear in his techniques for epic theatre, when I examined his techniques in the context of their contemporary use, it became apparent that the method I had chosen had become divorced from its original critical effect. For example, Brecht's techniques of revealing the materials of the set have become so widespread in advertising that they have become little more than decorative techniques or 'postmodern' conventions, signalling the ironic cleverness of the filmmaker, product or audience. Brecht's methods have been absorbed into culture generally. As a result, aspects of his techniques have lost their critical power.

Evidence for this can be found in a range of common forms of advertising and cinematic techniques. For example, as mentioned previously, the *Sony Camera Perfume Bottle* of 2015 is advertised in this way. Here, as explained and illustrated earlier, the perfume and camera are combined revealing the construction of both. This technique is often referred to as the process of 'Breaking the 4th Wall.' However, the original concept of the 4th Wall emerges from the writings of Diderot, who states "Imagine there is a big wall at the edge of the stage separating you from the parterre. Act as if the curtain was never raised," (Diderot, 1970, p.453)[28].

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[28] Michael Fried's (1988) text *Absorption & Theatricality, Theatricality and Illusion - Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* describes Diderot's reflection on theatricality. Diderot saw theatricality in art as a negative trait. He was much more celebratory about art that he considered morally correct and showed characters engaged in moral acts which could be an example to others: "The same basic issue-the need to establish the fiction chat the beholder does not exist proves to be the central concern of the writings on painting and drama of the foremost critic of the age," Denis Diderot. (Fried, 1988, p.6). Brecht undoes this process to reveal the

The reflexivity seen in contemporary formal applications of Brechtian method is used for many different reasons, and it is rarely strictly Brechtian. This is enlarged upon by Robert Stam, who suggests the manifold ways in which reflexivity can be divorced from political intention:

> Reflexivity comes with no pre-attached political valuence; it can be grounded in art-for-art's sake aestheticism, in media specific formalism, or in dialectical materialism. It can be individualistic or collective, narcissistic or inter-subjective. It can be a sign of bohemian flippancy or politically motivated sincerity. (Stam, 1992, Preface, p.xvi).

If we concur with Stam, there is reason to ask if something of value can be found in Brecht's work beyond these formal techniques which have been adopted and subsumed by broader culture. In separate articles in *Art Monthly*, both Maria Walsh and Sarah James argue that there is much more in Brecht than these familiar tropes from contemporary film and TV. Both consider that Brecht's legacy for fine art could be a fruitful source of further investigation. James' "Brecht/Redux" acknowledges that artists may quote Brecht, yet often create works divorced from his politics. She suggests that if artists wish to re-engage with his politics, they must rethink how they are using these techniques (James, 2015).

One group selected for criticism by James are the photography collective Broomberg and Chanarin, whose work, she claims, "seems to do little to counter any scepticism as to the safe and fairly elitist nature of the pair's Brechtianism." (James, 2015, p.9). James is referring here to the collective's updated version of Brecht's *War Primer* (1945), which used the

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construction of images, so that the audience is critically aware of how images and also theatre was made. This creates what he terms an active spectator.

same text as Brecht but altered or updated the images. This seems to be "safe" because it repeats the original intervention that Brecht made, but does not consider that our reception and reaction to such images are more understood in terms of their mediation in the current era. In order to make a new critical response to politics, new methods need to be formulated - methods appropriate to the contemporary moment. This is a central tenet of this thesis' argument concerning Brechtian criticality: we can adopt his politics, but we need to change our methods to produce a criticality appropriate to the needs and politics of today.

This argument is echoed by Maria Walsh, when engaging with the nature of Brechtian practice in film. Brecht claims that artists using film need to look beyond traditional techniques of distancing and didacticism (or the formal expression of techniques) which 'shock' spectators out of their absorption in spectacle. Walsh, in contrast, suggests going beyond Brechtian revelatory practices. She argues that "underscoring of the fictional by revealing its process of construction seems somewhat condescending to an audience which, in this day and age, cannot but be aware of the signifiers of fiction and the real (Walsh, 2010, p.342). Instead of conventional Brechtian methodologies, Walsh suggests that artists need to identify ways in which Hollywood expression and cinematic illusion could be used to form new responses to the problems of spectatorship:

> While 'Brechtian' strategies might inspire formal innovation, the projected photographs of the moving image emit performances whose energies and rhythms resonate with the core selves of captivated audiences. (Walsh, 2010 p.342).

Walsh expands on this idea by giving examples of artists who have gone beyond conventional Brechtian techniques by producing a different form of encounter. For example, her discussion of Ming Wong's *Life and Death in Venice* suggests that it explores the Brechtian turn beyond a simple reflexive

encounter by using Wong's own performance to emphasise the global dominance of western cinema and distribution networks, arguing that "Conceptually, the piece is a clever staging of components of 'primitive cinema, not only the piano accompaniment, but also in the Asian body's acting out of an encounter with European Cinema" (Walsh, 2010, p.342). However, Walsh also argues that the affective aspect of the piece becomes significant to its method of critique: a less obvious strategy within conventional uses of Brecht. This adds a more contemporary dynamic to Brechtian-style cinema in that it deals with notions of desire perhaps more akin to other styles of cinema than that of strictly Brechtian devices. Walsh describes this as "strangely captivating" (Walsh, 2010, p.342):

> Wong's miscasting by age and race lends a curious resonance to his performance. The performance is continually threatening to unravel - he has not used aging makeup and his blonde wig sits uneasily with his Asian features - yet Wong's unflinching gaze and the contour and rhythm of his ersatz performance invests it with belief and desire (Walsh, 2010, p.342).

With these ideas in mind, I was motivated to explore how contemporary theories and practices of spectatorship might be explored as means of moving through (and from) Brecht within my own work.

How and Why Should Brecht be Utilised for the 21st Century?

Walsh's discussion above reveals that one of the ways into a Brechtian critique for the contemporary era may be through an analysis and application of more recent theories and forms of spectatorship. As Walsh argues, these theories

must take account of the ways in which many of his original techniques have been subsumed. In his own era, Brecht was an acute observer of the dynamics of audience responses and wanted to create a critical or active spectatorship amongst them. This critical spectatorship or aroused audience is described in his 1949 dialogue with the playwright Fredrich Wolf in *Brecht on Theatre* titled "Formal Problems Arising from The Theatre's New Content" (Brecht, [1964] 2013), in which he claims that "The 'attitude of criticism' which it tries to awaken in its audience cannot be passionate enough for it" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.227).

Here, Brecht shows that he wishes to create or "awaken" an active audience *via* his v-effekts by creating what he terms an "attitude of criticism" towards social injustice (Brecht, 1949). However, as discussed earlier, some of his methods for doing this have since been subsumed. Could Brecht's methods of the time still work effectively for contemporary spectators, when irony and breaking with cinematic illusion have become a familiar part of conventional cinematic experience? In Brecht's era, techniques of filmic montage were considered to be at the cutting edge of cinematic technique, pioneered by Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, and others.[29] [30]. Contemporaneous audience members were commonly reported to have fainted at such illusions. However, this method of editing is arguably now a mundane inevitability in many cinematic productions. This can be considered evidence that Brechtian techniques have now been absorbed into broader culture. Discussions of this absorption into broader culture take place in Robert Stam's text *Reflexivity in Film & Literature* (1992) and this is further analysed and addressed in later chapters.

Brecht's ambitions for montage were considerably different: he viewed montage as a political tool rather than an aesthetic or filmic device. In his text "The Modern Theatre is The Epic Theatre*"* (1930), Brecht opposes the term

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[29] Eisenstein's "Methods of Montage" (1929) describes the aims and realisation of his techniques.
[30] Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) realises many types of montage within Cinema.

'growth' in conventional dramatic theatre to his term 'montage' in epic theatre. For him, growth in theatre appears to be referencing the idea that narrative structure develops logically to reinforce the idea that social inequalities are a natural inevitability, one which is reflected in theatre as in life. By growth, Brecht refers to the idea of the naturalism in theatre - a narrative grows from a start to the end of a production *via* Aristotelian progressive narrative, making social inequalities seem like a natural inevitable process. Montage contradicts this, intervening to show that what appears natural is in actual fact part of a social inequality of which an audience can and should be made aware of. This was Brecht's political intent in the use of Montage. In the larger body of this essay, Brecht bemoans traditional operatic forms as being "culinary" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.37), arguing that operas such as the work of Wagner, (The Gesamtkunstwerk or 'integrated work of art' (see: Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.37), fuse elements of music, image and setting so that the viewer is intoxicated by the work and therefore unable to think beyond the aesthetic pleasure of it:

> The integration is a muddle, the various elements will be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive suffering part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to produce sordid intoxication, or creates a fog, and has got to be given up (Brecht, [1964] 2013, pp. 37-38).

The 'culinary' is a metaphor for a type of theatre which fuses the spectator with the production so that they become absorbed into the whole totalising process. The audience are stirred up in emotion and become a part of the theatre experience, unable to use their critical faculties. Brecht places this in exact opposition to what he wants to achieve with his own methods.

Brecht intervened in what he considered to be culinary through his use of montage. It was a method by which he could subvert the audience's intoxication in traditional narratives by interrupting narrative flow, making an audience intertextually aware of how other 'culinary' forms of theatre act on them. For Brecht, montage was not the literal contrast of one element to another; as in film editing, montage was also the political effect of juxtaposing elements rather than being solely visual. This was a strategy designed to break the totality of the artwork and to create political contrast, so that the message of a work was not immediately received.

Growth in theatre was indeed the opposite of montage in this case. Brecht considered that conventional narrative forms 'grew' without interruption and that montage (or elements that did not fit with the apparent natural 'growth' of the productions structure) interrupted this. Montage therefore took a position on the action on stage, rather than allowing events that took place to appear natural or inevitable.

In a later text titled "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Pictures of The Elder Brueghel," (1940) Brecht talks of montage in a different way and yet, his political ambition is the same, claiming that "anyone making a profound study of Brueghel's pictorial contrasts must realise that he deals in contradictions (Brecht, [1964] 2013 p.157). For Brecht, montage is not just visible in what we consider filmic montage, but can be equally effective when used in a single image, here interrupting an idealised landscape.

Figure 10:Breugal, P. (1558-60) Landscape with the Fall of Icarus *[Oil]. Royal Museums of Fine Arts Belgium, Belgium Available at: URL https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape_with_the_Fall_of_Icarus(Accessed: 12th Jan 2018).*

> In the *Fall of Icarus*, the catastrophe breaks into the idyll in such a way that is clearly set apart from it and valuable insights into the idyll can be gained. He does not allow the catastrophe to alter the idyll; the latter rather remains unaltered and survives understood, merely disturbed (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.157).

Brecht is suggesting that the viewer is affected by the disturbance to the scene. They are encouraged to acknowledge the disaster, and thereby, to take a stand on the contradictions within it. For Brecht, montage is far more than the physical placement of contrasting elements; rather, it is a political dynamic aimed at challenging an audience's ready absorption in a spectacle. Brecht is not just talking here of the physical artwork, but also making a veiled commentary on the political situation at the time.

This view of montage is also confirmed by Walter Benjamin's writings. Benjamin, according to translator Stanley Mitchell, considered montage as "an un-melancholy form of allegory" (Mitchell, 1998, p.xiii), a way to shock people into using their senses. This is also evidenced in the way in which Benjamin describes the use of montage in both Brecht and the work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.[31] In Benjamin's description, montage becomes an entirely modern phenomenon, here putting dissimilar elements together in unexpected ways is a device that produces a radical change in the recognition of the world. As such it is a transformation of an audience's subjectivity, albeit understood as the transformation of the individual's ideological or political position.

Within my own early work, I have also used processes of montage, which I considered to have radical effects. My film *Hiraeth* (2014), for example, employed the juxtaposition of images, sound and screens-within-screens to reflect on contemporary politics. *Hiraeth* (2014) was developed from found footage, using a process of layering to contrast the same place at two differing historical eras. The film demonstrates the environmental and social impacts of industrialisation on a landscape and its people. In using techniques of screens within screens, I also reflected upon some of the illusionary ambitions of early forms of cinema. For example, I examined the film *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) by George Méliès, and analysed the use of illusionary tricks within it.

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[31] Benjamin discusses Eisenstein in a response to A.H. Schmitz review of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. In his response to the what he considered to be a conservative review, Benjamin states: "In every new technical revolution, the political position is transformed - as if on its own- from a deeply hidden element of art into a manifest one. And this brings us ultimately to film. Along the dramatic points of fracture in artistic formations, film is one of the most dramatic" (Benjamin [1936] 2004, p317). Echoing Brecht, Benjamin is demonstrating how film can draw out hidden politics in art, making them manifest to an audience *via* montage and other filmic techniques.

Figure 11:Still from A Trip to the Moon *(1902) by George Méliès.*

Méliès and Brecht are connected by their both rejecting the concept of illusion. This has been noted by film critics such as Dan North, who describes the context in which Méliès rejected illusionism:

> The historical links between magic and cinema can help us to understand early film's ambiguous relations to both art and technology. Since magic theatre was designed to remove any fearful elements from the stagecraft, the illusions took on an anti-realistic quality, which would enable spectators to appreciate the artistry and the science behind a trick, without ever being completely deceived. Some of the earliest filmmakers engaged with both the scientific and artistic capabilities of the new medium, in order to meet the expectations of such technically literate audiences (North, 2014, p.71).

Méliès' decision to use an anti-realistic quality within his film appears to mirror Brecht's later formal techniques, which sought to "emphasise the machinery,

the ropes and the flies" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p. 233) within his stagecraft. I found this commonality between the two practitioners interesting, prompting me to ask what effect the screens-within-screens had within my own method: was it, as George Méliès' work proposed, a method to "enable spectators to appreciate the artistry and the science behind a trick without ever being completely deceived," (North, 2014, p.71) - or did it effectively relate to Brecht's ambition, which was to reveal the social forces in operation in society behind other realist methods of theatrical technique? I speculated whether Brecht owed a debt to Méliès in the development of the formal aspects of his v-effekt, and whether Brecht's techniques did anything beyond what Méliès had already achieved in 1902. My resultant investigations depend on such comparisons as Brechtian techniques in film and photography (which are similar to earlier techniques) and yet are also intended to encourage the transformation of art from the domain of creative endeavour to socio-political reality.

Contemporary Approaches to Brecht within Film and Photography

This section develops and explores various approaches to the relationship between Bertolt Brecht and contemporary art-based film making practice. As an artist working mostly in photography and film, I had long been interested in theories associated with the collective and collaborative, aspect of the critical project developed by Brecht. Brecht worked collaboratively, as well as on more individual projects. As a filmmaker, this is a choice that I have decided to emulate[32]. Filmmaking, by its very nature, is highly collaborative, and both Brechtian methodologies and practice have been very influential on art

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[32] Brecht's collaborative practice is well documented. He always worked with others, both in terms of the Berliner Ensemble and his intellectual partners. This satellite of people included including Charles Laughton, Helen Weigel, Walter Benjamin and many others.

filmmaking - including my own. In particular, artists have responded to notions expressed in the v-effekt, with its focus on distancing an audience, so that they become socially and politically aware of their circumstances rather than absorbed in what Brechtian theory calls a 'culinary' spectacle.

Brecht also emphasised the importance of collaboration between director and other creatives, but also the importance of collaboration and development alongside an audience. For example, *The Learning Plays*, discussed further in Chapter 3, allowed a dynamic exchange between performers and audience. In this model, the process of making theatre was no longer fixed but becomes a consistently changing process. Brecht sought to transition from the fixed working of older naturalistic theatrical method to a dynamic method of social and political change, so that his audiences felt themselves "alterable and able to alter" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37). This was starkly different from most theatre contemporary to Brecht, which relied on a fixed script and unchanging performances.

I was also influenced by artists such as Clio Barnard, Miranda Pennell, Martha Rosler, Jeff Wall, and Gillian Wearing - all of whom have used the v-effekt in very different ways to try to encourage audiences to become more critically aware. I will discuss each of these artists briefly in this section, but this is not a comprehensive list of contemporary approaches to Brecht. In chapters to follow I will also refer to Monster Chetwynd, Hans Haacke, Alan Kaprow, Alexander Kluge, Broomberg and Chanarin, Peter Woolen and Laura Mulvey - mapping a range of contemporary practices, some of which are more contemporary than others. The works I will now introduce have commonality in that they are all pieces that are relevant to my own practice and simultaneously seem influenced by Brecht's interests and concerns. I also found them of interest as they seemed to move away from modernist-style photojournalism and into a territory of creative endeavour which acknowledged the influence of the artist over the scene they were depicting.

I initially saw Wall's photograph *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (Wall, 1993) as being typically Brechtian. In this image, Wall has seemingly captured a "decisive moment" reminiscent of the work of modernist photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, regarded as one of the fathers of modern photojournalism. Cartier-Bresson described the decisive moment in claiming that: "To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression" *(Photo-room online journal:* https://fotoroom.co/decisive-moment-henri-cartier-bresson/). In Wall's work, (illustrated and further discussed on page 104), a passer-by is surprised by the wind. His belongings float by, apparently swept up by the wind. The piece references documentary photography, and, specifically, the photojournalistic tradition initiated by Cartier-Bresson. However, the element of surprise is made a deliberate, obviously rendered illusion in this form of staged tableau. The intervention of the photographer is rendered explicit by the apparent impossibility of the composition.

Wall's intervention created a reflexivity to the photographic image through the technologically uncanny nature of the scene. The photograph seemed to create a foil to the idea of Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' and, as such, shed doubt on modernist and enlightenment ideas that objective truth is achievable through non-intervention in photography. This attitude seemed typically Brechtian to me, in that Brecht appeared to have developed his *War Primer* (1945) in a comparable way. This work was a response to journalistic photography, and what he believed to be its propagandistic use during the Second World War. I thus came to see Wall's work as a contemporary interpretation of Brecht's intervention. I was convinced that Wall's staged photographic lightboxes encouraged the viewer to reflect critically on the documentary-style photography of Cartier-Bresson and others, and, as a result, upon photography's role as a faithful reproducer of events.

Wall's work has been described as Brechtian by Gillian Perry and Paul Wood, who discuss the reflexivity of his work as a contribution to Brechtian criticality. However, Steve Edwards (2007) extends this analysis of Wall's work to suggest that the Brechtian quality of his practice also lays in the allegorical wit and humour within its critical effect.[33] For this reason, Wall's sophisticated response to Brechtian criticality steps beyond formal reflexivity and into a more politically productive dynamic. When looking at Wall's work, I was also reminded of Brecht's designs for theatre as described in *Brecht on Theatre* (1964). In this text, Brecht describes the need for theatre to reveal the nature of its own construction by laying bare the devices used. Jeff Wall was also laying bare the devices of documentary photography, as Brecht had done with his critical theatrical method.

Gillian Wearing's use of signs and banners, as well as her investigation into film development techniques, is also significant. The use of the non-actor within her documentary artwork *Self-Made* (2010) produces an awkwardness which draws attention to the medium. It follows the narrative of a group of non-actors working with a performance coach, who helps them develop alter-egos that achieve things in life that they may have missed out on. It thus speaks of notions of identity, representation, reality and the concept of performance itself. The fact of performance development taking place within the narrative of her film also suggests Brechtian ideas; the workshopping that takes place is reminiscent of Brecht's *Messingkauf Diaries* ([1930s-1940s], 2018) where the members of the theatre all have input in the eventual development of the work. As such, it appears to develop organically through conversation, despite being pre-engineered.

In another example, Clio Barnard's use of disjointed lip-synching in *The Arbor* (2010) seems to make what is familiar strange. This process puts mental distance between the work and the viewer, forcing them to use a critical

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[33] I discuss the analysis provided by all these theorists in a later chapter on my film *Gaslighting* (2015).

perspective. This defamiliarisation was similar to Brecht's decision to put costume changes in full view of the audience, or his method of "Gestus", a form of mannered acting. Gestus was described particularly tellingly in his description of Chinese acting:

> The Chinese actor expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. (Brecht [1964] (2013) p.92)

Miranda Pennell's use of voiceover and non-Aristotelian narrative techniques in *Why Colonel Bunny was Killed* (2010) also seems to have been influenced by Brecht. Brecht often playfully experimented with narrative structure, so that what he termed 'catharsis' or emotional release in more traditional forms of theatre could not take place. The film uses a simple animation of photographs with an obvious voiceover to create distancing and space. This carefully devised editing technique has the effect of creating novel conversations with British colonial policies. The strategy borrows from traditional documentary form but changes its approach so that an audience is forced to reflect on colonial policy in India.

The film showcases an archive of images, with the intention of uncovering reasons for colonial crimes near the Indian Afghan border in the 19th Century. It uses photographs to show how and why colonial ideas and prejudices remain within the collective imagination. The piece is read by Pennel's husband (artist John Smith), who recites from colonial diaries. The photographic techniques employed are varied, but the animation of photographs through slow camera movement lends a Brechtian dimension, as they seem to slow down reception of the narrative and provoke reflection. The photographs are presented in a manner reminiscent of forensic photography, an intertextual

visual metaphor employed by Pennel to further 'evidence' the problematics of British colonialist policies in India. The photography of criminal investigation implicates the colonialists for the crimes they commit, by deploying methods they usually used themselves. This turns the rational and scientific techniques of Western photography back towards itself, implicating the West in an act of criminality. This has some commonality with Brecht's decision to use his *War Primer* to re-frame the use of documentary within his work in order to criticise the way journalistic works are mediated. *War Primer* is discussed further in later chapters of this text.
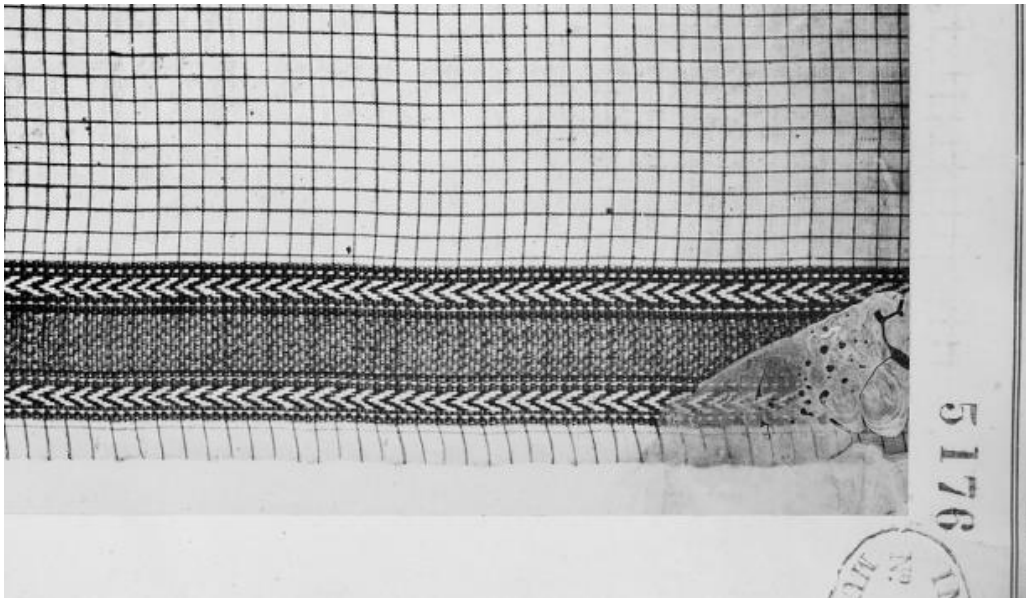
Figure 12: Still from Why Colonel Bunny was Killed *(2010) Miranda Pennell, LUX*

A different approach reminiscent of Brechtian techniques can be seen in Martha Rosler's work *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-5), which consists of portraits of the Bowery district in New York. In this work, Rosler reflects on the traditions of documentary style photography. She creates photographs which depict poverty through the evidence of those left destitute, but without portraying the people themselves. The work therefore reflects on the social and political reasons for poverty. This gives the people involved

dignity, yet also emphasises the social and political causes of poverty rather than 'othering' those who are left destitute. The material situation of the people and the othering they receive thus becomes a social and political issue rather than a personal one. Her description of documentary photography is telling in this respect, as she says it is carrying: "(old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful" (Rosler, 1981, p.4). This emphasises her call to change the effect of documentary-style photography so that it could become more socially productive, in a similar manner to Brecht's approach in the 1930s. Rosler describes this as the need for "a documentary incorporated into an explicit analysis of society and, at least, the beginning of a program for changing it" (Rosler, 1981, p.6). For her, this is the preeminent challenge to the documentary photographer in the current era – in claiming this, her work seems prescient both for Brechtian ambitions and for the photographic medium in current times. We now live in an era in which the importance of a visually literate and critical spectatorship seems equally necessary.
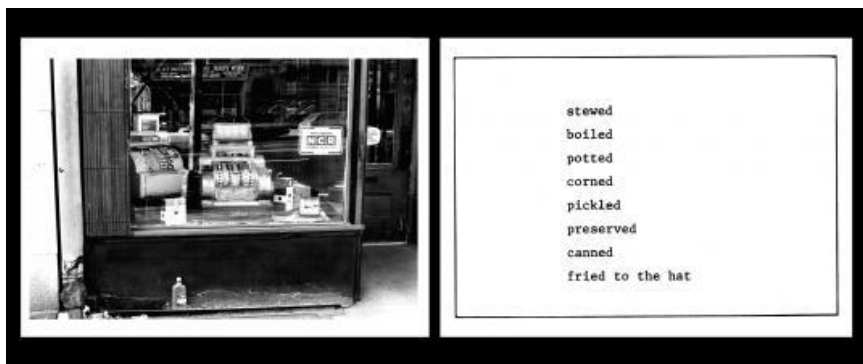
Figure 13: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems 1974-5 *(2012), Afterall.*

In their use of Brecht's formal techniques, these artists seem interested in creating an 'active spectatorship', and all were concerned with making audiences politically active. In the contemporary world, where we often find ourselves passively staring at screens, the act of not being passive, I felt, was more important than ever.

Brecht attempted Hollywood scriptwriting with *Hangmen Also Die!* in 1943, his only Hollywood film credit. At this time, he was in exile in the USA - as a result, the theories exemplified in that film are politically engaged for the era. It is also politically pertinent, since it reflects on the situation in Europe from which Brecht was still exiled. However, the new film effects used (non-diegetic sound, jump cuts, montage, sound interrupting the flow of action), have subsequently been absorbed into broader filmmaking culture so completely that they are unrecognisable as having the v-effekt to contemporary audiences.

Figure 14:Opening of Hangmen also Die! *(1943) (Film Dir. Fritz Lang with a script developed from a story by Bertolt Brecht)*

Far from being an audience who were to be compelled to change their lives on leaving the theatre by becoming aware of societal differences and inequalities, overuse and normalisation of these methodologies in film making has become part of the 'culinary' theatrical process itself. Although it was directed by the celebrated German director Fritz Lang, many techniques used in this film were influenced by other European cinema directors (such as Eisenstein), and by Brechtian theatre techniques themselves.

The role of intersectionality in reformulating Brecht's notions of audience subjectivity is worth returning to at this point. Although references to his audience are frequent, Brecht uses words to describe them which imply that

he regards them as a 'whole,' rather than a group of individuals with differing subjectivities. For example, in his writings, as quoted above, he observes them as a 'mass' claiming that "their tense congealed gaze shows that they are subject to the unchecked lurchings of their emotions" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p. 89). This description shows that Brecht regarded the audience as a singular group united in their experience of cinema. Brecht wished to resist this in his practice, as can be seen in his using phrases derived from sporting activities; he wants to create a theatre atmosphere similar to a "sporting arena or a boxing ring" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.233). Here people debate and disagree in the process of viewing events.

A similar issue to Brecht's problematic use of ideas of the 'mass' is raised by John Carey's 1992 monograph *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939.* In this text, Carey looks at shifting ideas of the working class, focusing on modernist novelists in particular. He says:

> The purpose of modernist writing, it suggests, was to exclude these newly educated (or 'semi'-educated') readers, and so to preserve the intellectual's seclusion from the 'mass.'
>
> The 'mass' is, of course, a fiction. Its ruction, as a linguistic device, is to eliminate the human status of the majority of people- or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make users of the term, in their own esteem, superior. (Carey,1995, Preface)

Carey's text explores how problematic ideas of the 'mass' were at the time. This critique of the idea of the mass is extended by Judith Butler and Audre Lorde, who (as noted in the previous chapter) discussed ideas around performativity and intersectionality respectively. The concept of

intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, who uses the term in her essay; "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." Crenshaw explains how intersectionality is deployed differently by different groups. Her own use of the term describes how people can be differently and multiply oppressed within the frameworks of both race and gender:

> I have used intersectionality to describe or frame various relationships between race and gender. I have used intersectionality as a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy generally. I have also used intersectionality to describe the location of women of colour both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism. (Stanford Law Review, Jul. 1991, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul. 1991), p. 1265)

Crenshaw enlarges on the ways in which women of colour can be excluded from the political power of identity politics, and can even, in certain circumstances, be further marginalised by it. Crenshaw thereby demonstrates how some people are multiply oppressed, even within feminist discourse itself:

> The embrace of identity politics, however, has been in tension with dominant conceptions of social justice. Race, gender, and other identities are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination-that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which power works to exclude or marginalise those who are different. (Crenshaw,1991, p.1242)

Audre Lorde's writings support this argument, explaining that it is necessary for white women to engage with black struggle to have any hope of resisting

patriarchal struggle:

> This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed
> occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women
> of Color to educate white women - in the face of tremendous resistance - as to
> our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a
> diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.
> Simone de Beauvoir once said: "It is in the knowledge of the genuine
> conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons
> for acting."
>
> Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and
> time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of
> knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference
> that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can
> begin to illuminate all our choices. (Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will
> Never Dismantle the Master's House", 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and
> Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110- 114. 2007. 3. Print).

Both authors emphasise the need to understand that groups are not singularly
but can be multiply oppressed and for this reason, new and different tools are
needed to challenge this oppression. This approach is different to traditional
Brechtian Marxist approaches. This Marxist approach to the term
intersectionality could be considered close to Brecht:

> On the surface, then, it may seem as if Marxism and intersectionality are
> complementary. However, if we look beneath the surface into the theory
> underpinning intersectionality, we can see that in its understanding of
> oppression and how to fight it, it is very different from Marxism. […] The
> ideological foundation of intersectionality rests on post-Marxist theories such
> as postmodernism and poststructuralism, theories that gained popularity in
> academic circles precisely in a period of capitalist reaction and the collapse of

Stalinism, when the labour and left leadership abandoned even the pretence of struggling for socialism and came out openly for a more "humane" capitalism. (https://www.marxist.com/marxism-vs-intersectionality.htm, 2019, np)

The authors of the article above thus argue that intersectionality entrenches itself in identity politics and thereby cannot serve to fully challenge the causes of inequality, which they identify as intrinsic to the capitalist system itself. They suggest that, without targeting inequality directly through Marxist intervention, intersectionality can be used by capitalist structures to their advantage. They argue that this is because intersectionality does not deal directly with the causes of inequality but is based on individuated forms of politics which depend upon "sectioning off people on separate axes of oppression" (https://www.marxist.com/marxism-vs-intersectionality.htm, 2019). As they elaborate, "the fact that intersectionality does not target the root of oppression means that it is ultimately not a threat to the capitalist class or their reformist allies, which is why they can so easily adopt its language in an effort to seem more progressive" (https://www.marxist.com/marxism-vs-intersectionality.htm, 2019, np). This may also explain why Brecht himself does not focus directly on individual oppression through his work and tends to think in terms of social class.

As a result of these critical approaches to the subject, I began to comprehend a difference between contemporary views of subjectivity and Brecht's conceptions of the passive and the critical theatregoer. I asked if Brecht was limiting his critical response by his unwillingness to acknowledge the spectrum of audience subjectivities. This concern regarding audience subjectivity, is raised by Jacques Rancière in his text *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011). Ranciere implies that the formal use of Brechtian technique fails because it assumes ignorance in the spectator which needs to be 'corrected'

by critical techniques, rather than acknowledging different degrees of what he describes as emancipation already existing within them (Rancière, 2011).[34]

With this in mind, my research developed with an awareness of Brecht's influence over my work and that of others whose work I was drawn to. When I first started making film and photography prior to this project, I believed that by applying the v-effekt formally in a contemporary context I could cause an intervention within the spectator - a genuine shock or 'sense of wide-awakeness.' I was committed to making films that formally acknowledged their own constructed nature in order to affect their audiences. Added to this was the related intention that, after viewing this 'construction', the audience would be more aware of how images and sound within films worked to manipulate them. They would therefore be compelled to resist this manipulation through a greater understanding of how these practices were designed to affect them. I looked more deeply at the Brechtian techniques that formed the v-effekt, including revealing the construction of the set, lighting, costume, acting, historicised narrative sequences, costume changes performed in full view of the audience, and musical numbers (songs and dance). These would be used out of the context of a storyline and Aristotelian narrative structures. It appeared that, because many of these techniques were absorbed into other aspects of culture, they had lost their power to make the kind of cultural and personal intervention intended.

After making, exhibiting, and showing various film works, I began to question whether an audience could be affected and influenced by such techniques in a contemporary context. Although people enjoyed the films and

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[34] "Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjugation. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts as a pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, and interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places... thus, they are both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them…" (Rancière, 2011, p.13)

understood their purpose, I began to question whether they were creating the effect I had intended: as an artist, this was very important to me. However, as an individual aware of my own subjectivity, I was obliged to question the interface between the different subjectivities of the audience and the intention behind the film pieces. This realisation led to an examination of contemporary thinking on subjectivity. In doing so, it led me away from what are considered more traditional or established Brechtian techniques within art practice. For example, Judith Butler's monograph *Gender Trouble* (2006) led me to think of the construction of subjectivity through the performance of gender, as opposed to what had been previously considered to be its' 'essential' nature. If gender is performative, as Butler suggests, then the issue of whether Brechtian critical method can relate to these terms becomes pertinent.[35]

I also began to wonder if these approaches could give new insight into a neurodivergent subjectivity for film. With an increased awareness of the need of divergent subjectivities within Brecht's ideas, it is necessary to examine more recent debates concerning the subjectivity of audiences, such as those presented by recent feminist theorists who explore notions of intersectionality. Audre Lorde's essay "The Master's Tools Cannot Dismantle the Master's House" (1984), inspired me concerning its discussion of intersectionality, in which she claims that "unacknowledged class differences rob women of each other's' energy and creative insight." (1980 Ag*e, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* (Paper delivered at the Copeland Colloquium, Amherst College, April 1980, reproduced in: *Sister Outsider* Crossing Press, California 1984). Lorde's essay also introduces the idea that individuals within society are oppressed to different degrees and thus it is appropriate that the response to

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[35] Laura Mulvey similarly argues that "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning…it faces us with the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language formed critically at the moment of arrival of language while still caught within the language of the patriarchy?" *Mulvey, L, 1975, p15.*

incidents of oppression should acknowledge and respond to this:

> As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist. (Lorde, 1985, p.114).

For Lorde, acknowledging the differences between women is the key to strength and liberation. The homogenisation of women, without acknowledging that different groups can be differently and/or multiply oppressed results in playing into patriarchal structures. She thus claims that "difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged" (Lorde, 1985, 111. 2007). In claiming this, she implies that recognising individual difference is the best way to challenge a society which demands that people oppose a system through the same means. The differences between people enable differing and more creative approaches to challenging oppression: "Difference must be not merely tolerated but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde, 1985, p.112). Lorde suggests that there is a need to generate new critical methods that respond to different forms of oppression and, therefore, that the same techniques (Brecht's critical methods, for example) cannot be broadly applied with the same effect for every audience member.

This thesis' research on subjectivity so far has indicated that the critical response needed in films has to be different from that of Brecht in his era. The work of Judith Butler and Audre Lorde has suggested that the critical subject required a different approach, according to the variation in audience construction. This realisation generated both further contemplation about Brecht's ideas and consideration of ways out of Brechtian thought in the films I

developed subsequently. I started to develop a critique of Brecht which doubted that he acknowledged the different subjective positions and differing states of comprehension within his existing audience. It became clear that my work would need to address this paradox within practice, with the films eventually becoming deeply personal.

Following a diagnosis of a severe mental health problem, I began to write for various publications about my experience of neurodivergency. I argued that brains do not work alike, positing, along with other theorists (Judy Singer, RD Laing, Oliver Sacks, Steve Silberman, Mark Fisher, or Michel Foucault, among others), that there was no need for them to do so. These considerations began to filter back into my artwork. I questioned whether Brecht had considered a diverse or divergent potential in his audience members, and also whether his theories could consider forms of neurodivergency. Brecht's position on subjectivity also appeared to exclude the subjectivity of the artist creating new works. In order to counter this, I sought to explore new ways of working that were still somewhat indebted to Brechtian concepts (and, to a certain extent, his politics), but which no longer relied on the formal use of his strategies. The resulting investigation produced films that presented forms of subjectivity that Brecht had overlooked. At a certain point, I realised that the formal use of Brechtian methodologies had become restrictive to how I was making films. Through filmmaking, I began to investigate how I could work through and from Brechtian strategy by taking a practical approach to each new film, whilst retaining significant aspects of the Brechtian critique of the film industry.

I began to move away from Brecht in different ways with each new film I developed. I was both trying to map new ways of working away from Brechtian techniques and also exploring, through experimental filmic methods, how I could enlighten my understanding of audience subjectivity. My aim was to re-invent a critical form related to my experience of neurodivergency. It seemed as if this could be a route to both understanding Brecht's influence over

the film, and for comprehending new ways of creating a critical method that was more appropriate for conceptions of subjectivity in a contemporary era. Each of the five films I have made in the course of the last four years have been part of this investigation into different ways of working with, through and against Brecht's theories. Each film and the associated research, experiments, changes in methodology, and results are demonstrated in the five following chapters of this thesis. I also have a 'findings' or conclusion chapter that could equally be titled 'next steps forward'.

Through a process of filmic investigation, I realised that active spectatorship was an impossible ambition if one solely uses Brecht's techniques in a formal way. This realisation came about in the course of making the films *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017) and *Letters Home* (2016), which generated an understanding that the active spectator Brecht demanded could no longer be provoked through his original method. The failure of traditional method was evident because the techniques of distancing he encouraged did not consider the varying degrees to which an audience were either, already aware of their predicaments, or could not be included in the process due to different capabilities and subjectivities.

Each of the five films I have developed as part of this project propose possible routes away through and from Brecht's formal strategies. Each film suggests a potential exit from Brechtian formal methodology, and yet also proposes possible routes to new Brechtian strategies in contemporary art filmmaking. Each chapter charts how I arrived at those particular strategies, methodologies, and techniques, how I implemented them in the writing, production, and making of the piece, and examines how successful I felt the piece had been. The successes of each piece were analysed both personally and through discussion with other artists and audiences. This analysis enabled the next steps for each subsequent area of the experimental process.

Bertolt Brecht and Subjectivity in Contemporary Art

One of the ways to re-invigorate Brecht in contemporary film and photography practice is through the application of recent understandings of subjectivity. Since Brecht's era, theorists such as Judith Butler have, through post-structuralist analysis and feminist theory, brought new understandings that suggest subjectivity is formed through a different process than that applied through the formal use of Brecht's v-effekt. In his work of the 1950s, Brecht does not consider questions of audience agency or subjectivity to this extent. It can be argued that Brecht assumes a particular type of subjectivity in his v-effect, one which is pre-formed and which he considers to be complete.

For example, through an analysis of his theory of 'Gestus' (a significant part of the v-effekt), we can see how Brecht maintains that there is an original or complete 'person' that can be imitated by an actor/performer. This conceit implies that Brecht considers the political site to be located external to the body. By indicating how power works upon it, *via* the theory of Gestus, he can reveal the material causes of socio-political inequality and provoke a direct reaction to it. Through Gestus, Brecht puts forward the idea that it is possible to communicate the action of social and political power on a generalised individual, and thereby to reveal it to an audience. The audience will then be empowered to challenge power relations on leaving the theatre. When performing a character, Brecht assumes that, by mimicking the external socio-political world acting upon a person, that the influence of their social situation

or context can reveal the inner world of the character portrayed:

> It can be said that everything to do with the emotions has to be externalised; that is to say, it must be developed into a gesture. The actor has to find a sensibly perceptible outward expression for his character's emotions, preferably some action that gives away what is going on inside him. The emotion in question must be brought out, must lose all its restrictions so that it can be treated on a big scale. (Brecht, [1964] 2003, p139)

In making this assumption about personhood, Brecht is engaging in dualist thought. He assumes, in this context, that the external and the internal are separate, and that the two can be isolated in terms of consciousness.

In *Realism after Modernism,* Devin Fore discusses the difference between Brecht's approach to Verfremdungseffekt and Modernist texts. He explains the action of these techniques in calling awareness to elements that would remain unnoticed or be smoothed over in the process of mimesis:

> As evidence for this claim, consider one of the cornerstones of modernist poetics, the device of estrangement made famous by Shkloveskii as ostranenie or by Brecht as Verfremdung, whose purpose is to distort, and thus call awareness to, the mechanisms of signification that would remain otherwise unnoticed in mimetic artworks. In this operation, the modernist text constitutes itself as an inflected, or denaturalised, version of a realist one in which resemblance functioned intuitively and unproblematically. Thus, the fragmentary construction of *Bebuquin,* for example, can be understood as the determinate negation of the psychological depth found in nineteenth-century narratives of *Buildung*. (Devin Fore, 2012, p. 214)

In contrast to Brecht's assertion that he sees the external forces working separately on a person, Judith Butler argues that personhood itself is a contested site, performed continuously. As such, it is formed and re-formed by social and cultural conditions (Butler, [1990] 2006). When analysing Butler's ideas, we can see that the concept of self-knowledge is contested and that, as a consequence of this, Brecht's dualism can be called into question. There is therefore an apparent conflict between ideas concerning agency (through its expression in the Brechtian v-effekt of Gestus) and those describing processes of performativity and subject formation.

Butler insists that power does not solely act on the body; performativity implies that ideas concerning autonomous forms of agency are difficult to substantiate. She asserts that roles, or our ways of being in the world, are 'performed' rather than being fixed. Brecht assumes a specific type of subject, but in contrast, Butler asserts that subjectivity is being consistently formed and reformed as we 'perform' it. The difference between the two practitioners' views on subjectivity indicates that one way to re-invigorate Brecht for the 21st century would be to develop works that encounter both the v-effekt and contemporary understandings of subjectivity. For this reason, the films I made in order to re-invigorate the Brechtian v-effekt, emerge from the context of these post-Brechtian conceptions of subjectivity. This approach would be presented in such a way that an audience was addressed appropriately in the light of more recent understandings of subjectivity. I thus began contemplating the possibility of addressing an audience with this strategy, and to ask what happens when new ideas concerning subjectivity emerge in filmmaking practice.

The research discovered that Brecht regarded his audience as a homogenous entity, rather than acknowledging them as varied in their subjectivities. That Brecht regarded the audience as a homogenous entity is suggested by the way he talks about them in general terms when he talks of an audience. At one point he refers to them as having a "tense congealed gaze"

(Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.41) as if they all were one and the same and therefore had the exact same experience within theatre, noting that "the process of fusion extends to the spectator too who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p38).

As a result of this discovery, it became necessary to ask how films could be created, which incorporated a Brechtian critical method, yet also acknowledged that this audience consisted of people of varied subjectivities? Brecht was unaware of notions such as intersectionality or performativity, could these theories be introduced into filmmaking retrospectively, whilst retaining a Brechtian critical effect?

Audre Lorde's ideas, concerning intersectional feminism, also produced a new understanding of subjectivity. It became evident that there are different degrees of oppression according, not just to gender, but also other social modalities such as race, class, and sexuality. She uses the metaphor of 'the master's house', claiming that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p.113). Here, Lorde implies that not all critical methods work for all social groups because some groups of people are both differently and are also multiply oppressed.[36] Within the criticism of a single approach, such as basing everything on formal aspects of the v-effekt (alongside Brecht's belief that there existed a mass singular subjectivity), I began to consider how I could expand my methodologies to incorporate an understanding of intersectionality.

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[36] "Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." (Lorde, A. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, pp.110-114. 2007).

Judith Butler contrasts with Lorde in terms of her notions of subjectivity. This is because she believes that the subject is constituted by language. As such, one cannot attain a critical distance from the subject through definition; one needs to re-perform and re-create those performances – including, most significantly for her, gender. Subject formation can only be re-signified through subversive acts in representing what is already there. Thus, rather than defining the self as a 'woman', one would define oneself as a human being - reclaiming the whole from the binary use of gendered patriarchal language. This would be through ironic use of discourse, heightening the awareness of the disjunction between the reality of the lived self and the language system used to perpetuate notions of allowable selfhood. In this way, Butler is wary of identity politics, because such approaches merely use the language, labels, and possibilities that are already structured into the current power discourse. She suggests different strategies to combat them. Butler puts forward the idea that traditional feminism cannot 'work', because in representing "women" it has already played into (or even capitulated to) the language of power. This is problematic as this language centres on a definition of politics where masculinity is the assumed or established form of the universal.[37]

Furthermore, Butler disputes the notion of any 'essential' self at all. We are, she argues, a complex process of assimilations and readings created by the structure of language in the world. In contrast, for Brecht it seems that there is a 'reachable' essential self that can be awakened and politicised. Brecht does not acknowledge that selfhood exists separate from this language matrix. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex,* this capitulation to the structure of linguistic ideology and power makes women "the second sex" to men.

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[37] For example, in *Gender Trouble* (2006) Butler states that: "gender reality is created through sustained social performances meaning that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality." (Butler, J, 2006, p.73).

However, men consistently represent "the universal" both as a result of the way language acts on the body, and in terms of this form of critique. De Beauvoir claims that "the differences that one notices between men and women reflect those of their situation" (De Beauvoir,1949, p.296). As such, "difference" in "women's politics" becomes the basis of politics rather than an established target for critiques of power (where male is universal). Women are thus always established as the binary 'other' (De Beauvoir,1949).

Both Butler and De Beauvoir's discussions are at odds with Brecht's notion of Gestus - a language of action/gesture that would allow access to an audience of an inner world. Gestus is therefore based on a presumption of pure Cartesian dualism. Because dualism is a notion indicating that an essential internal world exists, rather than being contingent, for many people Brecht's essentialist self is, increasingly obviously, not the truth of their experience. Filmmakers have often used Gestus as part of the v-effekt. This is firmly evidenced in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), discussed in chapter 5. In this film, von Trier uses the mannered acting techniques of Gestus to reveal the social reality surrounding his characters. Externalising the interior feelings of characters through this mannered acting suggests that von Trier also considers the sense of self to be an essentialist concept.

I began to ask how I could alter Gestus within filmmaking, to incorporate the kind of ironic distancing that Butler suggests will have a re-awakening on the audience. Butler, and to an extent Lorde, reject the idea of representing the inner world, in part from the basis of the 'other mind problem' - that one cannot ever understand or accurately present what is internal. Moreover, as we have seen, for Butler there is no essential internal self: we are a combination and product of the political, sociological, and linguistic power structures or games that make up what we know as our 'identity'. Brecht's Cartesian view means that he appears to be stuck with a reluctance to shift past dualistic thought processes and outcomes in his work. He believes in this 'essential' audience, that can thus, be seen as a single type of entity, rather than

a multiply subjective one. This Cartesian dualism is in evidence in ideas concerning Gestus, in which he believes that, by use of gesture, you can recreate the internal as well as external world in a way that could be understood by the audience as universal. Brecht's reference to the actor's method of Gestus in his discussion of Chinese Theatre implies that he is 'dualist' rather than 'performative' in his understanding. Evidence of this dualism emerges in his reference to the ability of actors to mimic the feelings of characters, as the result of external social circumstances acting upon them.

These issues raised questions as to why many of Brecht's techniques did not function in contemporary art in an isolated formal context. I considered whether the different understanding of subjectivity was the root of this, or if Brecht's v-effekt could be ineffective in its formal expression, because he assumes that there exists an original or complete version of a human, which his actors can understand and represent through Gestus. I then considered if Brecht's original v-effekt could be mechanistic rather than adaptive or transformative when understood in the context of Judith Butler's ideas of performativity, and what the impact of this understanding would be for filmic practice.

Judith Butler suggests that gender performativity is achieved through a practice or set of practices - or as J.L. Austin suggested in his 1962 lecture 'How to do Things with Words', rhetorical 'speech acts'. This indicates that we (or what we consider the subjective 'I'), is constituted exclusively through language. Brecht has some similarities with Butler in the way he uses Gestus. Rather than suggesting that a character use naturalistic acting, Gestus is used to make social conditions of each character obvious to an audience through mannered acting. Brecht also demonstrates that he wishes to bring performance of this kind out into the world and away from the expression of the internal emotion of people, claiming that "Mankind's highest decisions are in fact fought out on earth, not in the heavens; in the 'external' world, not inside people's heads." (Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," [1964] 2013,

p196). Butler has a similar approach but adds an extra dimension by using language to repurpose hate speech as its opposite.

An example of how this understanding can be useful for an art practitioner is demonstrated by how hate speech can be (re)presented as its' opposite, through ironic discourse and through, what Butler calls "subversive re-signification," (Butler, [1997] 2003, pp 157). This insight means that re-purposing hate speech is the method through which to challenge what she terms, "prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed," (Butler, [1997] 2003, pp 157-158). She uses the legal and political domains as a further example:

> Paradoxically, the explicit legal and political arguments that seek to tie such speech to certain contexts fail to note that even in their own discourse, such speech has become citational, breaking with the prior contexts of its utterance and acquiring new contexts for which it was not intended. (Butler, [1997] 2003, p14).

Meanings, according to Butler, can never be fixed – it is a continually evolving process, or as Derrida puts it, a process of différance, the simultaneous difference and also deferral of meaning:

> Let us go on. It is because of différance that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to

be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called spacing, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (temporization). And it is this constitution of the present, as an "originary" and irreducibly nonsimple (and therefore, stricto sensu nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions (to reproduce analogically and provisionally a phenomenological and transcendental language that soon will reveal itself to be inadequate), that I propose to call archi- writing, archi-trace, or différance. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporization. (Jacques Derrida, 1982) (translated by Alan Bass, *Margins of Philosophy*) URL: https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Derrida/Differance.html: Accessed 16th July 2019.

This action of speech, as with the formation of the subject through it, is never a fixed process. Instead, the process is both continuous and emergent; there is never a singular political or social method but, instead a series of contestations.

With these insights into performativity in mind, it becomes worth asking what the implications are for filmmaking: if the film's fixity of process necessarily means that techniques of the medium are not to be used as a critical tool. Artists should also ask if the critique has to take place through the narrative or acting rather than the structure of visual language itself. This debate was a motivation for experimenting with new methods of Brechtian filmmaking. This investigation became the starting point for the film/experiment *Gaslighting* (2015). Following on from *Gaslighting*, I was inspired to consider how other aspects of subjectivity might re-invigorate or reconstitute Brecht for the 21st century.

If contemporary subjectivity could represent a potential means of re-kindling Brecht, then I reasoned that other contemporary understandings of

subjectivity could be means of re-igniting his work for the viewer. Following my investigation into subjectivity in *Gaslighting* (2015), and also through analysing Judith Butler's notion of performativity, I began experimenting with four further ways through which recent understandings of subjectivity are expressed. I considered that subjectivity was a way in which Brecht could be re-invigorated in a manner which avoided being overly reliant on his original formal method. At this point, I embarked on the production of four more films, each of which progressively explored new ideas of subjectivity and brought new insights into Brecht through these understandings. I hoped that by doing this, I could present ways of retaining Brechtian critical method in film without being entirely reliant on the formal uses of the v-effekt.

This represented a development from the point of departure that was *Gaslighting* (2015). The next film, *Letters Home* (2016), was inspired by what I had discovered from the writing of Audre Lorde concerning intersectionality, and also, the processes I had developed through *Gaslighting* (2015). I wanted to investigate post-colonial notions of subjectivity, to add to knowledge gained in formulating *Gaslighting*'s Butlerian stance. It was necessary to investigate the possibility for Brechtian research provided by subjectivity, viewing it as a route to remaking social and political worlds through filmmaking. Subjectivity thus promised to be a locus for social change, through Brechtian critical methods in the v-effekt. The problem that had emerged from producing *Gaslighting* (2015)*, and which required further exploration, was how subjectivity could be looked at in the light of post-colonial concepts. Butlerian ideas, as expressed through *Gaslighting* (2015), left me with a problem. Subjectivity had become, in what I had understood from Butler's ideas, the experience of a multiplicity of live subject positions. This was not a problem in itself - however, it did appear to break from Brecht, who appeared closer to structuralist thinker Louis Althusser than Butler.

Althusser made a direct link between the economy and the interpellation of the subject in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards

an Investigation)" (Althusser,1970, p.694), arguing that the Ideological State Apparatus produces subjects by creating identities. This consideration is also a key element of Butler's text *Excitable Speech,* and so it made sense to reflect on Althusser along these lines. His investigation made a direct link between economy, and what Althusser terms the 'hailing' or 'interpellation' of the subject.[38] This notion of hailing the subject was an extension of Brecht's Marxist strategies, where the economy is directly linked with the oppression and reification of the labour force. Through the v-effekt, Brecht thereby produces a direct mechanistic method to counter this. In some senses, then, Brecht's economically deterministic views had failed to take stock of ideological processes in the construction of the subject.

In contrast to Brecht, Althusser refers to Jacques Lacan's ideas of the 'Mirror Stage' in the development of his theories of the 'hailing' and the 'interpellation' of the subject. This contrast led to a concurrently Marxist and psychoanalytic understanding of the subject. The addition of psychoanalysis was a significant departure from Brechtian subjectivity, as he had argued that there is a pre-formed and complete version of a human subject, which acts as a homogenous group and is impacted on solely through economically determined drives. Althusser built the groundwork for understanding the subject *via* signification, and also for the importance of psychoanalysis in understanding ideological processes. Psychoanalysis was where some more contemporary understandings of Brecht appeared to have developed in the work of recent artists and theorists. For example, this approach is visible in the work of Roland Barthes in the 1970s and early 1980s, alongside cinema criticism in the journal

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[38] "Ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects. As ideology is eternal, I must now suppress the temporal form in which I have presented the functioning of ideology, and say: ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects. Which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects.* Hence individuals are "abstract" with respect to the subjects which they always-already are" (Althusser, 1970 p.700)

Screen. Both of these dedicate time to psychoanalytic readings of cinema in their accounts of spectatorship.

In the theories of spectatorship of the 1970s reproduced in *Screen,* the construction of the subject is often produced through relations of desire. This contrasts significantly with the writings of Audre Lorde, as these conceptions of subjectivity embrace the possibility of multiple intersecting forms of oppression within a single cinema audience. A reading of notions of desire, such as those espoused by Laura Mulvey in her foundational concept of the "Male Gaze" in the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey,1975 p.62), implied that in Hollywood Melodrama a simple form of audience viewed film through relations of desire. By simple relations of desire, I acknowledge that Mulvey's conception of audience for melodrama only encompasses the male/female relations of desire within a cinema audience. However, more recent understanding of intersectionality suggest that audiences are differently and multiply oppressed, not solely on the basis of gender. For example, Lorde's discussions suggest that films were viewed by a multiplicitous collection of people who were differently oppressed *via* multiple forms of subjugation. This notion of a multiplicitously oppressed audience presented a further problem to realising a Brechtian critique *via* the methods I had developed in *Gaslighting.* Although I had accounted for a subjectivity which encompassed Butlerian ideas of the construction of gender, I had not recognised the extent to which an audience could be multiply oppressed in terms of race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender. The discursive account of subjectivity as espoused in the film *Gaslighting* seemed, in the context of post-colonialist understandings of subjectivity, overly passive in the context of ideas surrounding intersectionality and, more specifically, post-colonialist readings of film.

This problem emerged because the subject of the film was produced mainly through psychoanalytic notions of desire: Mulvey's notion of the Male Gaze had been significant to the project. The use of mirrors within *Gaslighting* sought to reveal the construction of the look through revelatory practice, and

also the revealing of the subjugation of the female character, or "subject of the look" (Mulvey,1975 p.62). However, in the context of post-colonialist critique, this construction was overly passive within my film, as it implies that the subject is solely produced through binary psychoanalytic processes of masculine/feminine desire. Therefore, the film does not take into account the potential multiple oppressions of any audience or even a performer.

As a result of this discovery, *Letters Home* (2016), sought to address post-colonialist views concerning subjectivity. The understanding of subjectivity in *Letters Home* (2016), shifted from the position of Althusser, who regarded subjectivity as being entirely formed through the action of ideology, towards an understanding of subjectivity in terms of power and knowledge more consistent with the theories of Michel Foucault. Subjectivity, in the work of Foucault, is historically contingent and produced through a multiplicity of positionings. All of these emerge in discursive practices through the action of power and knowledge, a version of subjectivity presented in his theory of "assujettissement." This is a particular focus in *Discipline and Punish (1975)* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I (1978)*, in which Foucault describes the subject as oppressed through the action of power/knowledge upon them, and simultaneously oppressed *via* forms of classification produced by systems of governance. This oppression results in the bodily or internalised subjugation of differences in the group or individual. This idea contrasts with those of Althusser, who makes a more direct link through his notion of Ideological State Apparatus' than Brecht did with a focus on the economy and a single causal chain of oppression.[39]

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[39] "What are the ideological State apparatuses (ISAs)? They must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus. Remember that in Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) contains: The Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what I shall in future call the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question "functions by violence" – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g., administrative repression, may take non-physical forms). I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized

Foucault's work was salient to *Letters Home* (2016) as it recalibrated my approach to incorporate the consideration of intersectionality first raised by my reading of Audre Lorde, and which had been absent in *Gaslighting*. If, as Lorde suggests, individuals are differentially or multiply oppressed, down to their most significant desires, actions, and thoughts, and this oppression constructed by the action of totalising power on them (as suggested above by Foucault), this raises the question of how the subject itself can be the source of any significant resistance. Critical resistance, in such a context, would depend on a level of agency that has not been constituted by the action of power itself.

There is reason to think that subjectivity cannot be the sole source of resistance if entirely occupied or constructed by the action of power. The films I made following *Gaslighting* all experimented (through different means) with the expression of subjectivity in relation to the Brechtian v-effekt. These films include *Letters Home* (2016), which took a post-colonialist approach to Brecht and subjectivity through the use of letters within film making; *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017), which approached Brecht from the perspective of unreliable narration and in the context of queer theory; *Devon Gothic* (2018), which looked at allegory as a Brechtian approach to the v-effekt; and *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019), which explored Brechtian v-effekts in the context of affect and délire, asking how we might depolarise Brechtian thought through the introduction of a poetic method.

institutions." (Althusser, Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation, 1970, p.79)

Chapter 3
Film 1: Gaslighting (2015)
Brecht, Subjectivity and Feminism

Production Diary: *Gaslighting* **(2015)**

Figure 15: Still from Gaslighting (2015*), Alice Evans.*

The first film I made for this project was *Gaslighting* (2015). The idea behind it came when I was on holiday with my friend Daniel. I had met him at a bus stop in Soho a couple of weeks before: I was slightly drunk after a private view but did not want to go home, so had gone into town for more booze. At that time, I was feeling pretty *laissez-faire* about my life, and wanted to make new friends. I was feeling disconnected from human life and willed something good to happen that night that would help with this. Daniel was standing in a bus shelter, holding a small paper bag. I thought I was possibly psychic at the time, so I immediately asked him if he was a writer, as he looked like one. He was an opera student at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in North London - and a writer.

Daniel later operated the camera for *Gaslighting*. This film incorporates the original story and dialogue of the film *Gaslight*, a psychological thriller. In this film, the female lead, Bella (Played by Diana Wynyard), is portrayed as having her sanity questioned and gradually undermined by her abusive husband, Paul (Anton Walbrook). The title comes from the character Paul's manipulative strategy of lowering the gaslighting of the house. Paul uses this to persuade Bella that she is losing her grip on reality. The work thus used layers of film within films, a way of exploring what a film means when placed in a new context. The last line of the film is "I must escape this house". The character in the film *Gaslighting* is exploited by her husband and sent mad. This is, in some ways, very different from the madness I had experienced but I related to the experience.

I discovered in making *Gaslighting* that I needed to expand my approach to cover a broader range of Brechtian techniques if I were to comprehend, through my practice, how Brechtian critical strategies could be used most effectively in contemporary art. *Gaslighting* (2015) had presented me with new problems, including the need to consider how Brecht's techniques may provoke different effects when used in isolation. *Gaslighting* was an exploration into how Brecht's distancing device or v-effekt could apply to a contemporary context.

I had been staying in a house in France shortly after starting this project, one which I considered architecturally interesting. It did not have a TV and felt very alien from the houses I had lived in up until that point. It was austere and oppressive, making me reconsider Bourdieu's conception of habitus, which suggests that ingrained or absorbed reactions from social worlds can emerge through unconscious absorption of social class structures. I attempted to work out why I found the house intimidating, observing the house and beginning to think of it as a living being. The house seemed almost psychologically possessed by the people who owned it, and who had designed its layout and decoration. I did not belong there: it was a dead building.

At the same time, I was also considering how Clio Barnard's film *The Arbor* had dislocated its characters' voices by using actors to 'play' the people's lives while disguising their faces. I was trying to understand the relationship between Brecht's v-effekt and verbatim film or theatre, as well as the relationship Barnard had created between reality and representation. I asked if Barnard's techniques provided a more contemporary way to problematise art's relationship to authentic truth. I queried whether the techniques achieved

this by performing a disjuncture between traditional Aristotelian forms of theatre (which Brecht had thought of as absorptive), and the new kind of realism that he termed epic theatre.

The third strand of interest emerged from using the original film *Gaslight* (1940). The story focusses on a man attempting to convince his wife that she is insane. I used this as a soundtrack from which to mime, in considerations of my research into female subjectivity. In making the film, I performed as the character in the film; I borrowed her words. Speaking or miming another's words became essential for this film - and also, eventually, for later works.

Figure 16: Still from Gaslighting (2015*), Alice Evans.*

Gaslighting also uses screens within screens. By doing this, I was thinking of Brecht's description of his distancing techniques: "the essential part of Epic Theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing experiences, the spectator must come to grips with things" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p.23). Using multiple screens was an attempt to create a disjuncture within the film to confuse or alienate the viewer from natural absorption in the action. This process explored ways I could make the audience engage with their reasoning over their feelings. The film helped me discover that a

simple dislocation between diegetic sound and movement within a film cannot help us understand how Brecht could be used today. I was reminded, through practice, that his techniques were not used in isolation, but formed part of a broad range of strategies that contributed to Epic Theatre. It did, however, lead me to consider that a new route to understanding Brecht could be through analysis of how he uses techniques of narrative in his work, techniques that often contrast with more traditional structures of drama. I needed to expand my initial investigation to encompass more of Brecht's techniques.

Jeff Wall and Brecht

When I first started on this project, before I made films, much of my photography relied on an interpretation of Brecht which I now consider limited. This practice applied Brecht's techniques of revealing the formal aspects of theatrical structure to filmmaking. This was filtered through my earlier understanding and admiration for the work of Jeff Wall, as well as being influenced by Jean-Luc Godard. I noticed that the photography Wall produced often revealed how it was made within the frame itself. I initially regarded this as a Brechtian technique. However, when producing *Gaslighting* I understood that the formal use of Brecht's techniques could not entirely align the practice to its social function: to encourage an audience to change their response to the work and become aware of inequalities within both their own lives and larger society. This awareness was designed to change attitudes to societal inequality and to revolutionise audiences.

Susan Sontag's analysis of the image in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) made clear the importance of debates surrounding the status of documentary and made the need to revolutionise audience attitudes seem all the more pertinent. It was also significant to my understanding how the response to images had changed since Brecht's era. The debate indicated how film and photography continued to retain a radical potential in the image. For example, Brecht's *War Primer* (1945) challenged the media depiction of war. Years later, in texts such as *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991) Jean Baudrillard suggested that the world, at its fundamental level, is solely made of images: he argued that images are all that exist, and that there is nothing beyond the image. This view was strongly opposed by Sontag, who claimed that "this view is associated in particular with the writings of the late Guy

Debord, who thought he was describing an illusion, a hoax, and of Jean Baudrillard, who claims to believe that images, simulated realities, are all that exist now; it seems to be something of a French specialty" (Sontag, 2003, p 55). Sontag emphasised the human reality behind the depiction of war, arguing that to deny this is to deny human suffering:

> To speak of reality, becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism. It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment—that mature style of viewing which is a prime acquisition of "the modern," and a prerequisite for dis-manding traditional forms of party-based politics that offer real disagreement and debate. It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, un-seriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. But it is absurd to identify the world with those zones in the well-off countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people's pain, just as it is absurd to generalise about the ability to respond to the sufferings of others on the basis of the mind-set of those consumers of news who know nothing at first-hand about war and massive injustice and terror. (Sontag, 2003, p56)

Reading these accounts of the contestation of images, I began to comprehend how Brecht's mission to create political/social awareness through artistic work might continue to produce radical artefacts and effects. The need to do so is particularly prescient in the contemporary moment, especially within the mediums of film and photography. This attempt to change attitudes to the status of photography started in my early analysis of the practice of Jeff Wall and, before this, through my experience as a newspaper photographer. My interest in Wall started before my filmmaking explicitly developed from its photographic origins. The understanding of Brechtian techniques then became significant to this, and I started exploring the politics of images *via* these techniques. One of the foremost advocates of this style of practice seemed to be Jeff Wall.

For this reason, the following section describes my developing understanding of Jeff Wall as a Brechtian artist. It also explains how, in the films that followed *Gaslighting* (2015), I moved away from formal interpretation of Brechtian methods and began to consider how I might produce more contemporary responses appropriate to current political concerns. The discovery that formal methods used in stage design were not sufficient to produce a Brechtian audience was informed by the following analysis of the work of Jeff Wall. Following Perry

and Wood, I started this journey by seeing Wall's work as being influenced by Brecht's stage design techniques. These methods of stage design could be seen in several of Wall's works such as, *The Destroyed Room* (1978), *A Donkey in Blackpool* (1993), *Picture for Women* (1979) or *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (2003) and *Approach* (2014). However, the further insight provided by Steve Edwards' analysis added to this understanding of Wall. Edwards reflected on Wall's work as allegorical, and thus not solely aligned to the formal revelatory aspects of Brechtian technique – despite Brecht himself rarely discussing allegory. This suggested that one way through and from Brecht's original method might be to consider how allegory itself could be used as a contemporary Brechtian technique. As a result of this, I was able to develop a later film, *Devon Gothic* (2018) as an allegorical work.

As discussed briefly in the introduction to this thesis, Perry and Wood regard Wall as a Brechtian artist because of reflexive strategies present in his lightbox constructions. In contrast, Steve Edwards sees Wall's practice as allegorical through his analysis of Wall's image *Donkey in Blackpool* (2003). Both sets of critics were relevant to the development of my own Brechtian response.

Perry and Wood describe the Brechtian nature of Wall's work as follows:

> Wall's pictures are related to Brecht's critical realism; social truths are revealed through something 'built up, something artificial, posed.' This is one important way in which these pictures conform to the tenets of modernism, since their evident construction - their rigidity- makes us conscious we are looking at an image rather than an unmediated incident. (Perry & Wood, 2014, p.165)

Wall's work has what Perry and Wood describe as a "foregrounding [of] the device" (Perry & Wood, 2014, p.166). As discussed previously, in *Picture for Women* (1979), Wall uses a mirror to reveal photographic processes and structures. According to Perry and Wood, this foregrounding of the construction methods occurs in other examples of Wall's work. For example, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai),* Jeff Wall, (2003), is presented by Perry and Wood as typically Brechtian. In this image, Wall has captured a 'staged' version of a 'decisive moment,' reminiscent of modernist photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's celebrated work.

In Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind*, a passer-by is caught off-guard. His belongings float by, apparently swept up by the wind. The piece appears to refer back to documentary photography and, specifically, the tradition in photojournalism originating in Cartier-Bresson's work. However, the spontaneity is shown to be an illusion, part of a staged tableau.

Figure 17: A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai) *(2003), Jeff Wall*

When viewing the original lightbox, one can almost imagine strings holding the loose papers in place. The intervention of the photographer is apparent due to the seeming impossibility of the composition. Wall's intervention creates a reflexivity in the photographic image through the scene's technologically mysterious nature, seeming to create a foil to Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment.

Many of Bresson's images are collected in *The Decisive Moment,* which according to his publisher, Centre Pompidou, was "initially published as Images à la Sauvette" (Centre Pompidou, 1991, np). This title is translated as "pictures made in a hurried or secret fashion" (Centre Pompidou, 1991, np). The idea of the decisive moment morphed into the modernist idea that objective 'truth' could be captured through photographic mechanisms. In contrast, Wall's image serves to shed broader doubt on modernist privileging of non-intervention in photography. Brecht appeared to have developed his *War Primer* (1945) correspondingly.

War Primer was a response to journalistic photography and what Brecht saw as its propagandistic use during the Second World War. I asked if Wall's work can be viewed as a kind of contemporary version of Brecht's intervention, as suggested by Perry and Wood. I asked if Wall's staged photographic lightboxes encourage viewers to reflect critically on Cartier-Bresson's documentary-style photography, and also, upon photography's role as a faithful reproducer of events.

*Figure 18:*Derrière la gare Saint-Lazare, Paris, France, *1932, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris © Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos, courtesy Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson*

However, later discoveries concerning the nature of photography suggest that this idea of objective photography is highly contestable. The modernist assumption that photographic representation cannot be altered is not supported by lived experience - however, faith in an objective representative reality continues to hold sway in certain perspectives, ones that can seem antiquated. For example, Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment may seem a romantic notion in the current age of photographic manipulation and instant editability. However, as *War Primer* suggests, there never was a truth to the photographic medium, and there was always a critical context. *War Primer* challenged the message of the photographic medium by re-contextualising images to change the meaning of their original use. However, it is significant to the analysis of Wall, as it shows how Brecht's *War Primer* relates to Wall's own interventions over the idea of an objective photographic method. Despite Wall's revelatory techniques, a Brechtian method for the 21st century needs more than a formal concern with revealing photographic method. The assumption that Wall's large-scale lightboxes could awaken the kind of conscious political intervention that Brecht had intended solely through these techniques is problematic.

Steve Edwards indicates that there are new achievements in Wall's work alongside the formal reflexivity presented by Perry & Wood. For Edwards, Wall's lightboxes are an allegorical intervention, and that the lightboxes work beyond a straightforward formal Brechtian method as a result. Edwards demonstrates this use of allegory in his essay focused on Jeff Wall's *Donkey in Blackpool* (1999):

> Wall's image seems to constitute, what Bakhtin called, one of those 'parodic doubles and laughing reflections', which, he claimed, accompanied every high genre. Put another way, the donkey appears like a character from the pages of Bertolt Brecht, or perhaps Jaroslav Hašek. These characters are dumb, stubborn and recalcitrant survivors. They are ordinary figures who pit low, plebeian knowledge against the proprieties and normative 'common sense' of the ruling class. Invariably, they combine sly laughter with wisdom. We could say that, If Whistlejacket is an aristocratic horse, Wall's donkey is a working class 'ass.' In this period at least, Wall appears close to the Brechtian values of 'crude' or 'blunt' thinking. (Edwards, 2007, p.46)

Figure 19: Jeff Wall, A Donkey in Blackpool, *(1999) Transparency on Lightbox, Tate.*

In this image, Edwards describes Wall's critique of George Stubbs' work and political reception *via* his Brechtian *Donkey in Blackpool* (2003). However, Edwards also indicates that Wall's techniques are far more sophisticated than the simple revelatory practice described by Perry and Wood. They employ what Edwards terms a Brechtian slyness, allegory, and humor beyond Brecht's formal qualities. Wall thus enacts a critique not just of content but also of context, through his deployment of allegory. The donkey in this image becomes an allegoric intervention. Instead of revealing formal method, it functions as a form of play on the use of the equine figure in historical painting, and the inequalities present in society itself. The donkeys function as "recalcitrant survivors" (Edwards, 2007, p.46), becoming an allegory for the determined survival of working-class culture itself. The use of the lightbox to display the donkey also references street advertising methods. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, advertising has long co-opted Brechtian strategies for pedestrians by hijacking attention and encouraging consumers. However, Wall's use of allegory also serves to critique the messages of this type of advertising.

Figure 20:Jeff Wall Approach *(2014) Photograph, Marian Goodman Gallery, London.*

A more recent example of Jeff Wall's work is his black and white image *Approach* (2014). This image abandons his familiar lightbox-type display in favour of the photographic print. The work features a homeless woman huddled up and walking towards boxes. These boxes contain a second sheltered sleeping individual. Unlike *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* (1993), we are not sure immediately whether this work is staged for the camera or street-style photography. As a result of this dichotomy, the work has a different temporal and critical reception for an audience than that of straight documentary style. The composition of the image follows a strict rule of thirds which borrows from classical painting techniques. The light source from the photograph is separate from the camera and although this may be a subtle intervention, the shadow from the studio photography process dissociates it from documentary method. In documentary-style, a flash would conventionally be mounted upon the camera itself. The social context of the photograph belongs to the traditional subjects of street photography. However, like Martha Rosler's Bowery portraits (discussed in chapter 2) which dispense with direct depiction of the human subject, Wall's 're-staging' of events and characters distances it from the thief like capture of paparazzi photography. It also removes the image from the 'othering' process which Rosler associates in the accompanying essay with conventional forms of photojournalism. Rosler suggests that street photography carries old information from the socially powerless to the powerful. For Rosler, the

aesthetic/political inequality between photographer and subject in traditional documentary style photography is socially divisive rather than politically constructive (Rosler, 1981). The clashing contexts and content of Wall's work (documentary vs the aesthetic conditions of classical painting) demand an audience re-consider the context and politics of both. Thereby, the presence of each medium used within the same photographic frame illuminates and contrasts with the political significance and processes of the other. I consider this to be like the Brechtian device within theatre where juxtaposing elements are used to rub against one another to create an active analytic thought in an audience. The piece is allegorical in both a traditional and also in a complex way. The almost biblical pose of the woman with her head bowed references figures in religious paintings such as Fra Angelico's *Guido Di Pietro* (1420-23).
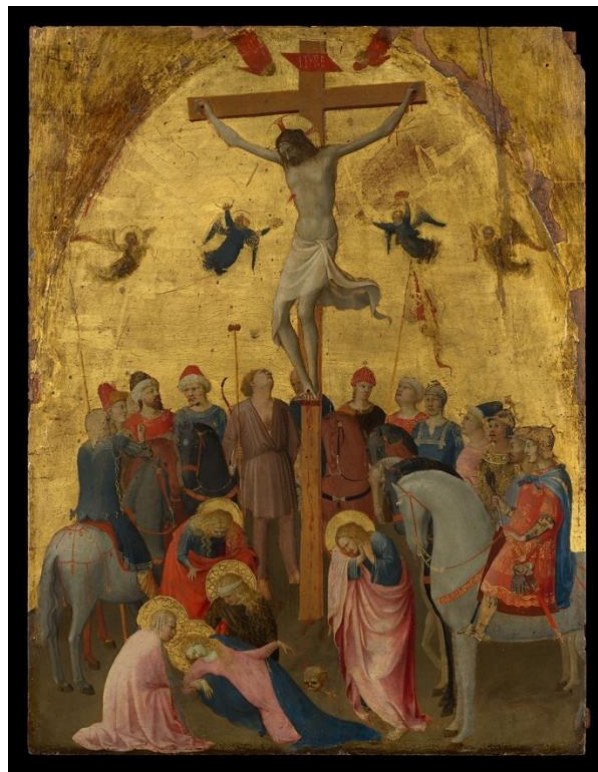
Figure 21: Fra Angelico Guido Di Pietro *(1420-23), Metropolitan Museum, New York.*

However, rather than being purely symbolic, it is a more multifactorial process of allegory than that akin to religious iconography. The processes contained within the work could perhaps be considered along the lines of Walter Benjamin's hugely complex readings of the allegorical, which among other things are considered by Howard Caygill to be "understood both as a condition of modern experience and an aesthetic means for its artistic expression"

(Caygill, 2010, p1)[40]. In *Approach*, Wall combines in a single image what seem to include the religious, aesthetic, historical and philosophical to produce the reflexive.[41] This creates a multi-layered radical response to both the social issues of homelessness itself, as well as the matters arising within the political aesthetics of photography through which homelessness is so often communicated and understood.

On discovering Wall's sophisticated use of allegory, I began to question my own attempt at Brechtianism. I understood that the use of Brecht formally (in a Godardian style, for example) no longer had the power and political bite to challenge inequalities – or even to raise them as something to be examined. The formal aspect of Brecht's method had been subsumed by the emergence of reflexivity in a broad range of media. The discovery of allegory in Wall's work became a potential avenue for exploration as a contemporary Brechtian method for the 21st century film maker. I had made an effort to reform/or 'exit' Brecht through reflexive strategy, and yet I was finding evidence that strategies of reflexivity, as used in my films, were not sufficient to achieve Brechtian ambition for filmmaking in the 21st Century.

Following my research into Wall's work I considered that to be truly Brechtian paradoxically required a close examination of these reflexive strategies in the light of what Brecht actually wanted to achieve. I thus examined if they still worked as isolated techniques, or if they need to be adapted for the current time. In order to explore this issue, it became essential to consider not just the techniques themselves, but how an audience might respond to these methods. This understanding demanded analysis of how an audience is constructed: the subjectivity of the 21st Century audience. To assert Brecht's influence, merely through its formal qualities, would leave out an essential aspect of his practice: his approach towards subjectivity. Wall's use of allegory had shown that a Brechtian method could be updated

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[40] Benjamin's understanding of allegory is discussed further in chapter 6 with regard to the film *Devon Gothic* (2018)

[41] Jeff Wall himself refers to the influence of Benjamin's allegory on his work in a *Radical Philosophy* interview with Peter Osbourne; "I was interested in Benjamin's notion of allegory – *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. It made me think about falsity or artifice, about the potential of arrestedness and of the process of masking, all those things." Jeff Wall, *Radical Philosophy*, July/August 2008, online: URL: https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/interview/jeff-wall-art-after-photography-after-conceptual-art (accessed 20/07/2020)

through the use of allegory, and this became significant to my enquiry into how we might achieve a contemporary Brechtian artwork for the 21st Century.

I had not initially understood the extent to which Wall's allegory extended the critique set up by his revealing how each photograph is made. I began to understand Wall's relationship to Brecht in greater depth, exploring how both Wall and Brecht treated the audience in terms of their subjectivity. My exploration into Wall showed that Brecht's techniques were not merely formal but had a clear ambition to awaken political change in an audience. In order to achieve this, Brecht considered the subjectivity of his audience very closely. His ambition to awaken political change is evidenced by the way he repeatedly states that he wishes to challenge an audience to become compelled to revolutionise their social and political lives on departure from the theatre. For example, in the essay "The Indirect Impact of the Epic Stage - (The Mother)," In *Brecht on Theatre* (2008) he says:

> Just as it refrains from handing over its hero over to the world as if it were his inescapable fate, so it would not dream of handing the spectator over to an inspiring theatrical experience. Anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed toward changing the world, it must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to. (Brecht, [1964] 2008, p.86).

Eric Bentley also quotes Brecht as saying, with reference to Brecht's learning plays, that he wanted to create theatre with revolutionary ambition, "directed toward changing the world" (Brecht, [1964] 2008, p.255). There is no doubt therefore that Brecht was not a mere formalist but wanted to use every technique at his disposal to change the audience reaction to theatrical experience, and in doing so provoke political change. The political effects of Brechtian technique cannot simply be produced by formal methods of reflexivity in the 21st Century. Instead, there is a need to extend these techniques beyond their formal incarnations and to use methods appropriate to a contemporary audience.

This view is supported by Jeff Wall himself. In his monograph *Jeff Wall* (2007), Wall himself seems wary of how some artists were using Brechtian techniques formally without political purpose. He describes this as a modernist revealing of the construction of the

photograph or film, which he considers "internalized radicalism" (Wall, 2007, p.11):

> An almost invisibilised intensity as far as any disruption of the classical codes is concerned. What happened was that the 'outside.' As you call it, did get inside, but in doing so, it refused to appear directly as an outside, disruptive element. It dissembled. It appeared to be conventional, appeared to be the same as (or almost) the conventionalized signs for the real that make up ordinary cinema. (Wall, 2007, p.11)

Here, Wall describes a "Godardian look" (Wall, 2007, p.11), which he says had "become so formulaic and institutionalized that it had completed its revolution" (Wall, 2007, p.11), thus explaining that many modernist strategies have been absorbed into the broader culture. Wall's images are similar to advertising, yet he uses allegoric forms to contradict and go beyond advertising rather than using a solely Brechtian reflexive method. Wall speaks of his critique in different terms; his critiques are related to his use of allegory. He demonstrates this in the way he builds each image.

However, there were other currents to identify within Wall's practice, allegorical strategies that go beyond the revelatory visual language present in *Picture for Women* (1979). Jeff Wall's use of allegory as a critique of advertising is evident. My early work tried to reveal the photograph's construction, as Brecht did with his stage set. This experiment indicated that Brecht's techniques would be difficult to reproduce outside the live realm of art since 'culinary' forms of advertising also employed such revelatory methods. I questioned if Brecht's radical practice can take place solely *via* the medium of still photography.

Jacques Rancière is another critic who, like Wall, questions the formal use of Brechtian techniques, doubting that they can have a critical effect in the contemporary era. When writing about the 'revelatory' potential of photography and film in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), Rancière has a different opinion to Perry & Wood. He believes that most audience members are already 'enlightened' to their political predicament and does not consider an audience as unaware or visually illiterate. Rancière explores previous strategies of political resistance by analyzing the history and application of ideas surrounding art's spectatorship. He argues that earlier considerations concerning the spectators of artworks as either 'active' or 'passive' in their engagement are worth re-examining. In the current climate,

these conceptualizations may contribute to a reactionary political response to the work rather than a critical function:

> Marxism then seized on it to render palpable, through the incongruous encounter of heterogeneous elements, the violence of the class domination concealed beneath the appearances of quotidian ordinariness and democratic peace. This was the principle of Brecht's alienation effect (Rancière, 2011, p.26).

Rancière challenges the assumption that to reveal how an artwork or political system works will result in political action. He thus questions art that aims to expose political mechanisms and attempts to educate a viewer into an insight about the 'truth' behind the political façade. To the critic, this patronizes an already thinking audience by assuming a difference in intellectual capacity between classes and between artists and non-artists:

> In effect, the procedures of social critique have as their goal treating the incapable: those who do not know how to see, who do not understand the meaning of what they see, who do not know how to transform acquired knowledge into activist activity (Rancière, 2011, p.47).

Rancière is also critical of Brechtian critique, as he believes that there is no way to calculate audience reaction:

> There is no short road from looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world, no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action. What occurs instead is a shift. From a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance. What occurs are processes of dissociation: a break in a relationship between sense and sense - between what I have seen and what I thought, what I thought and what I felt. Such breaks can happen in dissociation processes, but they cannot be calculated. (Rancière, 2011, p.75)

There have been other Brechtian strategies to provoke political consciousness that go beyond the modernist 'laying bare of the device.' It is necessary to consider what these were and what this political consciousness might look like; we cannot assume audiences to be visually 'illiterate'. Added to this is the fact that 'laying bare of the device' has been widely incorporated into increasingly 'knowing' and 'ironic' advertising since the world encountered postmodernist theory and practice in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is even pertinent to consider if Brecht's methods retain their critical function in the light of the understanding provided by Rancière and Wall. Brecht's ideas of provoking a political consciousness are evidently more fundamental than merely asking an audience to become visually literate. He was seeking nothing less than radical change.

The formal use of Brecht's v-effekts can form false ideas about Brechtian strategies in contemporary work and criticism. Contemporary critics such as Perry and Wood tend to see Brechtian strategies in practice that might, on examination, have only deployed a formal appearance of Brecht's techniques to overcome 'the culinary': they may fit into specific aesthetic definitions or methods that Brecht himself outlined or used in the mid-Twentieth Century, but still not be genuinely Brechtian in their effect. It is essential to understand that Brecht's strategies were not formal aesthetic choices; they aimed to have a specific impact on the viewer or audience. His concern was not with makers creating pieces using his formula, but how methods might create works that would affect a viewer or audience in a very particular way.

Some critics mistake the Brechtian strategies of an earlier era as formal requirements for making a piece. However, as evidenced in a broader look at his writings, this was never Brecht's intention. Brecht aimed to experiment to find ways to break through what he viewed as a kind of mind-numbing, consensus creating, falsely apolitical form of work. His intention in the v-effekt was to help himself and others develop practices that would create a new kind of interlocutor with the pieces, be they commercial films, fine art, or theatre. He termed the work he was against 'The Culinary Spectacle' because people fed upon it, without being nourished by recreating their responses or learning something new about themselves and the world they lived in (broadly, we could term this 'politics').

Culinary theatre provides an experience or a satisfaction, like a meal. It can be considered form of mental food that makes no difference to the reality of an audience's life or

social circumstance. Brecht thinks an audience should be encouraged to think rather than simply feel emotionally satisfied by a culinary type experience:

> And I must even admit that I regard suspiciously all sorts of people who I know do not keep abreast of science, who, in other words, sing as the birds sing, or as they imagine the birds sing. This does not mean that I would reject a nice poem about the taste of a flounder or the pleasure of a boating party just because the author had not studied gastronomy or navigation. But I think that unless every resource is employed towards understanding the great, complicated events in the world of man, they cannot be seen adequately for what they are. (Brecht, *Brecht Sourcebook*, 2000, p.25)

Brecht's antagonism to the culinary is based on the need for an audience to understand their predicament in a critical (and, in the above case, scientific) manner - to see things as they are, rather than as mere culinary experiences. Through this gap in understanding, as presented in the analysis of Perry and Wood, the need becomes apparent for consideration of Brecht's strategies in the contemporary era. Could going beyond his work's formal aspects and considering what he thought political consciousness to look like be the piece needed to fill this gap in understanding? Furthermore, it bears asking how might this 'exiting from Brecht' be achieved - how political consciousness can be provoked in our era.

The film *Gaslighting* (2015) explores this knowledge gap and asks whether there is a way to provoke political consciousness appropriate to our era, which does not rely on formal revelatory practices. In the process of making *Gaslighting* (2015), I began exploring ideas of intersectionality and varied subjectivities. I examined more recent understandings of subjectivity for clues and strategies. Brecht had referred to the audience as a group but did not acknowldge how this group was constructed of differing subjectivities. This became significant to my filmmaking practice.

By researching Wall's use of allegory and his questioning of reflexivity as a singular method, as well as Ranciere's rejection of the formal use of Brecht, I started to rethink my initial exploration of Brecht: I started exiting from formal use of Brecht. In order to achieve this, the film *Gaslighting* became an exploration of how subjectivity and feminism might

form updated v-effects, so that they continue to have relevance or provoke social change in a contemporary moment. *Gaslighting* enabled a practical re-examination of the v-effekt through particular, more recent, ideas of subjectivity. Through Judith Butler's performativity strategies, this filmic 'exit' takes us to a new filmmaking space. Simultaneously, I considered how examining how the specific methods used might prove fruitful in opening up a dialogue, potentially engendering a contemporary Brechtian-style critical approach.

As mentioned earlier, filmic methods cannot solely rely on a formal or mechanistic stance towards the v-effekt. These approaches are faithful to the 'look' or recorded historical methods of his productions. However, they have less potential for provoking a non-culinary critical engagement in the audience or viewer as the broader culture has absorbed many methods. In contrast, my approach relates to the specific political context of our era. It is possible to argue, as I have in earlier chapters, that Brecht viewed his audience as a singular group rather than a multiplicitous one. Butler's theory emerged as an appropriate way to address an audience of multiple subjectivities rather than a singular or amorphous group. I envisaged that a performative approach to filmmaking might enable work which was dynamic towards an audience, both in terms of their subjective positioning and their critical awareness.

I will describe shortly the strategies I devised, based on Butler's writings, to create *Gaslighting*, and explore how they were attempts to either 'exit' from Brecht or use Brecht in a new way. I outline the creative decisions made in the light of these readings. I identify techniques taken from Brecht's v-effekt in the case of *Gaslighting*. These methods include sound, editing, characters, actors, and sets. I identify each of these in the text, discussing how I have used each technique. I use these v-effekts in a way that is not as a static reproduction of the Brechtian method but encounters contemporary ideas of subjectivity. These are produced to 'exit' or move both through and from Brecht. I began to ask what the implications for the film are in the light of insights into performativity, making this investigation the starting point for my film/experiment *Gaslighting* (2015).

Developing Gaslighting (2015) Through Contemporary ideas of Subjectivity and Feminism

Gaslighting (2015), is based on the earlier film *Gaslight* (1940). The narrative of *Gaslight* (1940) was inspiring for me due to my subjective experience of being a woman and the intersectional experience of also being undermined due to my mental health condition. I refer to my mental health as the experience of neurodivergency. The decision to use the term neurodivergent is political in itself, as it is a more inclusive term than the negative labelling of schizophrenia, which can be limiting both personally and politically. A great deal of prejudice remains concerning mental health diagnosis, and often the experience of being given a diagnosis like this is life-limiting. People can be perceived as entirely defined by the limitations of a condition rather than the advantages. The term neurodivergency encompasses celebration of different sorts of mind; it explores the positive aspects of thinking in a different way from what is considered 'normal.' This experience of difference might help us understand what we value as a society and embracing difference can sometimes be a positive political action. There is not a great deal of academic writing discussing neurodivergency, but it is explained well on some disability websites. For example, one such website, *Disabled World*, describes it as follows:

> Neurodiversity is an approach to learning and disability that argues that diverse neurological conditions result from normal variations in the human genome. This portmanteau of neurological and diversity originated in the late 1990s as a challenge to prevailing views of neurological diversity as inherently pathological, instead asserting that neurological differences should be recognised and respected as a social category on a par with gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability status. (https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/neurodiversity/)

The fact that academic debate has not yet developed a good understanding of mental health discussion in this area indicates that there is still prejudice in this domain. My experience of schizophrenia often means that mental health professionals and family members challenge

my own narrative, due to my having experienced psychosis in the past. This experience becomes challenging to autonomy. Intersectional prejudice occurs being a woman amid patriarchal societal structures, and also through the experience of being diagnosed with a mental health condition. For this reason, it was interesting to consider neurodivergency as an intersectional position. The experience of the Bella character in *Gaslighting* (2015) becomes a metaphor for this experience.

The term 'Gaslighting 'has since been adopted in broader culture to describe the type of psychological abuse seen in the 1940 film, that undermine and shed doubt on the sanity of the abused. I used a film related to a real psychological phenomenon as the basis for critique in order to universalise a personal experience. Pointing to *Gaslighting*'s familiarity as a well-known form of abuse, I sought to engender some degree of recognition in an audience. The production of an affective response to events on screen was one that Brecht did not always value in his theatre. However, it struck me that certain aspects of his methods needed to change – therefore this universalising of personal experience did not seem oppositional. Instead, it allied to current theories about the constructed nature of the performative self.

In *Gaslight* (1940), I recognised qualities related to my predicament of being both a woman, in combination with my subjective/personal experience of being labelled with a mental health condition. This labelling has led to incidents where I have been discriminated against, both in terms of my gender and my mental health diagnosis. It was thus personally appropriate to use *Gaslight* (1940) as a starting point for my investigation. The film reflected the double-bind situation of being a woman and being vulnerable to doubt from others, due to the stigma attached to a mental health diagnosis.

The intersectional double bind of my position resulted in the decision to use myself as the performer of the female lead in *Gaslighting* (2015). Performing Bella's character, rather than using an actor, moves the work into a different dynamic of performance to that of Brechtian acting. I put myself in the character's position and used my bodily positioning within film as the locus for a critique, emphasising the body itself as a political space. This type of performance differs from Brechtian notions of what is critical. Although Brecht performed within his works, he demonstrated a character pointedly through his technique Gestus, rather than embodying the personal self. In contrast to Gestus, I acknowledge my own subjective position through 'performing' in the film. This positioning was a way to move from generic representation towards a subjectivity close to that of the original film's

character. This re-playing of the character moves the film to a position where what is personal becomes political.

Brecht was keen to eject the personification or embodiment of a character from his practice. He considered it played into ideas of empathy within the broader realist theatre of the time. However, changing views on subjectivity since Brecht's era mean that the empathetic or affective awakening of an audience has been re-assessed in filmmaking. This reappraisal has been particularly prominent in the field of feminist politics. Within the canon of feminist filmmaking, women artists often use the self as a model or performer within film, signalling a move away or exit from Brecht. Eva Hesse, Marina Abramovic, and Cindy Sherman are all examples of artists who also use themselves as performers within their works. Therefore, in both my work and that of others, the body becomes a site for re-examining subjectivity. This view of the subjective is different from the Brechtian ideas encapsulated in Gestus. For example, Cindy Sherman's untitled film stills could be said to encompass a form of Brechtian Gestus:

These staged images serve to create a disjuncture between familiar filmic tropes portraying the ingenue female actor and the position of the artist herself, placing Sherman's own body in that role. By re-performing characters, the artist is challenging stereotypes by emphasising them in a Gestic manner. This re-performance undermines cliches and asks an audience to reflect on the female archetype position in other media.

Along with subjective bodily position in *Gaslighting*, I was also interested in other aspects of its performative potential. In re-staging *Gaslight* (1940), I brought into being a form of ironic difference from it. This irony functions as a knowing form of quotation: a Brechtian v-effekt that is also sympathetic to Butlerian strategy. It became a way to use a Brechtian v-effekt that had the potential to be updated in terms of contemporary ideas of the subjective. Ironic difference is evidenced in my re-staging the dialogue between male and female characters using a comic or mannered tone. I use this ironic tone to awaken an audience to the casual sexism within it. The line "I'm sorry Lady Winterbourne, but she is having an attack" (*Gaslight*, 1940) is used twice within the loop of *Gaslighting*. This repetition places a camp or comedic emphasis upon the utterance. This draws attention to the original character (Paul)'s casual sexism, whose speech in *Gaslight* (1940) serves to undermine the female lead, Bella.

Knowing performance strategies are made manifest in Brecht's discussion of Gestus, relating specifically to his advice for actors to prevent the emergence of empathy for his characters. He enables this by directing actors in ways that prioritise emphasis on their social circumstance over the expression of the character's inner emotional state, preventing emotional or cathartic engagement with the character portrayed. Elin Diamond's essay 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism' is helpful in this regard. Diamond qualifies her discussion with some criticism of Brecht:

I realise that feminists in drama studies might greet this coupling with some bemusement. Brecht exhibits a typical Marxian blindness toward gender relations, and except for some

interesting excursions into male erotic violence, he created conventionally gendered plays and too many saintly mothers (one is too many). (Diamond,1988, p.83)

She then advances her argument by suggesting that Brechtian Gestus is still of use as a means of feminist criticism, because of its effect of exposing the ideology inherent in fixed and inescapable gendering.

> A-effects are not easy to produce, but the payoffs can be stunning. When gender is "alienated" or foregrounded, the spectator can see a sign system as a sign system the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc., that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will. Understanding gender as ideology-as a system of beliefs and behaviour mapped across the bodies of females and males, which reinforces a social status quo-is to appreciate the continued timeliness of Verfremdungseffekt, the purpose of which is to denaturalise and defamiliarise what ideology makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable. (Diamond, 1988, p.83)

Brecht envisaged that an audience can remain clear-headed and analytic towards the character's social and political position when presented with this form of pointed or mannered acting. For Diamond, this encompasses the potential for feminist theory and praxis. This is why Gestus became a significant element in my work. Brecht considers that an audience would relate this experience of events to circumstances in their own lives. The theatrical space thereby extends beyond the boundaries of theatre, to a realm of lived experience. He talks of this as the social 'Gest.'

Brecht describes Gestus in noting that "The first condition of the a-effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite 'gest 'of showing" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.136). In instances where Brecht engages with Gestus, Judith Butler engages with concepts of linguistic 're-staging' *via* her theory of performativity. In the case of *Gaslighting* (2015), performativity provides a strategic extension of the v-effekt. This is evidenced in the relationship with an audience to subjectivity. In writings such as *Excitable Speech* (2003), Butler introduces the idea of 're-performing 'the 'self:'

Re-contextualising the law-prohibition, in this case-occasions a reversal in which the sexuality prohibited becomes the sexuality produced. The discursive occasion for a prohibition-renunciation, inter- diction, confession-become precisely the new incitement to sexuality, an incitement to discourse as well. That discourse itself proliferates as the repeated enunciation of the prohibitive law suggests that its productive power depends upon its break with an originating context and intention, and that its recirculation is not within the control of any given subject. (Butler, 2003, p. 95)

By re-performing hate speech and recontextualising it through that performance, the utterance becomes resistant to its original context and usage. The performance also draws attention to its original use in a Gestic manner, so there is the potential for commonality between Butler and Brecht in this context. Brecht draws attention to the social and political arena within his use of Gestus whereas Butler uses the performance of language to draw attention to its social context and repurpose it as a resistant form. The self and gender therefore become their ironic counterpart, thereby emphasising the extent to which gender is performed, rather than being an essentialist concept.

Through the character of Bella, the literal re-performance of my own experiences was a way to emphasise the extent to which gender is performed. I used clichéd or mannered gestures within the film *Gaslighting* (2015) to underline the contingent construction of gender. This method includes using so-called 'feminine' gestures, such as hair-brushing and preening, which create an ironic difference between what is traditionally thought of as feminine and the notion of a multiplicitous construction of gender. The 'preening ' movements I perform within the film (such as brushing my hair in the mirror) form an ironic visual language, an allegory of the 'feminine'. The emphasis and repetition of these gestures are done in Butler's spirit of an ironic critical stance on language, with Butler repurposing linguistic devices to give them an ironic or critical distance.

My ironic performance is designed to make the languages and structure of that which is perceived to be self evident, resulting in the formation of a more radical subjectivity that reflects Butler's analysis of the repurposing of hate speech. This idea regarding the construction of gender is not something Brecht encounters in his work. As such, my ironic

distancing is a move away from Brechtian strategy and towards Butler's ideas of performativity. Brecht argued that actors can demonstrate their inner world by showing the social forces acting upon them. This dynamic indicates the essentialist nature of his thought. His attitude to the construction of subjectivity is problematic in the context of recent discoveries in the field, insofar as he assumes a binary division between a character's inner subjective world and a separate external world.

In this way, binary thought does not fit with more recent conceptions of subjectivity, such as those espoused by Butler. In contrast to Brecht, Judith Butler adds a non-essentialist dimension to the idea of performing the subjective. She introduces the conception that we 'perform' ourselves, and that the whole idea of the self is contingent rather than fixed. Through Butler's ideas of subjectivity, I extended Brechtian techniques in my approach to *Gaslighting* (2015). The decision to use myself as a performer within the film was used to emphasise my intervention as an artist. This is both a familiar strategy within recent staged photography and a Brechtian method. For example, the staged photography created by Jeff Wall in images such as *Picture for Women* (1979) uses this technique. In *Picture for Women* (1979) Wall demonstrates himself as the 'creator' of the scene, reflecting a postmodern demand for the intervention by the artist in the scene.

Wall's intervention reflects upon the concept of the 'male gaze' and the subjectivity of women, such as that discussed by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). In this text, Mulvey describes women as 'of the look' of the masculine gaze (or form of objectification) within Hollywood melodrama:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness…The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. (Mulvey, 1975, p.62)

I considered Mulvey's demonstrations of this theory and, thereby asked how ironically emphasising or disrupting this dynamic could add to, or move away from, Brechtian forms of critical method. As Jeff Wall did in *Picture for Women* (1979), I use myself as an 'actor' in *Gaslighting* (2015) to reflect on the status of documentary-style photography as a supposed bearer of truth. My performance becomes a method to undermine the status of documentary-style photography as a strategy of non-intervention; more recent conceptions of critical photography identify the role of the artist's influence over the scene they are depicting. This intervention is made evident in order to point to the constructed nature of all forms of photography. Paul Strand speaks of the 'objectivity' of modernist forms of photography as "being its greatest strength but also, its limitation" (Strand, 1998, p.9).

Figure 23:Still from Gaslighting *(2015), Alice Evans*

Like Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979) and Mulvey and Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977)*,* I also employ a mirror within *Gaslighting* (2015) to create a screen within a screen. This technique responds to Lacanian ideas concerning the construction of subjectivity, an acknowledgement of the creation and enforcement of particular notions of 'selfhood.' By using a mirror within the film in this way, I acknowledge the constructed nature of the self, demonstrating the ideological and societal pressure on the individual to

conform to particular notions of selfhood. These subject positions include fixed ideas of gender and sexuality, or even the restrictions imposed by society when presenting the self as neurodivergent.

Figure 24: Still from Riddles of the Sphinx (1977) *Mullen and Wollen, BFI.*

As a critical device, the employment of a mirror points out how ideas concerning subjectivity might be changed to incorporate new possibilities and less restrictive dimensions to the construction of subjectivity than the process of binary 'othering' allows. The use of the mirror within the film draws attention to the medium of film.
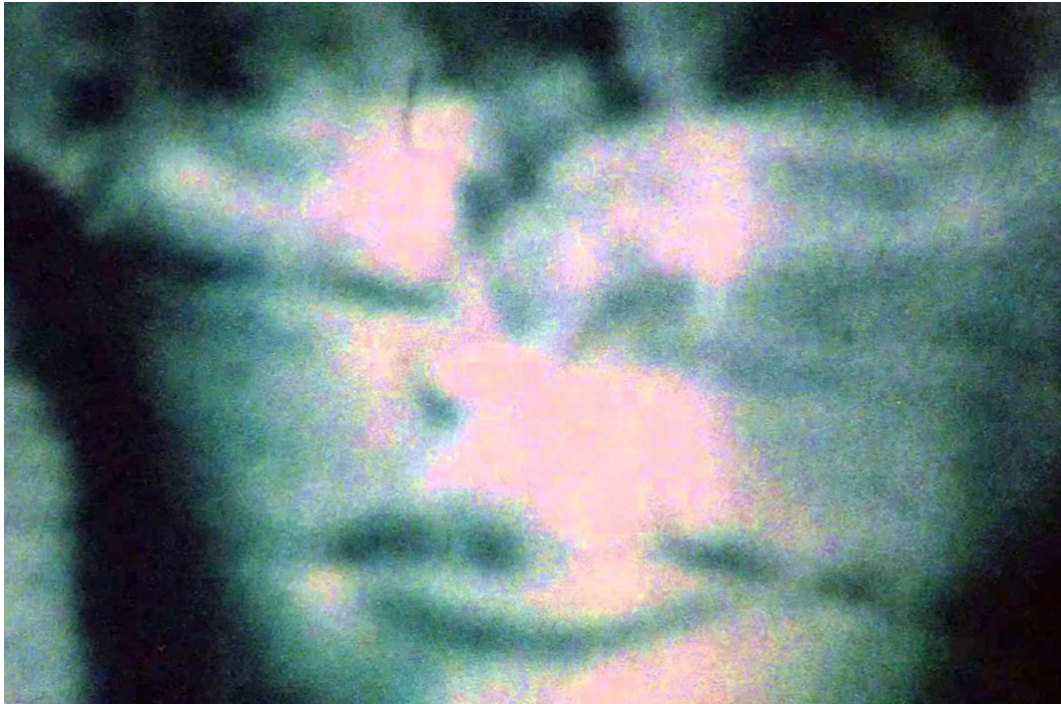
Figure 25:Still from Riddles of the Sphinx (1977) *Mullen and Wollen, BFI.*

An interesting comparison can be made between *Gaslighting* and Mulvey's film *Riddles of the Sphinx,* which she made with Peter Wollen in 1977. *Riddles of the Sphinx* contains a number of Brechtian techniques: as demonstrated in the still from the film above, Mulvey uses mirrors to reveal the construction of the set itself.

This revealing of set and camera was used in Jean Luc Godard's *Le Mèpris* to similar effect. However, the opening scene in *Le Mèpris* (1963) deconstructs the filmic process. *Le Mèpris* (1963) appears to draw attention to the medium of film but does not achieve the degree of reflection on subjectivity that Mulvey instills. *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) demonstrates the process by which film is broken down to fine detail. For example, the scenes of older footage, found footage of the Sphinx itself (see above) are accompanied by crackling soundtrack drawing attention to the very materiality of the film stock itself. This introduces the indexical nature of film as a medium and this, in turn could be considered to reflect on the artificially constructed nature of femininity. This was something I admired greatly about the piece, and which also struck me as fundamentally Brechtian.

Griselda Pollock's monograph *Screening the Seventies: sexuality and representation in feminist practice (2003)* was also of great interest to my research into the Brechtian influence on feminist filmmaking practices. In this text, Pollock describes Brecht's influence

over feminist practitioners, including Mary Kelly, Lucy Lippard, Mitra Tabrizan, Yves Lomax, and Marie Yates. Mary Kelly's work features centrally in Pollock's discussion of feminist Brechtian Practice. Although often placed in relation to psychoanalytic theory, Kelly's work is seen by Pollock as being just as closely aligned to the critique present in the conditions of its production – and is thereby Brechtian:

> [*Post Partum Document*] needs to be placed within its own history." This is in relation to Kelly's 1970-1972 work, the night cleaners which demonstrated *via* the archival medium "For women, work was what happened around the dead time of paid emploment; it had no limits and there was no real division between labour and leisure. (Pollock, 2003, p.230)

For Pollock, *Post Partum Document* then, like *Night Cleaners* of 1970-1972, was also informed by Brecht, despite often being analysed in a Lacanian manner by other critics (Pollock, 2003):

> The representational strategies were informed by the Brechtian uses of montage, text, objects in a sequence of sections which actively invent the spectator as someone who will engage, remember, reflect and reconstitute the traces of the mother and child which is the documents material" (Pollock, 2003, p.231)

Brecht's ideas heavily influenced many feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s. This enabled them to make visible the structures and politics of representation and the subjugation of women that dominates patriarchal societies. Through Pollock's essay, we can therefore see the contemporary relevance of Brecht for the feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s that continues today:

> Distanced from the passive consumption of ideological category of the natural mother or the voyeuristic exploitation of an autobiographical account of one woman's experience as a

mother the spectator is offered a quite new understanding of the intersection between the social organisation of domestic labour on the one hand, and on the other, the consolidation of femininity as prescribed within a patriarchal system. (Pollock,2003, p.233)

Pollock followed this by emphasising Brecht's continuing relevance to what was, at the time, current practice in claiming that "for that section of British feminist art practices, which I have discussed, a Brechtian input has proved vital and productive." (Pollock, 2003, 267). Pollock is also interested in artists like Sylvia Harvey, whom she says re-states "a Brecht for the 80's" in a timely fashion. (Pollock, 2003, p267). For Pollock, Brechtian feminist practices remain urgent:

> Post-modernism, post-feminism, all, we are told, is retro, passé, no longer relevant. But the changes for which the women's movement struggles have not come about…While the Brechtian modernism of the 1970s is being transformed tactically as it must by the conditions and debates of the 1980s, its theoretical and practical contributions for a political art practice remain a valid and necessary component for the contemporary women's art movement. (Pollock,2003, pp. 267-268)

For Pollock, Brecht continues to be relevant as a route to critical practice, and it is for this reason that my attempts to update Brecht again for the 21st Century seem relevant to feminist practice. The use of mirrors within my own work functions as a Brechtian technique, one discussed within his writings on stage design theories. The mirror allows the 'backstage' of the filmic process to be shown, so that events off-camera are revealed within it. In incorporating this as a Brechtian v-effekt, I make the film's narrative and sound seem discontinuous or disjointed. This process formed a resistance to traditional Aristotelian narrative strategy and, at the same time, undermined the idea that narrative should be fixed and formulaic.

The use of the mirror allows for rupture or disruption to the film's action when the actor who is providing the male character's voice pierces the film's continuity by appearing, seemingly unintentionally, within the scene. This voice interrupts the diegetic flow of the

soundtrack, making the film disjointed or discontinuous. For Brecht, a narrative that flows continuously from beginning to middle and end prevents an audience from being critical; they become part of what he terms the culinary. In terms of subjectivity, Brecht's approach to filmic structure enables us to doubt re-assuring narratives that reinforce existing social relations or subjective positions, in terms of binary notions of the self. Instead, he exposes how narratives are constructed, often through social bias. Narrative structure and bias are undermined within *Gaslighting* (2015) and produces a more empowering critical construction of subjectivity.

To summarise, using myself as a performer within *Gaslighting* (2015) is a non-Brechtian strategy. Using the self in the film is a different process to the v-effekt of Gestus as expressed in Brecht's foundational ideas. The technique acknowledges both the medium as a constructed form (like Brecht) and points to my intervention over it. These methods acknowledge the constructed nature of feminine identity and make these evident to the viewer. In the process of performing the self within a film, intersectionality is demonstrated. The intersectional is a new approach to the v-effekt, which could be applied as part of a toolkit for other artists to use.

Brechtian dualism implies that one can understand the inner world by demonstrating Gestus, and by implication, suggesting that the inner world can be represented through the external world acting upon it. This dualist notion is overtaken by the concepts associated with performativity. As such, these incorporations of Butlerian notions of a contested site of performed gender within my film indicate that new variations on the v-effekt can emerge. These experiments demonstrate that Brechtian v-effekts such as Gest, set design, and narrative disruption can become re-invigorated for a new era within film, particularly in the context of Butlerian ideas of subjectivity.

The discoveries produced in *Gaslighting* (2015), suggested that one way to exit through and from the formal use of Brechtian techniques was *via* Butlerian ideas of subjectivity. I was also reminded, through practice, that Brecht's techniques were not used in isolation but formed part of a broad range of strategies that contributed to the epic theatre. This discovery led to a new route towards understanding Brecht. This, in turn, indicated the possibility of incorporating an analysis of how Brecht uses narrative techniques in his work, which contrast to more traditional structures of drama. I thus needed to expand my initial investigation by making another film.

In the disjointed approach to narrative in *Gaslighting* and its divergence in approach to subjectivity from that of Brecht, I had discovered that another possible form of 'exit' from the formal use of Brecht's theories might emerge through a reflection on narrative strategy itself. I moved onto chapter 4 (Exit 2), to develop my next film, *Letters Home* (2016). Here, I would examine the use of alternative narrative strategies provided by the epistolary form (i.e., letter writing), as another critical 'exit' through and from Brecht.

Chapter 4
Film 2: Letters Home (2016)
Brecht and the Epistolary Form

Production Diary : *Letters Home*

Letters Home (2016) was made shortly after *Gaslighting* (2015). I went to Wales to make it, as I needed to concentrate on my work. This demanded time away from London. By this point I had (somewhat serendipitously) also met actor Julian Firth at a cafe in Soho, and was keen to work with him on something related to this project. He was interested in experimental filmmaking and wanted to do unusual projects outside of his existing work in theatre, film and radio. We discussed Derek Jarman while drinking tea and coffee.

  Gaslighting had demanded that I spend time looking again at ways in which I could use Brechtian techniques in a contemporary context. Making the film at this specific point helped me understand that there were several ways of considering Brecht: there was no such thing as a singular Brechtian tradition, and his techniques had evolved throughout his career as he experimented with different ways of engendering political consciousness in an audience. Reading Brecht's plays, seeing his performances, and analysing texts such as *The Messingkauf Dialogues* also helped convince me of the variety of approaches that Brecht had taken. *The Messingkauf Dialogues* provided me with insight into how Brecht had changed his strategies over time. His work was not some fixed model, like a so-called 'faithful' rendition of a Shakespeare play. Instead, each debate which takes place in the play starts a new discussion, so that the piece progresses towards a greater understanding for Brecht and his audience – an understanding of how they might be provoked through practice to change their individual lives and, in turn, society at large. This realisation raised the question as to how a contemporary Brechtian artwork might be created. I began to ponder whether this progressive method could also be a way to understand film making practice, with each film in turn providing a new approach towards other filmmaking strategies.

  Taking inspiration from Brecht's use of props and banners as a way to interrupt action on stage, I began to look for an equivalence that I could realise in my work. Working with Julian, I had become increasingly interested in a collection of old letters I had found at my

Great Aunt's house in Wales. Reading them gave me an insight into, and curiosity about, the lives led by my own family and others a hundred years before. I was particularly excited to find letters from my uncle Selwyn, who I had met in the 1980s when I was a child. Selwyn, like myself, was diagnosed of Schizophrenia (albeit in his old age). However, the letters I had found were compelling and exciting. He talked about going to the cinema and the life he had led in Wales before his illness. I wondered if I could use these family letters within a film in place of Brecht's props or banners. I understood that letters used within filmmaking had different effects, so I began planning a film that incorporated this archive to see if the epistolary form could add anything new to my understanding of Brecht in an artistic context. Rather than using banners and placards within filmmaking, as Brecht did within theatre, I pondered whether the physical appearance of letters had a similar disruptive effect: if the use of letters could help me comprehend the relationship between Brechtian V-effekt and Epistolary Form. Could letters be used as a way to explore new ways of provoking political consciousness, in a similar way to how Brecht had used props and banners?

I found a recording of my grandfather describing night exercises on a nearby mountain during World War 2 in another family archive. It was very crackly and poorly recorded, which already gave it a distancing quality. Julian and I re-recorded a clear version, in which Julian borrowed my grandfather's words. I could not decide which version was more interesting, so I asked Julian to mime to the original tape. We tried both methods and discovered a way of filming where Julian's performance (recorded by filming outside the house back through the windows) could be used with any combination of words. This way of filming hid the fact that he was miming. I also enquired if the physical distance from his performance could be useful in applying any combination of words. This technique was an exciting phenomenon. No longer miming (due to the distance from the camera), the performance became non-specific. This method became an extension of the disjuncture that I had found so compelling in my earlier film *Gaslighting*.

When I got back to London, I wandered through the National Gallery for a couple of days. My trip around the gallery was a somewhat welcome distraction, but also led to some new thoughts on ways that letters could be used to critical effect. I took pictures of all the paintings with letters featured in them, building up a substantial collection of images: I was surprised by the number of paintings that used letters in them. I thought about Norman Bryson's book *Looking at the Overlooked* (1991). I considered Bryson's analysis of still life,

and how he believed that the demotion of still-life to a so-called lesser category of painting functioned to dismiss women and women artists. Each of the pictures I had viewed in the gallery featured a tiny, detailed depiction of a letter. The people depicted were all important men, and the paintings scarcely featured women.

Thinking of Julian's performance again, I wondered what would happen if I asked him, at another point, to read my original words. It seemed important to consider the significance of a man reading a woman's words, in the light of concerns around feminist subjectivity. Was he speaking my words, or was I writing them for him to perform? In preparation for making *Letters Home*, I spent some time ahead of the production experimenting with Julian as he read other texts I had written. Through this process, I discovered that there was something in the original form of letter writing that had a direct link to its author: letter writing is often referred to as indexical, depending upon a physical hand on a page, that, in turn, connects with the person receiving a letter. The epistolary form thus seemed appealing to those who wish to write fiction with the impression of realism, as it does not require the presence of an omniscient narrator.

An equivalence to letter-writing would be light making marks on photographic paper. This led me to consider Barthes' reflections on the indexical and the punctum. These ideas helped me also understand how some contemporary works are indebted to Barthes' reading of Brecht in "Diderot, Brecht, and Eisenstein" (1974). In this text, he refers to distanciation over the Verfremdungseffekt. I considered a contradiction in the way in which letters appeared in film and other media. I saw that the realism afforded to the letter within the film could present the reverse of the realism effects of the epistolary novel. I asked whether the presence of writing films in the form of the letter created a step of removal from filmic realism and queried if this was something I could incorporate as a critical method. Could this enable a new approach to Brecht within art? To present a letter within a film, the writer must make the letter itself visibly evident within the context of the film: they must rely on other strategies, such as voiceover. There was thus uncertainty over whether both filmic approaches, and the subsequent realism afforded the medium, could be automatically epistolary in some cases – or if, alternatively, the depiction of the physical letters in the film could provide a removal from identification with emotive or cathartic events, in a similar way to Brecht's ambition for epic theatre.

I became interested in novels and short stories written in the epistolary form. These included Helen Hampf's *84, Charing Cross Rd*, Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, and *Austerlitz* by W.G. Sebald. Alongside these I considered literary theories of the letter, including Linda F. Kauffman's *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* and Paul Cobley's monograph *Narrative*. I also read Simon Garfield's *To the Letter* and Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema*.

Through my analysis of the letter within a film, I felt that, rather than using the letter as a way to get closer to the viewer, I could use it as a way to distance them. I borrowed dialogue I had recorded of my uncle and a series of letters sent home during the First World War. *Letters Home* was thus based on letters – but alongside its epistolary form, I envisaged producing the film as a way to explore how narrative might move away from Aristotelian narrative methods. In writing my initial plans, I sought to try to understand how an unreliable narrator could be used to create Brechtian effects. This Brechtian influence led to my designing a narrative that resisted the structures of a traditional story arc. To achieve this, I studied Aristotle's *Poetics*, which, showed me how drama is more traditionally designed to unfold through conflicts at different stages, leading to an inevitable catharsis and resolution. This contrasted vividly with Brecht's epic theatre.

In the film structures I was developing, I saw parallels with plays such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, which challenged forms of theatre that promote the American Dream. Observing a link between traditional structures of storytelling and the promotion of capitalist modes of production, I began to ask how Brecht did this differently. Brecht's method sought to break the progression of a narrative by using disruptive techniques, including the historicization of story, an open rather than closed resolution, songs, and banners that interrupted the action. These combined to prevent what Brecht had considered the quick absorption present in the narrative, and instead were designed to generate reflexive capacity in an audience.

***Dogville* and the Epistolary Form**

In this section I will return to the film *Dogville* from a different perspective. My previous film *Gaslighting* (2015) had reflected on aspects of contemporary subjectivity developed since Brecht's era. In Brecht's relationship to audience subjectivity, as produced by revelatory elements of the v-effekt, it was evident that a significant aspect of his critical technique was created through what he describes as non-Aristotelian methods. This was the aspect of the v-effekt which dealt with narrative strategies, which disrupted the conventional flow of events on stage:

> A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. Therefore, a well-constructed plot must neither begin nor end haphazardly but conform to these principles. (Aristotle [c.335] (2013) *Poetics* (Ed.) Anthony Kenny, p.12).

First, it is necessary to have a working definition of what is meant by Aristotelian narrative. Aristotle above enlarges upon the idea of character as destiny within a narrative: this has become a fundamental of European storytelling technique, opposed by the myth, legend or fairy tale, where the character is not the prime influencer in the dramatic action. In Aristotle's definition, a structure gives an arc based on the protagonist's individual character traits ('tragic' or 'comic'). This structure stresses the idea of the universality of 'human nature' and illuminates the concept of a society constructing subjectivities and opportunities. Moreover, this character-based form, in European/Western literature (and later, film), uses this 'arc' to tell a structured story of beginning, middle, and end, divided in various acts, and told through a protagonist with a unitary sense of identity.

A 'tragic flaw' is described in Aristotle's poetics is translated from the Greek 'Hamartia.' This tragic flaw exists in each Aristotelian character to define their destiny. As described by Aristotle, this is a process in all forms of tragic drama. Tragic flaws feature in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex [c.329]*, and also his character Creon in *Antigone [c.441]*. This form

of character building is also present in the drama of Brecht's own era, plays in which Brecht regarded character development as culinary. Brecht's view of how characters should be built differed from Aristotelian theatre practices. When Brecht talks about the idea of character as destiny, he talks about it primarily in terms of its effect on an audience: how an audience is misled and subsumed by the impact of this narrative structure. This is exemplified in the way he refers to the difference between epic and dramatic theatre, in which he states that 'plot' within Aristotelian style dramatic theatre "Implicates the spectator in a stage situation" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37). In contrast, Brecht's Epic Theatre uses 'narrative' as a counter to this, as it "turns the spectator into an observer but arouses his capacity for action." (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37). With this differentiation, Brecht asserts the need for theatre to prevent the character-as-destiny mode of narrative, so that an audience retains their ability to understand and rationally criticise how the character-as-destiny model functions to keep them subdued and unaware of social inequality. If an audience is absorbed in a story that implicates them and carries them along within narrative, Brecht believes that they lose their capacity for rational and clear-headed critique.

Aristotelian methods also relate to the protagonist's character as a singular, and causal influence within a narrative and the effect this has on an audience. Brecht believed that this led to audiences becoming lost in 'the Culinary' rather than becoming aware, challenged, or awakened. Indeed, much contemporary Hollywood scriptwriting creates empathy from the audience towards the protagonist creating a sense of 'lost' self in the viewer, a process of dissolving into the protagonist. Brecht's urging for the "separation of the elements" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37). of theatre challenges this effect: by dividing elements of opera into their constituent parts, it is easier for the work to perform a function which is resistant to the status quo. Similar to the reception of some conventional Hollywood film, the Wagnerian Gestamkunstwerk (an example he uses), integrates all elements of its form and thereby makes it almost impossible for an audience to take a critical stance towards the narrative created:

> The integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere feed to the rest. The process of fusion is extended to the spectator too, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive, (suffering) part of the total work of art. (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37)

For Brecht, this type of causal drive allows an audience to be drawn into the story, unaware of their circumstances and the social and political causes of inequality. His theatre calls for a different audience dynamic from traditional forms of realism at the time, rather than theatre in which the audience becomes the protagonist and experiences the action as that protagonist (the Culinary). Brecht rejects this strategy entirely, claiming that "the essential part of Epic Theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.23). Brecht's aim with this dialectical method is summarised by Willett in *Brecht on Theatre* (Willett, [1964] (2013)): "Because empathy depends on illusion, Brecht treats the epic methods of the 1920s as something more than new narrative aids; they become means of breaking the magic spell, of jerking the spectator out of his torpor and making him use his critical sense" (Willett, [1964] 2013, p.17).

As discussed previously in the Introduction to this thesis, Lars Von Trier is a confessed Brechtian. Many of the Brechtian formal techniques seen throughout his film *Dogville* (2003) were used by Brecht himself within his plays and performances. The overall visual effect of *Dogville* is distinctly reminiscent of Brecht's *Workbooks*. One of these *Workbooks* or Model books was produced to accompany his Productions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Brecht's Workbooks or Model books were a resource and record of Brechtian practice designed to serve as models for his practice for other theatre practitioners, devised by Brecht to accompany his productions. They contained images from the production, as well as detailed discussions of his methods. The below images from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are similar in style to elements of *Dogville*. This is particularly evident in the way the set is built so that it reveals its own method of construction: Von Trier uses a drawn map of the town setting rather than using a conventionally realist method of set design.
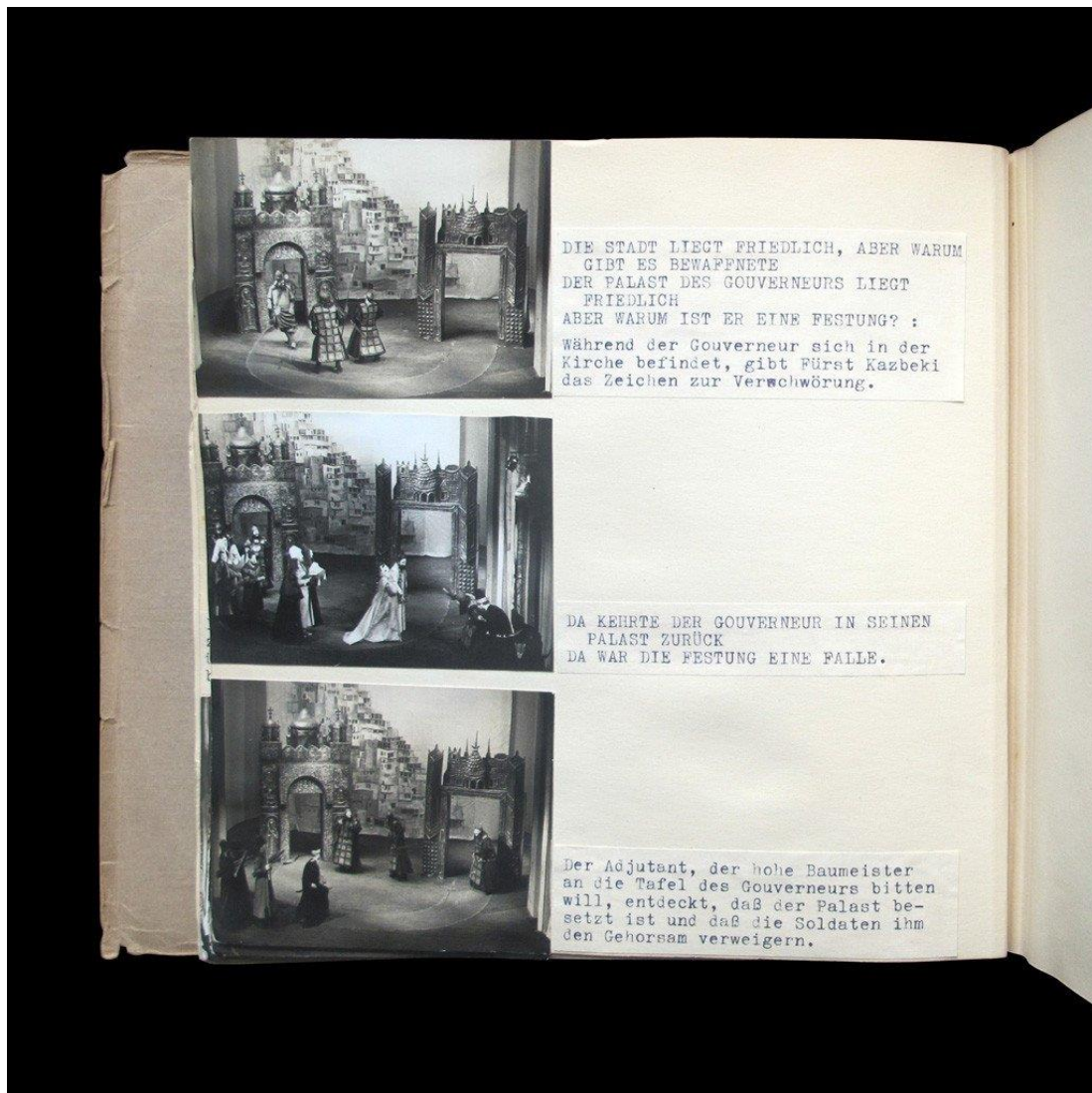
Figure 27:Bertolt Brecht: Modelbook for The Caucasian Chalk Circle
A Model Book for The Caucasian Chalk Circle / Der kaukasische Kreidekreis.
[N.p.], [N.d].

Figure 28:Von Trier, Dir. Stills from Dogville *(2003) showing the set which reveals its own construction in a similar fashion to Brecht's Model book for the Caucasian Chalk Circle.*

The lighting and costume presented within Von Trier's film are sepia-tinted, as if they are aged or faded photographs. This 'ages' the production as well. It is unclear whether this contributes to a historicised narrative, as Brecht experimented with in the 1950s with plays such as *Life of Galileo* (1950), or if it merely adds a nostalgic or romanticised dimension to the production. Brecht used the character of Galileo to talk about contemporary themes of McCarthyism in the guise of historical or period drama, hiding its direct contemporary references as this would have been politically dangerous for him at the time. The historical reference to the Depression-era United States in *Dogville* could be considered as a parallel to Brecht's historicised play *Galileo*, discussing contemporary America through the guise of the depression era. However, given a context where so many other films feel free to make more direct commentary on contemporary US politics, this could be considered doubtful.

The set of *Dogville* has been frequently discussed by critics and film reviewers as being distinctly Brechtian. Willett describes this effect in Brecht's work as: "acting as a continual reminder to the audience that the scene designer has built a setting; what he sees is presented differently from the world outside the theatre" (Willett, [1964] 2013, p.232). It is clear from the revelatory strategies within *Dogville* that laying bare the device of the set and the actors is a strategy borrowed from Brecht's theatre. Willett describes this as an element of epic theatre in emphasising the importance of "fragmentary props, sets, and costumes" (Willett, [1964], 2013, p.173). Stills from *Dogville* are almost indistinguishable from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle Workbook*.

The narrative strategy also bears reference to Brecht. Each short scene within *Dogville* (2003), is self-contained as a vignette and could stand alone rather than be a traditional form of progressive narrative. Scenes are divided into sections with deliberate and obvious chapter breaks. These breaks pierce any continuous narrative strategy. Willett in *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (1986) describes these 'breaks' in epic theatre as "something more than narrative aids, they become ways of breaking the magic spell, of jerking the spectator out of his torpor and making him use his critical sense" (Willett, [1959] (1986), p.172). However, *Dogville*, while breaking the narrative, does not break with the method of characterisation typical of realist theatre or film. The lead character, Tom Edison Jr., is portrayed with the character flaws of arrogance and a lack of self-awareness, which inflects his decision making and leads to the downfall of the whole village. It appears that this tragic flaw in character (rather than social circumstance) leads to the disasters which occur.

Dogville divides chapters through voiceover narrative by actor John Hurt. Hurt's voice is intertextually familiar from multiple voiceover roles, public information broadcasts, live theatre, and film. This adds a form of distancing or v-effekt akin to Brecht's deployment of the actor Charles Laughton. John Willett reports Charles Laughton as saying; "When asked why he acted, he said "Because people don't know what they are like and I think I can show them."" (Willett, [1964] (2013) p164) This is very telling in terms of Brecht's ambitions for theatre as well. In his description of epic theatre, Brecht talks of the need to 'demonstrate' or show where "the human being is the object of enquiry" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p37). This is opposed to dramatic theatre, in which, he suggests, "the human being is taken for granted" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p37) and is "considered unchangeable" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p37). Laughton seems to have appealed to Brecht due to his specific qualities

of acting. Brecht also discusses how the rehearsal of gest was sometimes more important than the translation of words themselves. In the following example, the lack of understanding in translation between German and English between playwright and performer shows that Laughton's performance style and interests were almost more important than the content of words themselves.

The awkward circumstance that one translator knew no German and the other scarcely any English compelled us, as can be seen, from the outset to use acting as our means of translation. We were forced to do what better equipped translators should do: to translate gests. For language is theatrical in so far as it primarily expresses the mutual attitude of the speakers. (Brecht, [1964] (2013) pp.165-166).

Charles Laughton was significant in his collaboration for Brecht in his style of acting, his demonstration and his use of Gest. Laughton was also a significant collaborator in *Galileo*. Even now, on recordings of the production, we can see that elements of his theatrical style differ from both contemporary and historical naturalistic Hollywood performance styles.

In his text 'Messingkauf Dialogues: An Editorial Note', Brecht remarks on his wishes to "address the audience directly" and also to "demolish the 4th Wall" (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.172). This discontinuous address is a similar process to that provided by Hurt's voiceover in *Dogville*. Laughton, in his larger than life or Gestic style of performance, bears similarities to Hurt's voiceover, engineering a way to create self-awareness in an audience – reminding them they are watching a performance and demolishing the 4th Wall separating the audience from the action on screen and in their lives outside. Brecht wanted the audience of his plays to feel and act as if they could change or "be changeable" (Brecht, [1964] (2013) p.37).

Alongside the performance of Hurt's voiceover, all sound effects, apart from occasional non-diegetic intervals, are created on stage and, seemingly, live. Doors are knocked, and footsteps appear to be performed by a 'live' foley artist, who is off camera, but remains on set. Besides these obvious Brechtian references, there are aspects of *Dogville* which borrow more directly from traditional Hollywood film and theatre. For example, the treatment of the female lead character played by Nicole Kidman could be considered anti-

feminist. As with other Von Trier films such as *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) or *Antichrist* (2009), the female lead is humiliated within the narrative, in this instance she is forced into being a prostitute for the village and made to wear a cowbell round her neck.

Von Trier's strategy of extreme subjugation of the female lead within his films could be considered both offensive and a *cliché*. His female characters are frequently portrayed as stereotyped victims, saints, or sinners. Shocking violence is inflicted upon them, and *Dogville* is no exception to this. There is reason to question why Von Trier's depiction of women, is much different in this respect to any police drama, where the dead body at the centre of the investigation is almost always a silenced woman. Being both anywhere and nowhere, the generalisation of *Dogville*'s setting universalises the theme of the film, a technique not evident in the Brechtian strategy. Brecht set his plays in various times and places, so that the experiences could not be considered universal, but historically contingent. Several interviews and articles discuss the Brechtian character of *Dogville*. For example, *Empire* claims that:

> Stylistically, the shadow of playwright Bertolt Brecht looms large over Dogville, and not just because the story is inspired by his song lyric, Pirate Jenny. Von Trier approaches his latest film like a Brecht play, adhering to the German's theories in near-textbook fashion by always emphasising the artifice and theatricality of the action.
> (https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/dogville-review/ Accessed 12_02_21)

Similarly, Von Trier states in a 2004 *Guardian* interview with Stig Bjorkman that "Dogville is inspired by Brecht. One of the starting points was actually Pirate Jenny's song in The Threepenny Opera." (Bjorkman and Von Trier Interview "It was like a nursery but 20 times worse" *The Guardian* 12th Jan 2004 (online) Date Accessed 27th March 2019 (https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/jan/12/1). A Turkish review of *Dogville* is even titled 'Trier's America à la Brecht', claiming that "With Dogville [von Trier] escapes the Hollywood *clichés* other directors depend on and paints a critical picture of America using a Brechtian style" (Ozmenek, 2004, P.85). These reviews all point to the general understanding of Von Trier's work being read as Brechtian.

St Joan of the Stockyards (1929-1931) is also set in the Depression era, and the structure of the play takes the audience down a narrative path in which a chance occurrence takes them in a certain direction, rather than suggesting universality. The contrasting universality of Von Trier's film is also evidenced by how the titular dog of *Dogville* (2003), becomes a real dog at the conclusion of the film, thereby bringing the 'unreal imaginary' of the theatre into the domain of the 'real' world of film for the audience. This may run counter to Brecht's ambitions, as it broadens the message for an audience's relationship with their own lives. In contrast, Brechtian technique would necessitate creating a conflict or the need for disagreement among the audience. This is akin to a football match or a boxing ring, where an audience disagrees and debates in the course of unfolding events.

Moreover, the sepia colour grade of Von Trier's film evidences an approach that historifies a contemporary issue (poverty and inequality in a capitalist society), and yet also adds an element of romanticism or nostalgia to the film. This nostalgia acts as whimsy, distancing the audience from the real horror of the inequalities of the Depression era. This strategy is similar to the description of Wes Anderson's use of sepia tone in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2017) which is described in *Film Enquiry* as a "washed-out, milky aesthetic, which ultimately gives a vintage, nostalgic feeling as if audiences are walking through a fading memory" (Sampson, 2018, n.p.).

Although disjointed by the division into scenes or episodes, the narrative in *Dogville* is more Aristotelian through its functioning as a mystery narrative. Although tension is somewhat dispersed through its episodic structure, the narrative drive remains, moving towards a solution to the mystery. In terms of the above description of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, *Dogville* is more traditional in its approach to cause and effect than it first appears. The seemingly meaningless violence at *Dogville*'s conclusion results in a morality familiar from Brecht plays such as *St Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-31). However, in Brecht's plays, no character emerges as a hero or villain. Instead, they are portrayed as victims of larger capitalist structures. The machinations of an extensive capitalist system are less prominent in *Dogville* (2003). Even though the village is depicted as poor, the film's morality is less dependent on the failures of capitalism more than it is on the human or individual frailty of characters themselves. The finger is pointed less at the system, and more at the individual. This approach is allied to the Aristotelian notion of a character-driven protagonist (or a 'shared protagonist', when the role is shared out to various characters).

With this in mind, I therefore argue that, rather than taking the audience out of 'the Culinary' into an awakened realisation of the social context and historical background, Von Trier's strategies might do the opposite. They serve to reinforce the myth of the individual as the predominant causal subject. This prevents an understanding that individuals are affected by conditions occurring within a larger system. This approach puts aside the problematics of gender and subjectivity that are also present in Von Trier's oeuvre. Secondly, I argue that the use of the set – although shocking/or 'awakening' in Brecht's own time – can now be seen in many contemporary 'culinary' delights such as music videos, adverts, or the ironic breaking of the fourth wall in comedy.

Von Trier's narrative is also more Aristotelian than the disjointed nature of the scenes may suggest at first glance. For example, when we have tragic flaws in individuals in a 'naturally occurring' world of unexamined capitalism, we have, at root, an Aristotelian tragedy where the 'fault' is the 'tragic flaw' and not the system the individual is trapped in and contextualised by. It is surprising that the use of so many Brechtian V-effekt methods can produce a piece of work with profoundly ambiguous results; the relationship between audience and narrative could be said to demonstrate that strategies from Brecht are not 'inherently' able to produce the effect Brecht was striving for (to awaken his audience for social change). Brecht's aim was not formal aesthetics, but to fundamentally alter how an audience would relate to a piece of work, and the state they would enter after seeing it. It seems as though this continues to be a gap in knowledge in film making critique and theory. Brechtian strategies have sometimes become ossified into formal techniques, against what Brecht himself was seeking to create with his writing and method.

The potential pitfalls of a 'straightforward' use of Brechtian techniques are evidenced in Von Trier's film. It is fruitful to question the results of these strategies in terms of their contemporary critical effect, and their context within *Dogville*. This leads to the question of whether there is a significant problem with using Brechtian techniques so directly in a contemporary era. At the very least, it requires us to ask if they have the same effect as they may have done in Brecht's own time, or whether newer techniques are needed to have an equivalent impact today. Is Brecht, like a so-called faithful rendition of a Shakespeare play, seemingly set in stone but wholly removed from the original social context – or does his technique need adapting and changing for each subsequent era?

The Messingkauf Dialogues (1930s-40s) was created as to advise and guide other theatre-makers about the details of Epic Theatre, at a time when Brecht was in exile and trying to secure his legacy. They provide an insight into how Brecht had changed his strategies over time and demonstrate that Epic Theatre was not a fixed model or a menu from which to pick plans that would lead to instant 'de-culinarisation'. Instead, each of *The Messingkauf Dialogues* starts a new discussion. The piece progresses towards a greater understanding for Brecht and his audience of how they might be provoked to change their individual lives and, in turn, society, through artistic practice. *The Messingkauf Dialogues* show Brecht advocating a more responsive use and development of strategies to counter the Culinary, rather than commandments quickly followed and never changed. Such methods would no longer provide hope of social awakening. Given the problems of using the V-effekt without adaptation for modern discoveries or subjectivities (See Chapter 1), and the use in the culinary sphere having denatured them, *The Messingkauf Dialogues* (1930s-40s) and its posited progressive method may represent a way to understand film making practice. In this understanding, each film would provide a new approach towards other filmmaking strategies to counter the culinary.

Robert Stam argues that a problem emerges with formal aspects of critical methods if they are reapplied in a contemporary context (Stam, 1992). Many of Brecht's formal techniques of reflexivity are not strictly or exclusively Brechtian and, can be used for various reasons without the same critical effect. Stam comprehends just how widespread reflexive techniques are in many non-Brechtian literary and artistic works, across a vast range of art forms. This indicates that, as well as misinterpreting the v-effekt as suggested by Squiers (2010), artists and writers may also be interpreting Brechtian techniques as solely reflexive rather than the more complex and dynamic political method Brecht intended. To use reflexive techniques is not solely Brechtian. As evidence for this, Stam identifies many appearances of reflexivity or 'distanciation,' that emerged prior to Brecht, including "Fredrich Schiller, Cervantes, Rabelais and Balzac" (Stam, 1992, p.1). This shows that the techniques employed by artists such as Von Trier may sometimes be claimed as Brechtian but cannot actually produce a reflexivity with the ambition or intention of Brecht himself. Reflexivity is employed for many reasons and is not always Brechtian. Artists who are claiming Brecht as an influence may even be using reflexivity in its earlier form, separate from Brechtian politics. Stam describes the presence of reflexivity in film and literature as follows:

Reflexive strategies, while equally available in literature and film, have distinct materials to work with in the two media. Literature is a purely verbal medium, while the unattainable text of cinema is a multi-track sensorial composite. Without losing sight of the specificity of each medium, our text will attempt to place literature and film, and literary criticism and film criticism as discourse, ecriture; both are textual and intertextual; both can foreground their constructed nature; and both can solicit the active collaboration of their reader/spectator. (Stam, 1992, p.14)

Stam's work allows us to view literature and film as being of merit for the questions being explored in this project. It has also been of great value in understanding the reflexivity in cinema, which he explains as follows: "Throughout this text, I have very broadly defined reflexivity as the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their production, their authorship, their textual influences, their reception, or their enunciation" (Stam, 1992, preface, p. xiii). When considering Stam's criteria of reflexivity, it appears that casual acknowledgments of Brecht's influence over Von Trier may not necessarily be specific enough to be Brechtian in action, even if they seem familiar to the formal techniques put forward by Brecht in his writings. They could be seen as aesthetic choices, rather than holding content or being a strategy to break the audience's dream state.

One method that I sought to overcome this problem – to fill the gap in our knowledge – was to look at what the use of 'epistolary' form could provide in terms of a non-Aristotelian arc. I pondered whether the use of letters, with their ambiguous position on the screen, could create a version of a Brechtian non-Aristotelian narrative strategy for the contemporary artist. As such, the second attempt to exit from Brechtian formal strategies, the film *Letters Home* (2016), explores the epistolary form (letter writing), as a route to a contemporary filmmaking method.

The epistolary style is a popular literary device and has been used for many and varied purposes. The form became popular in 1741 with Samuel Richardson's moralising novel *Pamela* which was shortly followed in 1747 with its tragic counterpart, *Clarissa*. In some ways the epistolary style has become archaic for contemporary writers and may be difficult to create in realist fiction as the method often requires physical distance between characters. This is also challenged by newer digital technologies: people write letters less frequently, and thus the use of letters could also seem slightly sentimental. Attempts have

been used to engage with new technologies within this style, to varied levels of success. Texts which draw attention to the writer's situation would be anti-illusionary in a conventional novel, and yet can be used within the epistolary form to a realist effect. I was particularly interested in the ways feminist filmmakers had employed the use of letters, as well as the act of reading and writing being used on screen, to great effect within their works. I looked at various artists who had used these techniques and analysed why the technique was so prevalent. Many experimental feminist filmmakers have explored the epistolary film. Including Agnes Varda's *One Sings the Other Doesn't* (1977) and Su Frederich's *Gently Down the Stream* (1981). Both became significant to this project.

One Sings the Other Doesn't (1977) uses the exchange of letters and postcards between two central characters in a multi-vocal manner. This sense of multiple voices engenders a sense of the multiple impacts on women of the feminist movement, as well as the multiplicity of women within it. Varda includes her own voice as narrator, adding an empathetic dimension to her mediation of the relationships between the two characters. The film confronts politics of the time surrounding abortion laws, and its contemporary relevance is still evident: such a style of working can be seen clearly in later feminist works. The film employs a 'home made', amateur style, which adds to the personal politics of the piece. Varda's songs and the singing within the work also act in a similar manner to the letters themselves, universalising the specificity of the character's experience – yet also interrupting narrative flow so that the work is not received without thoughtful reflection.

Figure 29: Still from One Sings the Other Doesn't, *Agnes Varda, (1977)*

Figure 30:Still from Gently Down the Stream *(1981) Su Fredrich, Vimeo*

Su Frederich's films *Gently Down the Stream* (1981) features very unconventional depictions of reading and writing. A section of *Gently down the Stream* (1981) seemingly describes a sexual encounter between two women using handwritten graphics on screen broken up by the materiality of the film stock itself. The effect is jarring, and yet comes across as more truthful than the sexualised imagery of women in conventional narrative films. The text is separated on screen by each filmic plate. Poetic language dissolves into a visceral physical encounter, and the words become more separate and urgent at one point – seemingly describing the experience of orgasm.

Figure 31: Still from Gently Down the Stream *(1981) Su Fredrich, Vimeo*

In this way, the physicality of love and sex is not removed or mediated for the audience. I reflected again on Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) and saw that what Frederich had achieved was to break down the "scopophilic" relationship (Mulvey, 1975, p204) through the use of written text to portray the physical and emotional encounter of love and sex between women. This process challenges what Mulvey terms the "To be Seen-ness" (Mulvey, 1975, p203) of conventional representations of women on screen melodramas, in turn challenging the dynamics of what Mulvey terms in her essay the Male Gaze (Mulvey, 1975). The film breaks up the process of filmmaking, creating an encounter for the viewer that is unfamiliar from conventional melodrama and challenges the ready absorption of narrative and image through the use of text within the frame.

My own attempt to overcome the issues concerning conventional narrative structures' problems with filling in the gap in our knowledge was to look at what the use of 'epistolary' form could provide in terms of a non-Aristotelian arc. As with Varda and Fredrich's work, I explored the use of letters, which have an ambiguous position on the screen. In doing this, I sought to create a version of a Brechtian non-Aristotelian narrative strategy for film practice. This led to the second attempt to exit from Brechtian formal strategies. The film *Letters Home* (2016) explores the epistolary form (letter writing) as a route to a contemporary Brechtian method. Knowing that letters in films have been used to create many effects, including the 'culinary,' I began planning a film that incorporated an archive of letters. My

intention was to see if the epistolary form could, use the physical appearance of letters to have a disruptive effect, rather than using Von Trier's direct borrowing of Brecht within filmmaking. The intention was to discover if this could provoke political consciousness in the way Brecht had done using props and banners. Brecht had used communication devices in the form of the telephone (a very modern device at the time) on stage to achieve a similar effect. This is described by theatre reviewer David Finkle (2002) as follows:

> *The Jewish Wife*, one of Bertolt Brecht's most affecting works, is also one of his most atypical. It's not hard-edged or fantastical or meant to be performed in the stylized manner that's come to be thought of as Brechtian. It is, instead a piece of realistic writing in which a Jewish woman named Judith Keith prepares to leave her husband and homeland, having read the signs written on the wind and on the splintered windows. During the opening scene, she begins a series of phone calls to friends and associates, making light of her impending journey. Eventually, her Gentile husband arrives, and she tests his reaction, knowing full well that, no matter what he says, he is sure to be relieved that she is leaving. (Finkle, D, 2002, NP)

This potential 'exit' provided by letters was also explored through a reading of Linda F. Kauffman's *Special Delivery* (1992) and Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema* (2001), both of whom discuss the use of the epistolary form as a critical strategy within film making. What remained unclear, however, was how this related to Brecht's practice. Brecht had used many methods to interrupt events on stage within the theatre, including the use of props and banners. While I did not use props and banners, I began to investigate if including the written word, incorporated onscreen, would function as a contemporary v-effekt. This touched upon both the rhetorical and temporal effects of letters within a film. In some cases, these effects would have been methods which Brecht might have considered culinary in his own time. For example, a love letter or a letter home from wartime, both of which are used within the film, seem at odds with formal Brechtian method. This is because of the romantic or somewhat archaic association with letters in a contemporary moment dependent upon digital culture. This anachronistic positioning of the letter in contemporary culture suggested that it might function as a critical action.

The use of the written word was also informed by the consideration that coherent identity can be considered a disabling fiction. *Letters Home* attempts to destabilise the idea of the self, in order to show that what appears 'natural' is socially constructed. The letter used was a genuine letter from an earlier generation (a man stationed in Macedonia in the First World War) which was read out at the end of the film in a female voice.
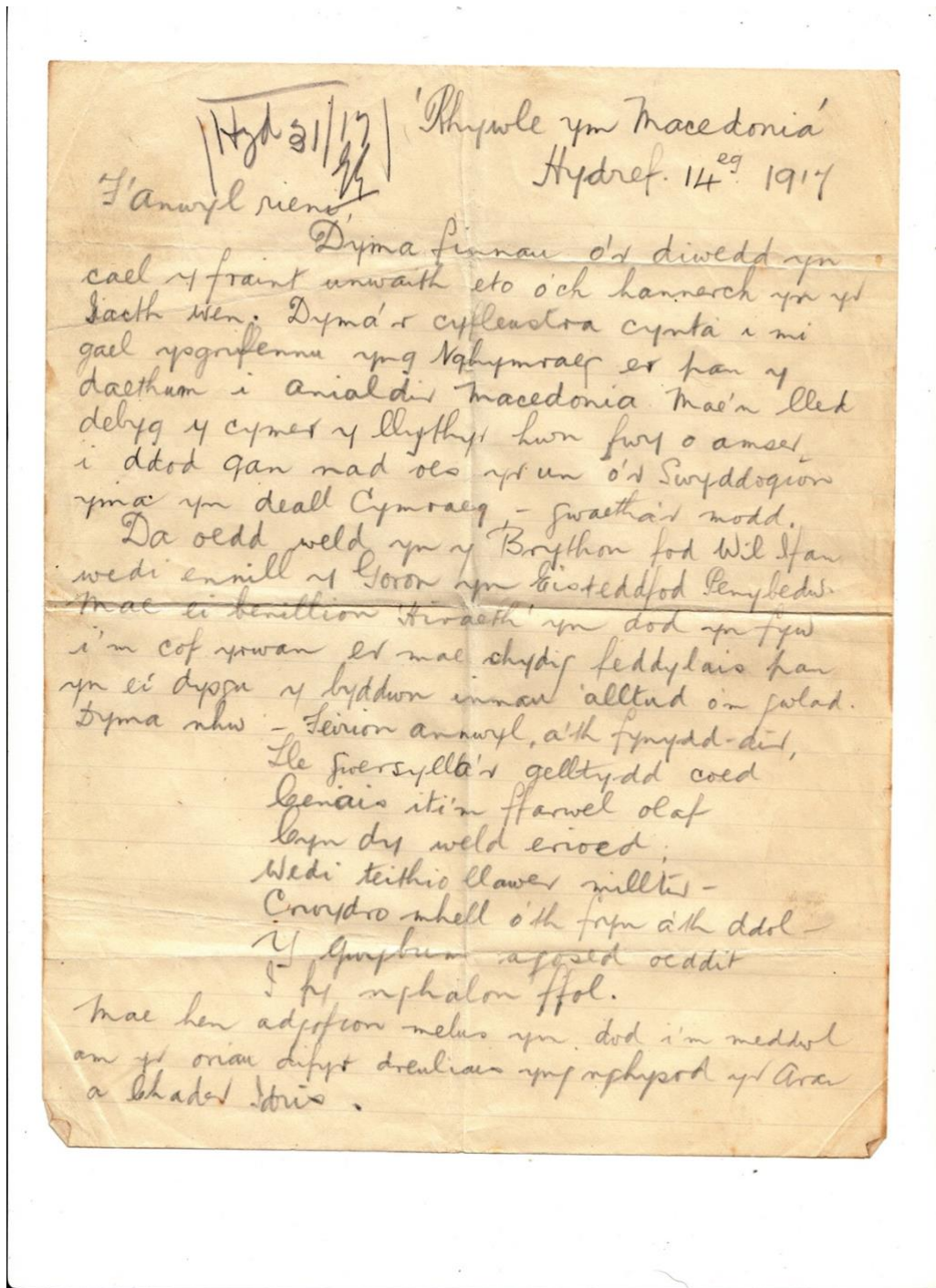
Figure 32: Huw Evans' Letter *titled "Somewhere in Macedonia", 1917, Family Archive.*

The effect of the female voice added extra displacement from traditional realist narrative form, and yet, at the same time, emphasised the age of the young soldier – as this made it appear as if his voice had not broken. The reading process thus presented itself as displaced in terms of temporality and gender. This destabilisation was part of a broader use of the letters which aimed to remove the focus on a unitary protagonist, and thus interrupt the narrative expectations of the viewer. The letter describes the landscape with awe, from a person who has not seen this landscape before. The use of a woman's voice emphasises the displacement and alienation of the letter's author by destabilising their gender identity. Kauffman suggests in *Special Delivery* ways in which letters in film can provide insights into contemporary subjectivities. It is worth considering whether the displacement of the man within an unfamiliar environment can be compared with the experience of feminine identity, reframed, and re-created by the performance of gender.

Kauffman's chapter on Barthes in *Special Delivery* discusses similar ideas. She describes the action of letter writing as follows:

> Each attempt to go beyond the narratable, beyond logic, beyond totalising theories, beyond the boundaries of gender and genre. Each stresses the performative aspects of language, using amorous discourse to stage his speculations about love, literature, identity, difference… Sometimes they nostalgically re-inscribe the feminine stereotypes they mean to mock, but at other points, they show what can be gained by destabilising the assumed relationships between gender and identity (Kauffman, 1992, p.xv).

This discussion clearly related to my earlier investigation into subjectivity within the film *Gaslighting*, but also appeared to represent an extension to it. I asked if letter writing within film may produce a critical method beyond that achieved in *Gaslighting*. These strategies may thus be able to be applied within film making to provide a contemporary Brechtian approach. An investigation into the epistolary as a contested form of dialogue demanded an analysis of the use of letters in other films and novels. This influenced the rhetorical and temporal effects of letters within *Letters Home*. Examples of some of the texts consulted include François Truffaut's film *Stolen Kisses* (1968) and *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie

Collins. *Stolen Kisses*, described rather dismissively by the auteur as "teasing and playful" (*Truffaut on Cinema*, [1968], 2017, p.156), was filmed shortly after May 1968, and was interesting to me because it indicated how the epistolary form could work to separate elements of drama by geographical distance – and yet also become reflective of the medium itself. (*Truffaut on Cinema*, 2017, p.156).

The Moonstone is one of the first detective novels in the English language, first published in the magazine *All the Year Round,* edited by Charles Dickens. It is said to have been partly influenced in its literary style by Collins consuming opium to treat rheumatic pain: as Robert McCrum describes, "Collins's opium habit found its way into the narrative, and certainly contributed to the frisson that accompanied publication." (Robert McCrum, British Library Website, NP). It is this which particularly inspired me to read it. I wondered if the influence of the various characters used as narrators of the epistolary form, (particularly Miss Clack, the solicitor Matthew Bruff, and the opium addict Ezra Jennings). Collins plays with ideas of unreliable narrators as a trope in itself, and different characters are portrayed in different letter-writers' writing styles. I asked if this was something which could inspire my own work in contemporary circumstances Indeed, my final work, *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) employed a variety of different forms of address – although it was less reliant on the epistolary form.

As demonstrated within *Gaslighting* and the literary works above, coherent identity can be considered a disabling fiction. *Gaslighting* attempted to destabilise the idea of the self to show that what appears 'natural' is instead socially constructed. The role of the letter within filmmaking could also provide something more urgent in this regard. Of course, letters inside a film can be used for both culinary and non-culinary purposes. The written word itself, as featured in my films, could both distance a viewer (in the classic Brechtian sense) and also bring a degree of intimacy. Brecht would, at the time, have been compelled to reject this intimacy as culinary. The role of letter writing in *Letters Home* also relates to more recent understandings concerning the constructed nature of gender, and how it is performed. In this context the woman's voice allows for reflection on this sense of construction. It thus enables the personal quality of letter writing to become a political act.

The strategies attached to the epistolary also highlight the importance of the medium used. When using writing on windows in one scene, I draw attention to the medium of film itself in the use of the screen (in this case, a window). It can be argued that this becomes an

intervention akin to a Brechtian v-effekt in its original context. My drawing on the window is an acknowledgment of the presence of the camera, becoming a means of emphasising the constructed nature of the film making process. In this case, the layering of the written word indexically across the screen provides an intervention akin to Brecht's use of banners, interrupting the action on stage and preventing narrative resolution, development, or closure.

More confessional moments, where conversations happen between the actors in the film, would perhaps initially have been considered as culinary by Brecht. On the other hand, the showing of the backstage of the film can be viewed as a Brechtian strategy, showing the machinery of the production and acknowledging my own intervention over the film. At the same time, these moments are not solely Brechtian, as they show the performance and narrative of those involved in the filmmaking in a more confessional way. In the light of more recent understandings of subjectivity, where personal life is considered a strong source for political action, this use of letters is not necessarily as reactionary as they might have appeared to Brecht.

Alongside Kauffman's work, I was informed by Hamid Naficy's text *An Accented Cinema*, which analyses the process of letter writing as a means of expressing the challenges associated with post-colonial diasporic filmmaking. For critic Terry Rowden, an accented cinema is achieved because:

> it does not conform to the classical Hollywood style the national cinema of any particular country, the style of any particular film movement of any film author, the accented style is influenced by them all, and it signifies upon them and criticises them. By its artisanal and collective mode of production, its subversions of the conventions of storytelling and spectator positioning, its critical juxta-positioning of different worlds, languages and cultures and its aesthetics of imperfection and smallness, it critiques the dominant cinema. It is also highly political because politics infuses it from inception to reception. For these reasons, accented cinema is, not only a minority cinema, but also, a minor cinema. (Rowden, T, *Situating Accented Cinema*, 2006, p121)

Reading Naficy and Rowden led me to view the letter itself as a reflexive device which could comment upon British colonialist policy at the time of the First World War, and the waste of ordinary lives associated with it. Naficy speaks of the letter as a way to communicate the

subjectivities presented by the post-colonial within film (Naficy, 2001). Naficy emphasises how letters can be used to create a disparity between what an audience knows and what the character on screen might understand. He describes this as an 'accented cinema', one that looks toward letters to create different ways of addressing the audience. This variation in address can reveal the constructed nature of ethnic, gendered, or national identity, in terms of the self and the other. He thus explores ideas of displacement and the concept of what home means in the case of exile, as relationships have long been enabled between places and people by letters (and now through emails or other digital media). The displacement of the writer within my film from his home in Wales is presented by reading a letter home from the front lines.

A sense of exile enhancing this sense of displacement is presented in *Letters Home* by having male-authored letters read by a woman who is performing a man, and also by how the letter describes an alien landscape. The film also offers us with displacements in other ways: the contingency presented by the use of the letter, the delay introduced by reading archival materials, temporal confusion produced by the juxtaposition of old and new forms of writing, and, finally, the displacement of the historical object in a contemporary era (and vice versa). Strategies to destabilise narratives in *Letters Home* also included plans to indicate the socially constructed nature of film making. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, this stemmed from a wish to fulfil a Brechtian ambition to destabilise the 'culinary' use of Aristotelian narrative, with its comforting fiction of individual causation and unitary identity or subjectivity.

Letters Home features a diaristic method of storytelling and differing moments of ecriture. These include writing on windows, the physical appearance of letters within the film, invisible ink, burning paper, ancient graffiti, and writing etched in the bark of trees – as well as a 'road movie' storyline, where a character wonders about the countryside with a voiceover reading out letters from the First World War. The pace of the film is slow, which may add to a sense of general ennui for the viewer. Could this, I wondered, be a method of critical distancing in itself? By subverting the audience's expectations of the types of narrative they were going to watch, I hoped to force the audience to think critically about what the film was doing.

Letters Home also borrows aspects of documentary-style filmic method, interrupted as 'fictions' by the physical appearance of the written word. The letters are used as points of

contingency, delay, temporal confusion, and displacement. This is produced by the semi-documentary style of the narrative. Similarly, the actor's performance is dramatic, but this is undermined by use of long takes and the incongruent details provided by the physical appearance of letters and written text throughout. The actor appears as himself at certain moments within the film. We catch glimpses of his own life when he breaks into a personal narrative about his family history, though poignant moments are interrupted or left incomplete. The rural Welsh setting, which features waterfalls and landscapes reminiscent of landscape painting of the 19th century, adds an apparently romantic aspect to the film. However, footage shot in a car, where both driver and passenger are filmed from behind, undermines this concept.

Figure 33:Still from Letters Home *(2016) Alice Evans*

This explains why, when the main character (played by Julian Firth) stands posing in a landscape which references the Caspar David Fredrich work *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818), the logic behind the reference, is left unexplained – without context, this deliberately removes the narrative metaphor that would usually be implied. The 'pathetic fallacy' of the landscape thus echoes the emotional state of the protagonist.

Figure 34:Still from Letters Home (2016), *Alice Evans*

The letter is conventionally a device that supports plot and narrative by constructing disparities in knowledge between characters and audience, but in *Letters Home* this process is deflated. Letters are produced as archival objects, foregrounding how time has passed since they were written. This provides a reverse process of discovery. The letters reveal something of the past and do not always function as a narrative development strategy, but instead undermine conventional plot or narrative. For example, in the car scenes the letters are discussed in a secondary form that does not enlighten an audience as to their content: instead, it speaks about the current lives of the protagonists. However, these are developing those protagonist's narrative arcs and frustrating the narrative structure that most audiences are expecting.

Another example of this 'frustration of the narrative' is the delay produced by the main protagonist, who blocks the introduction of letters by engaging in other writing processes such as scratching initials on the bark of trees thereby marking the landscape whilst wandering in the countryside. All of these interactions with landscape and environment delay the 'reveal' of the letters themselves. This is a way of using the letters as a meta-commentary or background to a confusing sub-plot that has been foregrounded, producing a temporal confusion between past and present. This is not resolved until the conclusion of the film, when a letter that has been discussed throughout the film is read to the audience in the form of a voiceover. This voiceover could have been introduced at the start of the film, but, in a reverse edit, is added at the end to effect a form of confusion or displacement for the viewer.

168

Letters are also used as an insert within the film. The physical placement of the letters as written text is used similarly to inter-titles in a silent film. Shots of the letters themselves are used within the narrative, which both converge with and diverge from processes of silent cinema. As such, the letters are used diegetically and non-diegetically, breaking the 'fourth wall' and disturbing the narrative.

Figure 35:Still from Letters Home *(2016) Alice Evans*

Words, perhaps from the letter, are scratched onto a window to create a physical screen-within-screen. The actor, Firth, is captured in the act of writing as if caught unawares – much like a graffiti artist. This writing on the screen is a familiar trope from many films representing notions of creatives, seen in depictions of Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and John Nash. In this instance, they let the audience see the indexical marks of the author. Firth's scribblings on the window are illegible and impermanent, undermining this trope in a moment of parodic resistance to its use in mass cinema mythmaking.

As a device, letters also allow a mediation of disparate elements of film form (framing, image, and sound) and complicates the relationship between image, voice, and text. For example, we see a letter written in invisible ink that is framed as if it is to be revealed to the audience yet catches on fire from a candle before its content can be shown. This dissipates the revelatory moment, and thus undermines or deflates regular use of the trope. When read out, the letters produce a direct relationship between text and sound – but this is a cursory nod to their frequent use in creating narrative disruption rather than a satisfactory connection between the viewer and the content of the letter itself.

The film explores the 'culinary' language of staging the epistolary by locating the action in heavily loaded environments, such as a church. Weather too, features as a character within the work, with the sound being provided diegetically through rain, waterfalls, and fog. However, this also seems an empty metaphor, as it is not directly related to a narrative arc: the use is random, yet still full of 'baggage' of past symbolism. A more standard narrative arch would use these letters as a plot point, but *Letters Home* has no significant plot and, without this link, separates the inherent narrative potential of letters from the heavily laden visuals of church, landscape, and travel. In a similar manner, *Letters Home* references narrative strategies in film adaptations of epistolary literature in the use of different forms of ecriture on screen: the burning paper, writing on windows, etching on trees, and carving into stone. Again, each of these processes could be used to further plot or narrative, but within

Letters Home (2016), they remain as separate or unsatisfactory elements without stabilising context.

Figure 37: Still from Letters Home *(2016) Alice Evans*

In a semi-Brechtian manner, this use of letters reveals the constructed or *clichéd* use of them in other forms of cinema. They become apparent or presumed metaphors, but without purpose or productive value within the film; this removes their metaphorical use for narrative. This destabilisation proposes ways to deflate, remap, reimagine, or recycle the cultural, social, and structural elements of the filmic tradition by using letters out of context, outside of their common uses as a filmmaking tool. Indeed, every letter used conventionally is undermined by its use as a narrative deflector, rather than a constructor. The overall effect is, therefore, very disorientating.

In the making of *Letters Home,* I sought to apply the epistolary form to filmmaking, as a potential non-Aristotelian method. This was one that had not been used by Brecht in his own era but provided a possible 'exit' from him within contemporary film. A discovery was made at this point: that the letter was a useful form in exploring modern Brechtian subjectivities. By contemporary Brechtian subjectivities I am referring to the idea that Brecht's ambition needs to be employed *via* new methods that acknowledge the ways in which Brecht's original techniques have been absorbed or made culinary. For this reason, I began to explore ways in which Brecht's practice could be updated to incorporate more

recent understandings of what subjectivity means in a contemporary era. For my practice, this was one way in which Brecht's ambition could be realised through new means. In this case, a letter allowed a specific mediation on elements of film form (framing, image, and sound). It also produced a new relationship between the vocal, the visual, and the text. However, it was difficult to find methods that did not reiterate what was already seen in classical film narrative and was, therefore, culinary in both the original sense and in the sense of a contemporary culinary. It proved a somewhat unwieldy method for my own filmmaking practice, as it was neither consistently Brechtian in its presentation nor consistently culinary: I felt that it did not reveal enough about contemporary Brechtian subjectivities, and that Brecht's method could not be achieved solely through the use of the epistolary.

The film experiment was vital as it indicated how I might employ the epistolary as a critical form within a larger project. However, a singular focus on the epistolary presented its own problems. It was unable to cater for a broad perspective on new Brechtian subjectivities if it was the only method used. As such, this attempt to exit Brecht was less successful than first hoped. Using repeated epistolary motif appeared promising in theoretical terms, but in the context of the filmic medium it appeared to fall flat. This was something to be addressed when approaching my next potential 'exit' from Brecht in Chapter 4. *Letters Home* also resulted in a preliminary glimpse into the potential productive use of allegory as a critical method that I explore in Chapter 6.

After documenting the process of creating the methodologies, the writing of, and the making of *Letters Home*, as well as analysing subsequent reaction from myself and others during a period of reflection, I was compelled to take the experiment in new directions. Once again, it seemed that active spectatorship through the process of filmic investigation was an impossible ambition, if one was solely using Brecht's original formal techniques. I realised that the active spectator Brecht demands (and as is discussed in the introduction to this thesis) cannot be provoked through his traditional methods. Brecht's techniques of distancing did not consider the varying degrees to which an audience were already enlightened to their predicaments. It did not consider the other side of the situation either, where an audience were not included in the process due to different capabilities and subjectivities. Brecht's lack of consideration for these subjectivities led me to explore the trope or strategy of 'unreliable narration,' which informs Chapter 5.

Chapter 5
Film 3: Somewhere in Macedonia (2017)
Unreliable Narration as an Exit Through and From Brecht

Production Diary: *Somewhere in Macedonia*

In the course of developing the script-treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia*, I began to consider the life of my great uncle Selwyn, who, by way of his Schizophrenia, was not considered a reliable source of information. As a foil to Selwyn, I introduced Sergeant Grant, a fictional character who, through his association with journalism, had more storytelling authority than Selwyn. The film was designed to ask who has the power to tell a story - who is privileged to tell 'official' narrative, and how these conflict with more auto-ethnographic methods of historical investigation.
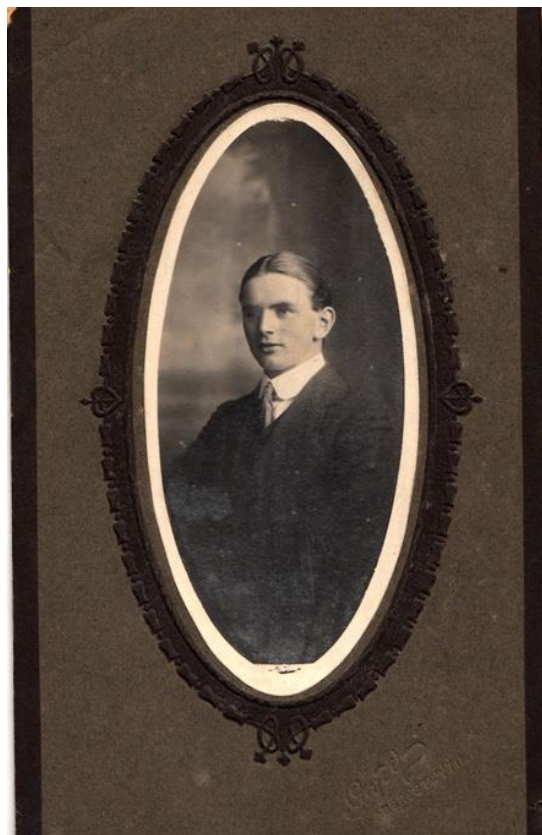
*Figure 38:*Huw Evans *(1916) Family Archive*

Somewhere in Macedonia was perhaps the most conventional of the films I made as part of this project. I used it as a method to further unravel the Aristotelian elements of film practice. It had a traditional script, but, with subsequent work, I unravelled working processes so that they became less structured in the style of script I used. *Somewhere in Macedonia* relied on the craft of traditional scriptwriting. Each work after this film worked to undo what I had learned; after this film, I worked predominantly with non-narrative films.

Figure 39: On-set image of Somewhere in Macedonia *(2017) photograph credit: Emily Badescu.*

Letters became a starting point for the film. A family archive had turned up in a drawer in Wales, and the story was devised from a re-telling of this family history. Each letter was titled 'Somewhere in Macedonia', and so I decided to use this for the title of my film. The plot of the film explores the family tale of how my uncle Huw Evans had lost his boyfriend

and, as a result of his subsequent grief, walked into no-man's land.
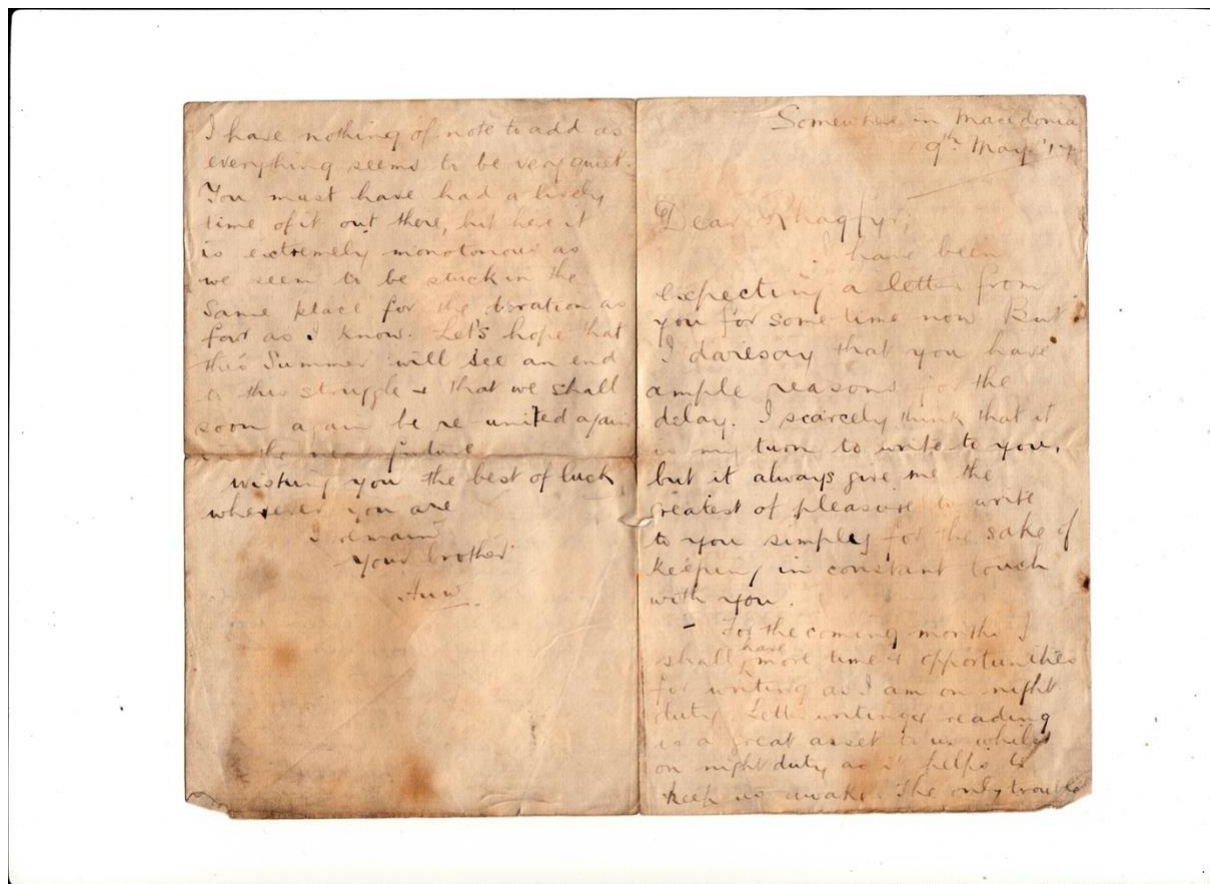
Figure 40: Huw Evans' Letter (1917) Titled 'Somewhere in Macedonia'

The set was designed to be a close reproduction of a First World War trench but was still a visibly constructed set at certain points in the production; for example, matte painting in the background of one long shot is particularly obvious. This added a reflexive dimension to the film. The trench helped audiences to identify and locate the characters and story, but also reminded them that they were viewing a construction of reality and not reality itself. Rather than building several sets for the production, we used different elements of the same rotating set, which was re-constructed for each scene. This added to the 'staged' effect of the films' appearance: I did not want to eliminate or disguise the fact that the piece was a film rather than a direct documentary-style reproduction of reality. I had even aimed that the final scene of the film should show the full set, as well as the kitchen basement area where it had been built. This strategy would have echoed Martha Rosler's photographic series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Back Home* (Rosler 1967-72), a piece which juxtaposed scenes of the Vietnam conflict with contemporary American home life. However, the pressures of filming

and time limits overcame this ambition, and, sadly, it was not achieved. Alongside visible set construction, the sound was not smooth in its rendition, and the muffled feeling added to the non-illusionary quality of the work. The shape of the room itself could be detected within the films' sound as an echoing effect, and I viewed this as an advantage for the production overall.

I had been working as a videographer for the London Gay Symphony Orchestra for some years, and they gave permission to use their recording for the soundtrack's title sequence. I also recorded a score with composer Stefan Melzak, and one of the London Gay Symphony Orchestra's performers, Zami Jalil. The repetition of the same leitmotif within the soundtrack was aimed at encouraging an identification with character and story (as with conventional film scores), yet its frequent repetition within the piece functioned as a distancing device, aimed at awakening the audience and making them reflexively aware that they were watching a film. In addition, my housemate wrote a poem which was recited in the script. This was a reproduction of a Welsh poem of the type called an Englynion, popular at the time of the First World War. It was translated into Welsh by Ann Jones, a translator and friend of mine who I had involved in discussions about developing the treatment. The poem mentioned places close to Huw's home in the film and emphasised the physical distance of the character in the film from both his home and Welsh culture. The Welsh language also added its own form of distance for an English-speaking audience. Reproductions of the personal effects of my great uncle were used as props, including scanned reproductions of his diary and letters. The 'newness' of these items seemed to add a distance for the viewer onscreen, despite the fact that they had been reproduced directly from archival materials.

Figure 41: Somewhere in Macedonia: Actors Gethin Alderman and Julian Firth Rehearse Between Scenes (2017)

A sort of mystical feeling surrounded the shoot. The actors had trampled the garden whilst waiting on breaks between the filming. As a result, this disturbed the ground - yellow Welsh poppies sprang up in the garden on the day the shoot finished. Alongside these experiences, I had also discovered a letter within the archive that my Uncle had been stationed in 1916 at the RAMC before travelling to Macedonia. This was the very building in Millbank where Chelsea College of Art was situated, and where I was currently studying.
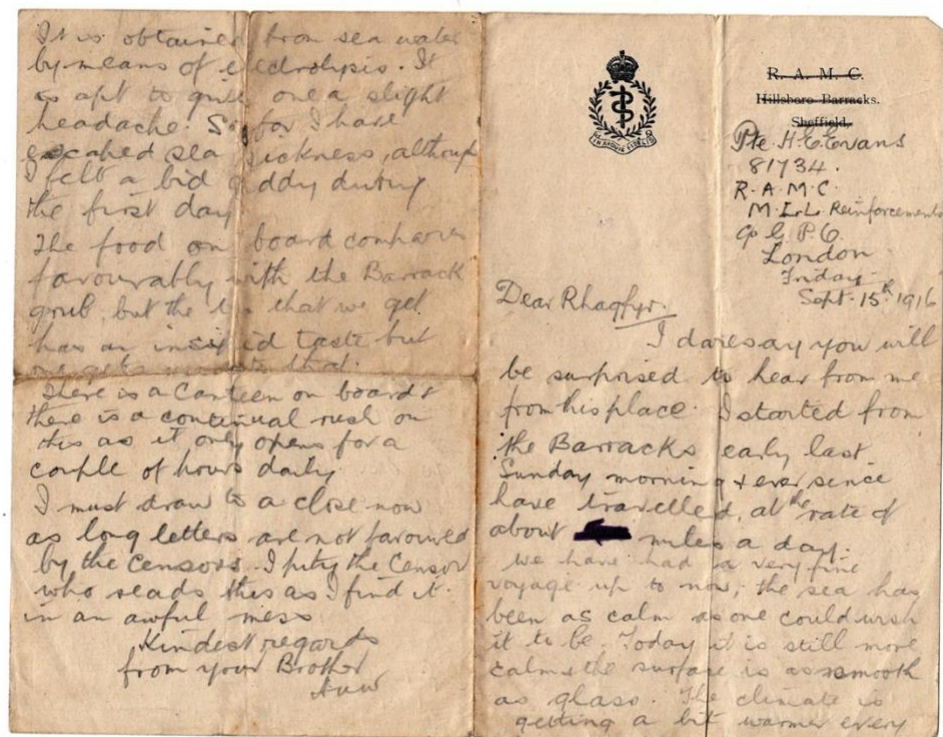
Figure 42: Huw's Letter, 1916, addressed from the London Royal Army Medical Corps, London. The current Millbank address of Chelsea College of Art (UAL) (Family Archive).

I felt slightly haunted by this even after making the film. On the last day of filming the actors, who were all Welsh speaking, rowdily sang Welsh songs in the pub after we finished the shoot.

Figure 43: Still from Somewhere in Macedonia, *showing reproductions of letters (2017) Alice Evans*

Brecht & Hans Haacke

A recent monograph, *Hans Haacke* (2017), describes the German artist Haacke as an early pioneer of both conceptual art and institutional critique - critics have also linked him with Brecht's ideas and theories. Haacke indicated that Brecht was an influence over the development of his practice as early as the 1970s, specifically through his reading Brecht's essay "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth" ([1935] 2003). This acknowledgement of Brechtian influence tells us that there may be more pertinent contemporary Brechtian practice at work than the mere 'didacticism' suggested by critic J.J. Charlesworth in 2015. John Tyson's work accords with this perspective, noting that "since encountering Bertolt Brecht's *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties* (1935) as a student, Hans Haacke has acted on the idea that art could be a vehicle for telling the truth - especially overlooked truths about the political and economic systems that govern our lives" (Tyson, 2017, p.2).

Haacke's interest in Brecht is pertinent to this project. Brecht's essay considers the way in which art can be a strategy for revealing political and social problems, and the important aspect of this for Haacke seems to be that art itself has a quality which can be used to reveal these problems, and thereby produce political action or re-action. Brecht's "Five

Difficulties" essay itself describes five methods in which art can work to challenge the status quo. Brecht opens his essay by claiming that:

> nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the *courage* to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the *keenness* to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the *skill* to manipulate it as a weapon; the *judgment* to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the *cunning* to spread the truth among such persons. These are formidable problems for writers living under Fascism, but they exist also for those writers who have fled or been exiled; they exist even for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails. (Brecht, *Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth*, (1935) NP).

For Haacke, all these 'truths' are employed as artistic strategy. This will be discussed in terms of his work *Gift Horse* (2015) and his examination of the piece *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). In both these examples, Haacke uses a revelatory strategy to uncover the political and social reality within cultural systems and relationships.

Hans Haacke (2015) acknowledges Brechtian influence through the inclusion of extracts from the Brecht essay within the monograph as an "Artist's Choice", said by the biographers to "reflect Haacke's approach to his work" (Bird, 2015. p.1). Building on these ideas, this thesis proposes that Brechtian influence is best shown by specifically focusing on Haacke's 4th Plinth Work *Gift Horse*, a recent (2015) addition to his practice. However, an association with institutional critique has been evident since his early career. Haacke's work, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), was rejected for exhibition by the Guggenheim, with the museum's director claiming that the institution's policies "exclude active engagement towards social and political ends" (*The Art Story*, 2020, np.). *Shapolsky et al.* exposes the links between the landlord Shapolsky and his ownership of properties through fake corporations and companies, many of which were supposedly owned by family members. All the information was available on public record, but it was exhibited in a way that emphasised the ownership mechanisms at work, as well as the machinations behind the 'front' of the Shapolsky real estate company. One reviewer claimed that

Haacke invites and provokes a changing relationship between the reader and what is being read. The viewers move close, step back to take it all in, and crane to read individual lines of text. Haacke used this engagement politically, aiming at an increase in political awareness and attempting to provoke social change. (*The Art Story*, 2020, np.).

Haacke's intention seems akin to Brecht's statement that "the essential part of Epic Theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing experiences, the spectator must come to grips with things" (Brecht, 1968, p.23). This echoes Marx's sentiments in *Theses on Feuerbach, XI* that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx, [1845] 2002, p.16). With this in mind, it is worth asking how these Brechtian aims relate to Haacke's *Gift Horse*.
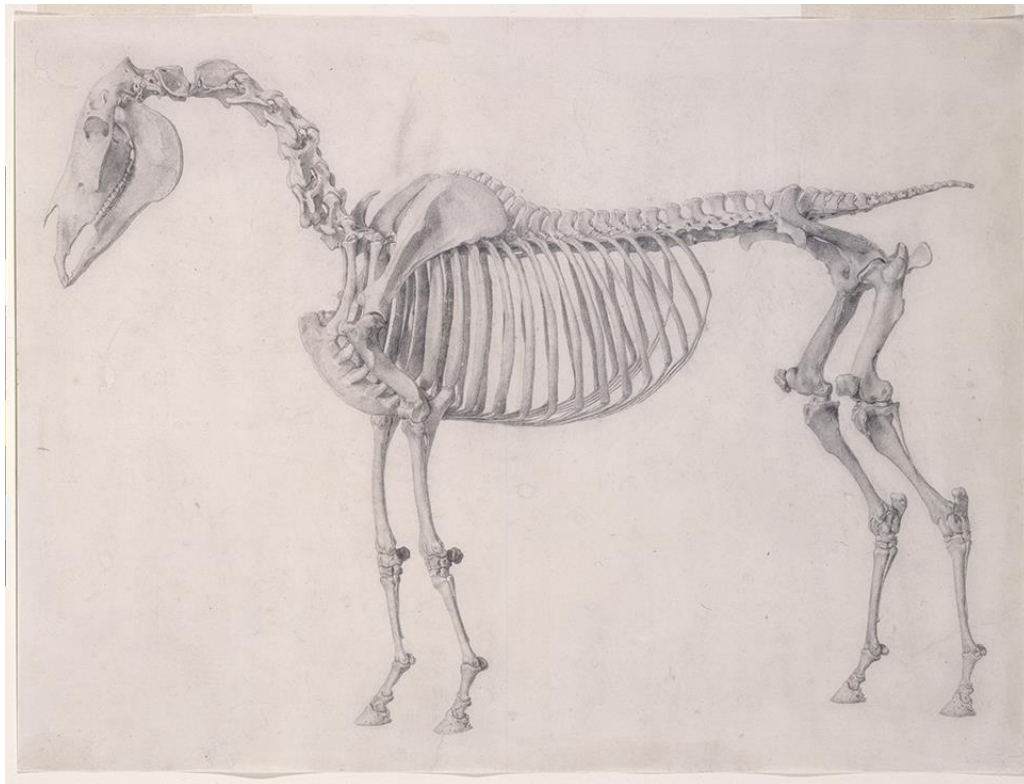
Figure 44: (Above) Hans Haacke, Gift Horse *(2015)*

Figure 45: (Below) George Stubbs Anatomy of the Horse *(1776) Plates: etching; 18 1/4 x 23 in. (46.4 x 58.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1953 (53.599.1bis)*

Many prominent and influential critics reviewed *Gift Horse*, though none considered the work to be Brechtian. Writing for *Art-Net* in 2015, J.J. Charlesworth derided the work as "sheer, crass, patronising, didacticism", arguing that "if we agree with the "message" then everything is fine, and if we don't, then the sculpture is there to gently re-educate us in the

"right" way of thinking about a particular issue as if we were too dumb to have our own opinions about such questions" (Charlesworth, *Art-Net*, 2015, np.). In terms of contemporary Brechtianism, Charlesworth implies that *Gift Horse* (2015) would not be an appropriate subject, as it is too didactic. Charlesworth believes the work fails to ask the audience to have a broad, connected critique of the social and political realities of heroism for the state, the sphere of meaning through which such statuary is conventionally understood. However, Haacke himself was enigmatic about the intention of *Gift Horse*, emphasising the extent to which the audience was to formulate interpretations itself in arguing that "The meaning of the work is projected onto it by the viewer. There is no ultimate authority controlling it forever. If you see it as a critique, then that's your interpretation. You're perfectly entitled to understand it that way" (Haacke, interviewed by Tiernan Morgan, July 2015, p.1.).

Unlike Lars Von Trier's film *Dogville*, there are no formal revelatory Brechtian strategies at work in this artwork. The creature is stripped to the bone – as such, the work does not reveal the formal means of its structure. This is a common strategy in Brechtian theatre design – as well as arguably being visible in Haacke's earlier conceptual works, which are more obviously of a formal Brechtian style. Despite this lack of apparent Brechtian reference, there are layers of reference in the work, although they may not be as immediately apparent as those suggested by Charlesworth. These references suggest a contemporary form of Brechtianism. Additionally, if *Gift Horse* is examined in its context, it could arguably be considered as more Brechtian in a modern era, and thus significantly more critical and provocative than how it is presented as being by Charlesworth.

Stubbs's *Anatomy of the Horse* (1766) formed a key reference point for the sculpture, linking the work with the nearby National Gallery. This intertextual reference can be associated with a critique of arts sponsorship in the contemporary era, as well as wealth (and the sources of that wealth) in past 'connoisseurship'. George Stubbs' personal history, with his transition from equestrian artist to society painter, adds to the intertextual reference that links sculpture to arts sponsorship. Charlesworth and others interpret the stock exchange ticker bow on the horse's leg as a further aspect of this critique. Indeed, Haacke himself argued that "to have a ticker on a skeleton… (Pauses) it's probably difficult to understand that as a celebration of the London Stock Exchange" (Haacke and Morgan, 2015, p.1). In this way, Haacke takes a Brechtian stand even in an interview about the work by refusing to answer but asking that the interviewer or the reader works it out. This response is reminiscent of Brecht's

own sarcastic or ironic responses when interrogated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the McCarthy era.[42]

Some reviewers have suggested that the decision to use a horse as a metaphor links to Trojan horses or armed cavalry. The aphorism to 'never look a gift horse in the mouth' could be a direct reference to sponsorship of the arts, a cynical nod to the conception of arts sponsorship itself as another form of advertising or tax deductible. Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke have discussed private patronage as a 'seemingly' humane way to disguise the ideological aims of sponsors:

> I think it is important to distinguish between the traditional notion of patronage and the public relations manoeuvres parading as patronage today… corporations give themselves an aura of altruism. The American term 'sponsoring' more accurately reflects that what we have here is really an exchange of capital: financial capital on the part of the sponsors and symbolic capital on the part of the sponsored (Bourdieu & Haacke, 1995, p.15).

These more playful readings of the 'layers' of meaning as they interact and contradict provides a more comprehensive picture of the realities of these issues, giving a broader interpretation of the work that fits more closely with contemporary Brechtianism. This approach seeks to escape didactic and simplistic analyses in favour of a more interconnected and complex set of readings, that can have substantial critical intent. These potential readings also hope to create an 'awakened moment' - however, they are also highly playful in how they spark a recognition of their connections and political implications. It is this excitement of discovery that Brecht was ultimately hoping for - that he passionately believed would change the world.

As mentioned above, Haacke was very non-committal in interviews about the meaning of the work, leaving it to the interpretation of the audience. Brecht himself suggests this as a strategy in his '*Five Difficulties'* essay in 1935. Further analysis of Haacke's work supports this – for example, one article claims that

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[42] This can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkiqGxD4CZ8

[Haacke] continued to answer Brecht's call to "manipulate the weapon" using techniques that might be termed parasitic or redeploying corporate graphic design and texts to critique their adapted Brecht's strategies of "re-functioning" (Umfunktionierung) estrangement (Verfremdungseffekt) for visual art" (Unnamed Journalist, *Art in Print*, 2020, p.28).

In some ways, the sculpture reads as a natural continuation of this aspect of Haacke's work. The Brechtian notion of the dominant narrative does not only pertain to the audience's view, but to how influential critics can surround a work with or against the dominant narrative that Brecht sought to attack. Haacke's statue presents as making a sophisticated use of these media narratives when considered from a contemporary Brechtian perspective. For example, Boris Johnson, the London Mayor in 2015, even found it necessary to go on record to try to diffuse the more obvious message of the work by denying its reference to Austerity - the British political response to the financial crisis that had caused documented drops in standards of living, vast need for food banks, and a dramatic rise in homelessness. Johnson said in 2015 that "there will be those who say that this undeniably underfed beast… is a symbol of the excessive pursuit of austerity and the [chancellor] George Osbourne-diet approach to life. But I say not." (Johnson, *The Independent*, 2015, online.).

Haacke's refusal to place a fixed meaning on the work (and, concurrently, its context within this media attention) contributes to a broader critical infiltration of the work than the actual bones the sculpture represents. This critique is made evident for the many people that read newspapers but never walk in Trafalgar Square, for whom such commentary would be their first exposure to the piece. This extension to the critique is essential: it acknowledges that Haacke is not just manipulating by direct didactic reference to austerity but is extending this to involve the drivers of the policy, including Boris Johnson himself. In this way, the work has a much more meaningful life beyond the apparent symbolism in its immediate manifestation as a sculptural work. In encouraging an open interpretation, as Haacke does, the sculpture has an extended existence that borrows from a more contemporary aspect to Brecht - that of narrative strategy itself. Brecht's narrative approach, as discussed in the previous chapter, was very much anti-Aristotelian, rejecting easy metaphors and traditional narrative drives.

Haacke's critique functions as a sophisticated extension of Brecht's strategies. His non-committal response to describing the 'ultimate' meaning of the work gives a new

dimension to its narrative method, raising the question of whether he is deliberately 'unreliable' in his narration to provoke the audience towards active critical engagement. Haacke's refusal to be the reliable source of meaning for his work, and the resultant controversy, discussion, and thought that this ensured, highlights another possible use of the notion of unreliable narration that could 'exit' Brecht. This controversy upholds Brechtian intentions. Moreover, this strategy of unreliable narration as a performative practice could give insight into methods for creating this effect - a 'new V-effekt' approach in film as well. This notion of unreliable narration was the context and thinking behind the film *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2016).

Unreliable narration originated from Gothic fiction, often alongside use of letters or the epistolary form. *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James is a prime early example of its usage, used to create a disparity between a psychological problem in an author and the story they are telling (in this instance, a ghost story). The use of letters or the epistolary form can also be seen frequently within such texts. The use of the unreliable narrator often reveals a gap between appearance and reality, as the unreliable narrator often distorts reality and sometimes avoids the truth. It may even manifest not as a deliberate concealment of reality, but a subconscious one. For example, Vladimir Nabukov's *Pale Fire* (1962) becomes extremely comic at the expense of its narrator Kinbote, who is clearly insane. Kinbote believes himself to be King of a non-existent country, and he interprets everything in a bizarre manner: "Shade [smiling and massaging my knee] "Kings do not die - they only disappear eh Charles?"" (Nabokov, Pale Fire, 1962, p.265). This bizarre story is mirrored by the non-linear structure of the piece, which works to great comic effect.

With these investigations in mind, I applied my interest in unreliable narration to my work as an artist-filmmaker. I also extended my interest in the unreliable narrator as a potential critical form, identifying films which employ unreliable narration. I then initiated a study into ways in which this technique might be deployed as a Brechtian critical technique. Unreliable narration was a method not used widely in Brecht's era, but one which could be appropriate to the contemporary moment. My status as an individual diagnosed with a severe mental health problem (where others can doubt my own 'reality') informed this decision, and lent insight into how unreliable narration might be a critical tool in a broader filmic context. Many filmic representations rely on depicting the mentally ill as an obviously unreliable source of narration: this is how unreliable narration is deployed in the film *A Beautiful Mind*

(2001). I began to explore whether it could it be implemented as a critical method within my own practice.

A Beautiful Mind employs an unreliable narrator to portray mathematician John Nash's experience of schizophrenia, with a series of vivid flashbacks representing his auditory and visual delusions. Nash is thus the unreliable narrator of his own story, with his unreliability explained as being due to his experience of schizophrenia. Being diagnosed with the same condition, it seemed both politically and personally relevant to my practice to look at this representation in detail. I aimed to evaluate whether this could be an extension of Brecht appropriate for the 21st century, as indicated by the analysis of what I considered Haacke's critical use of the same narrative strategy relating to *Gift Horse*. Could unreliable narration provide a new and novel critical system appropriate to Brechtian contemporary practice, and how might this be achieved?

Contrary to conventional narrative strategy, the audience of *A Beautiful Mind* is often left uncertain whether the delusions of John Nash are real or a figment of the character's mind. There is some logic to the idea that a talented mathematician could be working in a covert role for a government spy agency such as the CIA. This results in a form of questioning engagement for the audience within the narrative, suggesting that a novel narrative strategy could be at play – one which can arguably be read as a Brechtian, non-Aristotelian method of critique. Brecht's narrative methods are ones where the story structure is made non-linear or uncustomary in its strategy. Brecht was fond of unconventional narrative in what he termed the "non-illusory" aspect of Epic Theatre (*Brecht on Theatre*, p.172). He employed unusual narrative methods, summed up by Willett in *Brecht on Theatre* which quotes Brecht as claiming that:

> Once the content becomes, technically speaking, an independent component, to which text, music and setting 'adopt attitudes,' once illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theatre's social function (Willett, J. [1968], (2013), p.39).

Reflecting on this idea, I wondered if unreliable narration (where an audience is encouraged to question the narrative) suggested that the same technique, in a differing context, could be explored as a critical or reflexive device to "force the spectator to cast his vote". This would

mean that an audience would be asked to use their critical sense within my films (Willett, [1968] 2013, p.39).

When Nash is committed to an asylum, it is clear to the audience that they can now assume that the character is mentally ill. This lack of doubt is productive for the more conventional narrative twist in the work, adding a sensationalised narrative drive to the work and serving to 'other' Nash through his mental illness. However, Nash himself describes the experience as follows: "To some extent, sanity is a form of conformity. People are always selling the idea that people who have mental illness are suffering. But it's not so simple. I think mental illness or madness can be an escape also" (Nash, 2001, *PBS Documentary Transcript: A Beautiful Madness*). This suggests the film falls into the conventional Hollywood Aristotelian narrative drive (the 'culinary') and forces the film back into the framework of a traditional 'hero's journey' narrative, which no longer questions the form itself or the politics behind the expression of this Aristotelian narrative method. Nevertheless, the analysis of Nash's unreliable moments seemed, at those moments when they were 'confusing' for an audience, to have something critically useful about them, as well as some promise in suggesting how unreliable narration can be a critical tool. I pondered whether this could be akin to Haacke's provocative and performative media critique.

I had discovered much from the narrative of *A Beautiful Mind* concerning the design and realisation of John Nash's status as an unreliable narrator. I had also gained from my analysis of Hans Haacke's version of performative/media-manipulating Brechtian critical method. I set about designing a treatment for a film that employed these techniques, for what I aspired to be different critical effects. The treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017) keeps this understanding in mind. Just as the character of John Nash is unreliable because the audience sees events from his point of view, I began to develop a narrative which also depended upon a mentally ill unreliable narrator to provide the audience's perspective or point of view.

I invented a character within the treatment for the film who appears very reliable, due to his current status as a national broadcaster. As a foil to this, I designed a typical unreliable narrator in Selwyn, who experiences schizophrenia. Playing one off against the other in the course of the narrative, I intended for the audience to question the extent to which they could rely on the character with authority over and above the alternative story told by the person experiencing schizophrenia. I wished to investigate how this might manifest in terms of an

audience's ability to form a critical, non-culinary, awareness of the actual truth of the story. The balance of power shifted from the authorial truth of the authority figure to the traditionally unreliable narrator (the schizophrenic character Selwyn). This potential reversal of power indicated that unreliable narration could be a route to a contemporary form of Brechtian critical method.

The film treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia* provides an exploration into the process of unreliable narration. This film treatment aimed to try to comprehend how we can monitor the authority status of different narrators when history deliberately presents a chosen subjective perspective. This view of subjectivity is an issue deeply embedded in the politics of neurodivergency. For this reason, it was of interest to see if, by representing a neurodivergent subjectivity within a film, I could show the bias of established authorial processes. Usually, the neurodivergent are considered typical unreliable narrators. I was thus intended to discover whether placing a neurodivergent individual at the centre of plot and story could encourage an audience to take a critical stance on established narrative authority, and thereby form an original Brechtian critique.

The representation of neurodivergency as unreliable narration was something very successfully achieved in Andrew Kotting's film *Galivant* (1996). The film features Kotting travelling clockwise round the coastline of Britain, accompanied by his young daughter Eden, who has a rare genetic syndrome called Joubert's Syndrome, and her Grandmother Gladys. This is a highly emotive film to watch, due to the audience's understanding that Eden and Gladys may not have long to live. There is also a great deal of eccentricity in the structure of the narrative: Gladys tells stories that do not always make sense, and strange anecdotes that may or may not be true. The relationships build between the characters as the story progresses, building a form of narrative reminiscent of a road movie where we are led through the bizarre and strange world of coastal life. At one point, a man competes for an award for the best public toilet and an attempt is made at cold water swimming by Kotting. Alongside the main characters, people of seaside towns are portrayed through their own celebrated strangeness, the piece becoming a celebration of difference in body, mind, and spirit. Much of the film's use of sound is also significant to the portrayal of neurodivergency since it disorienates the viewer by being reflective of the character's subjective perspectives. The rich colour grade of the film adds a slightly surreal effect, and the opinions of 'Big Granny' Gladys linger in the memory long after its conclusion. The use of different forms of

footage - time-lapse, Super 8, and digital - all lend the film great poignance. The personal feeling becomes strengthened through the use of such archive footage. I found Kotting's playful deployment of unreliable narration inspiring for my own exploration of unreliable narration as a Brechtian method within *Somewhere in Macedonia.* The gentle warmth and humour of the work also demonstrated something very Brechtian: that idiosyncratic narratives, which don't rely entirely on Aristotelian style can be extremely compelling.

Joseph Conrad's novel *Under Western Eyes* (1911) and *A Beautiful Mind* (2016) also provided a model for this approach. Both texts tell the story from the perspective of someone whom the reader/audience consider as having bias. This narrative method forces an audience to question his account of the politics and colonialism represented within both texts. My film (and the treatment for it) aimed to explore the positive benefit to critical methods of using an unreliable narrator to develop a narrative. Once again, it seemed that I may have found an exit from Brecht to effect an active audience.

Under Western Eyes is considered original in terms of unreliable narration because "the real focus of the novel is not on the past events as such but on the narrator's surmises about what has happened, on his ignorance and misapprehension." *("But why will you say that I am mad?" On the Theory, History, and Signals of Unreliable Narration in British Fiction,* Nünning, A (1997) p.92). The notion that a film, as with a novel, could destabilise a reader by asking them to question the reliability of a narrators account was important to me in realising the treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia*. The treatment for the film was essential to working out specific problems. It led to an understanding of unreliable narration as a potential 'exit' from Brecht. However, the treatment for the film and the actual short film *Somewhere in Macedonia* became distinctly different achievements. After spending much time planning to make the film, I realised that, to apply unreliable narration in the production (with more people involved and a shorter script) would prove very challenging. The experience of making the film became a steep learning curve, and the collaborative aspect of film making changed the resultant film. However, the research which had produced the treatment was as important as the film itself in understanding unreliable narration as a potential 'exit' from Brecht, even if this was not fully realised in the final film work.

Brecht's learning plays seemed significant to this predicament. In these productions, Brecht set out his ideas and collaborated fully with others in order to realise and develop his ideas. His *Lehrstücke* or 'Learning Plays' were aimed to not divide audience and actor, but

instead to open the possibility of learning through the process of performance itself. The plays were developed to explore roles, attitudes, gest, and to adopt strategies to communicate bilaterally between audience and performers:

> With the learning play, then, the stage begins to be didactic (a word of which I as a man of many years of experience in the theatre, am not afraid) The theatre becomes a place for philosophers, and for such philosophers as not only wish to explain the world but wish to change it" (Brecht [1964] 2013 p.80).

The strategy was designed to be dialectical and participatory: the emphasis was on the adaptability of each play rather than a fixed script, despite the fact that the original scripts for these works were written down. The plays did not mimic reality but were aimed at having a critical relationship to social and political realities - one that was developed through the process of performance, rather than imitating a fixed reality. This dynamic process would evolve during performance: Brecht handed questionnaires to audience and changed scripts accordingly after each performance, so that the playwriting process became responsive rather than solely functioning as entertainment. The whole process was aimed at engaging the audience and encouraging disagreement and debate, rather than the performance styles preferred in established bourgeois theatre. In creating the *Learning Plays,* Brecht put these ideas into practice, collaborating with others in order to realise and develop his ideas. Marc Silberman describes these plays as follows:

> In the late twenties and in particular with the experimental learning plays of the early thirties Brecht sought to formulate explicitly an alternative to the subjectivist, antibourgeois stance of the early twenties. It takes the form of a collectivity which derives from the consciousness of individual subjects transformed into a class identity through the dynamics of mass struggle. The earlier social chaos and individual rootlessness give way to a consensus model of obedience to the collective (Einverstindnis) and new individual who is defined not in opposition to but through the masses (Silberman, 1998, p.16)

Brecht's ideas of collectivity became very pertinent to my own practice: it became important that we became a collective in our working method, rather than individualistic. I was now working with my newly formed production company, *Tiny Circus Birds*, and the experience of working with a team changed the dynamic of my working method in a way that I had not envisaged. There were also considerable limitations in terms of budget, which had necessitated shortening the film. Both budgetary constraints and teamwork changed the results; I had spent nearly a year on developing the treatment for *Somewhere in Macedonia,* centring it upon the notion of unreliable narration. However, the extent to which I could achieve this in short film form was limited. I discovered that unreliable narration depended on the audience having a great deal of background information about the characters, and thus needed a comprehensive 'set-up' within the narrative to work. This proved a limitation to unreliability as a Brechtian trope in the short film form, despite what I had achieved in the treatment for the film.

The teamwork of film making was extremely invigorating for me. I had spent so much time working alone on story development, exploring ideas of unreliable narration. It was sheer joy to work alongside others in filming the short film version of *Somewhere in Macedonia.* I learned a great deal about the dynamics of a production and, as a result, I understood something of the practical dimension of Brecht's method through this process. Brecht had nearly always worked collaboratively in realising his projects at the Berliner Ensemble. For *Somewhere in Macedonia,* our team all had skills and abilities which contributed to the filming process. It was invigorating working alongside them, when I had spent so much time alone in the planning stage - however, this team effort resulted in unanticipated results. Not wishing to dictate terms too much to the fellow artists in my team during the filming process, the shape of the film inevitably changed. This situation was unexpected for me, having so clearly decided on the trope of unreliable narration as a subject for the film treatment that I had written.

The film remained a gay love story, as intended, but when filmed it no-longer centred upon unreliable narration. This was disappointing to me, but it ultimately proved exciting as well. I asked if unreliable narration was actually possible in this length of film, an unexpected and welcome discovery concerning the way in which unreliable narration might be employed as a Brechtian tool in other contexts. I believe that this does not undermine unreliable narration as a Brechtian tool, but, rather, places other demands on its successful realisation in

future film works. Either the narrative must be much more tightly constructed in future work that I or others may make with this theme, or, alternatively, the film must be longer in form and pace to allow space to set up the conceit of unreliable narration.

In making *Somewhere in Macedonia*, I was aware that film making is ultimately collaborative and that I needed to respect this. I speculated on this as a Brechtian trope of its own by asking myself if Brecht was not just a single person, but a social group of people with a common goal. Of course, Bertolt Brecht did exist as an individual. However, there are lingering questions over whether he also existed as a synecdoche for the collective 'group' that formed his company The Berliner Ensemble: Brecht as the public face of a larger whole. I questioned what this could tell me about Brechtian strategy. Could a production company formation and structure be, in itself, a resistant political strategy in the way we work? What made the way we realised the film non-culinary in nature?

The low budget, 'cottage industry' of our working method lent us an independence rarely seen in massive budget productions. We could present characters and themes that did not appear at that time in big-budget cinema. The film foregrounded actors and situations that were often invisible in conventional cinema. The story was presented in a way that made the subjective experiences of people and situations that were usually invisible within culinary narratives both visible and even foregrounded. Prior to *Somewhere in Macedonia,* few contemporary films had tackled themes of homosexuality in the military in a positive light, nor did many foreground gay characters. Such characters were normally sidelined or condemned as 'other' within many conventionally Aristotelian, narrative-driven productions. In more recent years, big-budget productions have emerged which address this situation. However, the independence and size of our production allowed for this storytelling, without restrictions, before its culinary appearance in Hollywood cinema.

I also came to realise that the film presented itself as allegorical. In this use of allegory, the characters and their representation became symbolic of a larger situation and, as a result, was transformative. Through the foregrounding of gay characters, the film expressed the cruelty that many gay men had experienced, both during the First World War and in subsequent conflicts. At this point, I consulted Craig Owen's famous text *The Allegorical Impulse,* which explored the links between allegory and Postmodernism. In this essay, Owens reclaims allegory for contemporary use, arguing that it is far more significant to postmodern

artistic practice than had previously been considered:

> Allegory becomes the model of all commentary, all critique, insofar as these are involved in rewriting a primary text in terms of its figural meaning. I am interested, however, in what occurs when this relationship takes place within works of art, when it describes their structure. Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos = other + agorae = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance. (Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, October Magazine, p68).

Owens explains that, by emptying allegory of its original meaning, artists are able to re-emphasise its importance:

> The first link between allegory and contemporary art may now be made: with the appropriation of images that occurs in the works of Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo . . .-artists who generate images through the reproduction of other images. The appropriated image may be a film still, a photograph, a drawing; it is often itself already a reproduction. However, the manipulations to which these artists subject such images work to empty them of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning. (Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, October Magazine, p68).

Allegory thus voiced the reality of the subjective experiences of my great uncle, upon whose life the narrative was based. His experience became representative of a larger group of overlooked subjectivities, and the story thus became an allegory examining the broader societal treatment of those who are not visible within conventional cinematic representations (those who are not Straight, Male, Anglo-Saxon, White, and Western). This allegorical form provided the potential for further Brechtian critique. As a result of making *Somewhere in Macedonia* I realised that allegory could even become a specific topic for investigation in my

next project - a Brechtian 'exit' in and of itself. Exit 3, *Somewhere in Macedonia,* led me to an examination of the specific field of allegory as a subject, and also, as another possible narrative 'disruptor'.

Chapter 6
Film 4: Devon Gothic (2018)
Allegory

Production Diary: *Devon Gothic*

In my film *Devon Gothic,* a hybrid man-bird, living heads trapped under glass, and an indoor Arctic expedition work together to create a journey where history and fantasy collide with the writer's imagination. It contains sequences of dreamlike imagery. Inspired by the centenary of the publication of Mary Shelley's masterpiece *Frankenstein*, in this film Mary joins forces with her signature creation to capture and destroy the bird creature that taunts them - itself born from the dead body of the Bristolian poet Thomas Chatterton. While she may be able to control the dark forces of her imagination, the film asks if Mary can also hold back the invading forces of a changing and expanding world.

The actors and filming team became a significant element in the critical effects of *Devon Gothic*. Julian Firth found something specific in his voice and acting technique for the film that was important for me: he did not hide his performance, he revealed it. This helped to shatter illusion and put other elements of the film on a different footing - everything was discombobulated by it. Being an artist meant rejecting the photographic industry itself. The impulse was very simple - a process of turning the camera around to look at its own processes. Similarly, Julian went through a process of performing masculinity within the film.

Figure 46: On Set on Devon Gothic *(2018), Credit: Michael Grant*

I am reliant on specific people for my work: each actor had a quality important to the piece, in a similar way to Julian. For this reason, meeting suitable people to work alongside became part of the process. It became a social dynamic, forcing me to reflect on how Brecht himself may have selected his own teams. Like Brecht, I intend to build up long-term working relationships with cast and crew, in a manner reminiscent of a collective or a social movement. I disliked the idea of a traditional casting process, where actors line up aiming to look like a specific type of person. I did not necessarily want people to look like the character they were playing, but to be themselves - to perform a character while retaining their own character at the same time. This demanded that I cast actors who did not necessarily look like their role may have indicated.

I met many actors whilst writing my scripts in the Soho Theatre in London. At the time, it seemed like the best place in London to work, and people began to get used to me being there. I made friends and was able to discuss my work and exchange ideas: the atmosphere was quiet, focussed and warmer than my flat. The more traditional acting fraternity would often be networking or having meetings with agents in the building. I did not dare to approach many of them, not wanting to distract them from their work. I mostly wanted to work with people who worked directly at the theatre itself, and who were interested in the creative process I was proposing.

Although younger actors often rehearsed and had events in the building, I wanted to work with people who were interested in the project and processes I would be working with. I was able to discuss these ideas with each actor in turn. The experience each actor had of being embedded within the institution itself was a useful one. They had seen so many productions over the years and had a thorough knowledge of the histories of film, theatre and comedy from an insider position. I felt like a lichen in the Soho Theatre, feeding on the air, drinking lots of tea, and occasionally helping the general ambience.

Abigail Oaks played one of the two Mary Shelley characters. She was an extremely talented actor who was very emotionally intelligent and sensitive to the needs of the production. Paul Carroll played the character of Edmund Hillary. He had spent time in his youth in the touring production of *Riverdance* and had a very good way of moving for the camera. Both Abigail and Paul had a degree of theatricality similar to what I had also benefitted from with Julian. The acting was vital to *Devon Gothic*, as it was a largely silent film. Ahead of the production process for this film, I had viewed many silent films, and Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were a significant influence over my decision to abandon dialogue.

The shoot itself took place in the West Country. I used the location for 4 days, which also meant catering for the actors once each days' shoot had taken place. 'No budget' really did mean no budget - so I spent every evening cooking and cleaning, the set becoming a domestic working space both in terms of the shoot and feeding the crew. The West Country is a popular holiday destination, yet rather than being a comforting place, the film made it a place of eerie mystery where even the landscape itself might turn on its inhabitants. I edited the film and then worked alongside Stefan Melzak to create a soundtrack, one designed to be pastoral but also jarring to the listener.
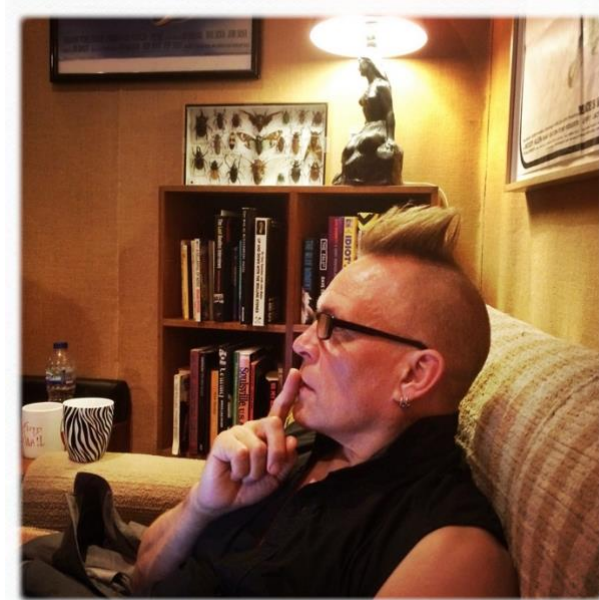
Figure 47: Recording session for Devon Gothic *(2018) Credit: Mark (Til) Tilton.*

The titles were recorded with my band Impossible Chairs, which I formed alongside musicians from The Membranes and Dinosaur Jr. Patrick (Murph) Murphy had been a friend

of mine for many years and agreed to provide drums, whereas John Robb, who I had known at various points since my teens, helped us in the studio. The soundtrack was devised from a song written in a single day which was titled 'Silent Spring', alongside a medieval song called 'Hey Ho, No-body at Home' - both led a slightly unnerving aspect to the film, because they treated the countryside as disconcerting rather than its being a romantic setting. My violin added a sinister drone, which created a further sense of alienation. On completion of the project, the first screening took place secretly at the Soho Theatre, in between shows. There were only 5 of us in the audience, but I was thrilled with the results.

From an examination of the use of unreliable narration in Exit 3, this chapter examines the notion of allegory as a critical technique or 'exit' from Brecht. *Via* conventional definition allegory is discussed as "a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one." (Lexicon Online, 2020, n.p.).[43] However, this dictionary definition seems a somewhat limited interpretation of the term, implying that allegory only provided one route for interpretation. In contrast, Walter Benjamin reclaimed allegory in the 1920s and 30s as a multifaced or multivalent way of seeing. Alan Wall describes this approach in Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire:

> Baudelaire spends his days gazing upon this cityscape, and every item in it starts to become emblematic of something or someone else - sometimes a figure from antiquity, sometimes a virtue or a vice out of the schemata of the spiritual life. In 'Le Cygne' he sees a swan in dawn light and thinks of the tragic window Andromache. Or perhaps he thinks of Andromache, and then invents the swan. The dialectic makes the present and the past one. (Wall, A, 2015, p.3)

Benjamin himself describes this process thus:

> That which the allegorical intention has fixed upon is sundered from the customary contexts of life: it is at once shattered and preserved. Allegory holds fast the ruins. It offers the image

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[43] Definition of allegory, Lexicon Online: URL: https://www.lexico.com/definition/allegory (accessed 20-06-2020)

of petrified unrest. Baudelaire's destructive impulse is nowhere concerned with what falls prey to it

(Benjamin (2006) pp. 143-144).

In my own work, *Devon Gothic,* allegory became a way to recapture the symbolic in a way that resists fixity of meaning. It thus became a means of expressing the multivalent, multi-faceted, polysemous ways of seeing objects, images, and texts. This was not a simplicity of reproducing historical objects and ideas as if they conform to a univocal or monadic process, but a means of acknowledging the ways they have a manifold polyphonic existence.

This chapter initially describes how contemporary artists have used Brecht, as well as the problematics of this use. It identifies a gap in knowledge regarding contemporary Brechtian strategies. It initially does this by examining how other artists use Brecht, and then applies this method in order to produce a Brechtian 'critical subject.' Finally, it describes and examines the strategies of allegory employed in the film *Devon Gothic,* as a way to exit Brecht in a way which retains the Brechtian quest to produce a non 'culinary' and 'awakened' art.

Broomberg and Chanarin: Failures of Formal Brechtian Strategy

This section will develop the chapter's discussion of the use of allegory as a Brechtian 'exit' by contrasting my approach with that of Broomberg and Chanarin's homage to Brecht's *War Primer*. The non-ironic re-creation of Brecht's work by Broomberg and Chanarin indicates where allegory (or the ironic difference created by allegory) can be a more fruitful contemporary critique than that produced by the mere re-presentation (without irony) of Brecht's work. In this case, I am using the example of Broomberg and Chanarin to demonstrate how things can go wrong in realising a contemporary Brechtianism.

Brecht's *War Primer* (1945) was an example of a way in which Brecht used poetry to critique documentary form in his own era. Its purpose, according to the publisher Verso in

1998 is as an "image-by-image analysis of social democracy" (Verso, 1998, n.p). The artwork utilises Brecht's poetry as a method of critique[44]. Broomberg and Chanarin and filmmaker Monster Chetwynd employ Brechtian poetry as critique but in distinctly different ways. In 2002, Broomberg and Chanarin produced an 'updated' version of Brecht's War Primer titled *War Primer II* (2002). In this work, the duo re-purposed Brecht's critical method for the 21st century by faithfully re-creating its format and poetic content but adding contemporary images of warfare since 9-11. This repurposing of Brecht's original content was not always received warmly by critics. Sarah James in *Art Monthly* (2015), questions the political efficacy of their technique. She suggests that *War Primer II*: "… seems to do little to counter any scepticism as to the safe and fairly elitist nature of the pair's Brechtianism…" (James, 2015, p.9), James argues that Brecht's techniques are being used both cynically and formally to promote the artists themselves, and as a part of a wider neoliberal agenda within the arts, without any actual Brechtian ambition behind the work (James, 2015). James' account is close to my own understanding of the work, and I concur with her analysis.

This criticism of Broomberg and Chanarin indicates some of the difficulties for artists who are reproducing Brecht formally in a contemporary era - this form of reproduction has been discussed in previous chapters. The criticism has also added to debates which deliberate on methods which might enable Brechtian ambition to emerge through contemporary practice without relying on the formal use of the playwright and poet's methodologies. Broomberg and Chanarin use the same style of epigrams in the 21st century that Brecht had used in the original *War Primer* (1945). Although the pictures are different, with the former artists showing contemporary war reporting, it is necessary to ask why the poetry remains the same. Does this work indicate a cynicism or elitist position of the artists, as suggested by James - or are Broomberg and Chanarin missing critical potential in their work by not altering the form of poetry to accompany the new imagery?

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[44] This is described in the publisher's review as "A compelling use of the epigram alongside newspaper war photography, *War Primer's* image-poems each dialectically exemplifies a moment of conflict during the war. Chiselled rhyming quatrains, a form borrowed from Kipling and rendered expertly by translator and scholar John Willet, separate an epic of World War II into instances, some familiar. Others confound expected patterns. The book is a verbal-visual montage of irony, discord, and hope" (Verso, 1998, n.p.).

Monster Chetwynd as a Contemporary Brechtian

Brecht's poetic method should not be entirely abandoned: this perspective is indicated by the arguably successful critique presented by Monster Chetwynd. In her work, she borrows from Brecht's original work in a parodic manner which stays in the spirit of Brecht's playful, collaborative and evolving practice. I wished to emulate this form of borrowing Brechtian work in aspects of *Devon Gothic,* as it was significant to my own relationship with Brecht. I admired Chetwynd's approach to her 'original' material. In particular, I enjoyed her borrowing of *The Threepenny Opera,* and was inspired by this method with the borrowing of certain elements of Mary Shelley's work for *Devon Gothic*. I did not regard the material as fixed or sacrosanct, but as an important basis for experimentation in the style of Brecht.

Monster Chetwynd utilises the Brechtian style poetic method, as an element of practice. This is evidenced in her work *Dogsy Ma Bone*, exhibited at Liverpool Biennale in 2017. The influence of Brecht on Chetwynd is discussed on the Tate Liverpool website as follows:

> Inspired by Bertolt Brecht's satirical musical *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) and Betty Boop's a *Song A Day,* (1936) the artist worked with 34 children and 44 teenagers from across Liverpool to make *Dogsy Ma Bone*. The film uses the city of Liverpool, as a backdrop to the action and, it is presented within a pop-up installation designed by the artist, surrounded by hand-made animal costumes and props." (Tate Website, 2018, n.p.)

Chetwynd's appropriation of Brecht is anarchic, in that she appropriated aspects of his work but rejected the idea of a faithful original. Chetwynd downplays the extent to which Brecht's work is a direct influence, or the idea that her work is copied from Brecht in an absolute manner. She states that even in 'borrowing' *The Threepenny Opera,* she is making a new independent work:

We've lifted the story of *The Threepenny Opera* from Bertolt Brecht and so we've had to re-make the songs and a lot of the narrative, at this point, I'd like to say it's almost like a new work rather than it being just a version of *The Threepenny Opera*." (Tate Website, 2018, n.p.)

Paradoxically, Chetwynd's style of loose appropriation could be considered more typically Brechtian than the way in which Broomberg and Chanarin appropriated Brecht's work in *War Primer II* (2003). Brecht himself was a great recycler of earlier work, influenced by numerous other cultural events and stories. For example, the influence of Chinese theatre on his theory of Gestus is widely discussed:

Brecht was heavily influenced by Chinese theatre: another of his well-known plays is set in China – *The Good Person of Szechwan.* And Brecht was so impressed by what he saw in Chinese drama that he drew elements from it as he developed his theory of Epic Theatre. (*Antaeus Theatre Company Online*, 2019, n.p.)

The Cambridge Companion to Brecht also discusses the critical literature concerning Brecht and Chinese Theatre. In the introduction to a chapter on dialectics, Booker (2008) discusses the dynamism of Brecht's practice. That it was not 'set in stone' but functioned as a constant re-imagining of how theatre can work:

"The most damaging yet most common error in discussions of Brecht's theory has been to see it as fixed and unchanging, and to view it therefore as either dogmatic, communist-inspired abstraction or revered holy writ. Behind these views lie different perceptions of Marxism and the rights and wrongs of political art. Brecht began to think through the ideas with which he is most commonly associated in the late 1920s and early 1930s. His emphasis and terminology changed in these years, as well as subsequently, and many see in his later remarks and essays (especially *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, 1948) a belated acceptance of the conventions of realism and the realities of emotional experience suppressed by the supposed sterile intellectualism of his earlier years." (Booker, P, (2006) p209)

Brecht himself speaks of Chinese Theatre in his discussion of Gestus, comparing the method of acting in Chinese theatre with what he seeks to achieve with his own alienation or v-effekt:

> The following is intended to briefly refer to the use of the alienation effect in traditional Chinese acting. The method was most recently used in Germany for plays of a non-Aristotelian (not dependent on empathy) type as part of the attempts being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audiences' subconscious. (Brecht, 2003, [1968] p91)

Similarly, Chetwynd's loose and experimental way of operating could be said to be much closer to the development of Brecht's theatre than the fixed formal concerns of Broomberg and Chanarin. This is also demonstrated by Brecht's "Appendices to the Short Organum for The Theatre" (1948), where the playwright describes the constantly evolving process of his practice as a part of his rejection of more traditional forms of realism:

> The theatre of the scientific age is a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradiction and so forth: all these are ways of enjoying the liveliness of men, things and processes, and they heighten both our capacity for life and our pleasure in it. Every art contributes to the greatest art of all. The art of living. (Brecht, [1953] 2009, p.32)

In a similar vein, when asked if she edits her ideas as part of the process Chetwynd claims:

> No, It's the same process as a conversation. I'm looking to bring up difficult subjects, like the question of cultural appropriation perhaps. Then I talk to people about it, in a crude form of market research, and use what they say. (Tate Website, 2018, n.p)

She also says:

> I really enjoy making something grandiose from something really economical and simple.
> That is the jump I like to make. Most of what I am doing is to boost morale, it is really sad
> how much our culture and society wears down our morale, the performances are to do with
> making a stop in time for people to just literally feel good in that, you don't have to have any
> strain around you just for those 20 minutes. I would prioritise various forms of mayhem, of
> irresponsibility, so I guess you can guide that. (Tate Website, 2018, n.p.)

Brecht's essay "A Theatre for Learning*,"* published in English in 1961, is relevant to this
discussion. In this work, Brecht outlines the importance of enjoyment as part of the learning
process. I considered this dynamic to be compelling evidence that Chetwynd's method was
closer to the spirit of Brecht. She puts the process first and the text second, while Bloomberg
and Chanarin treat the text as if it were something critical in and of itself. Evidence from
Brecht's "A Theatre for Learning" (1961) shows that no text was sacrosanct, but that all texts
were to be adapted and changed according to the needs of practice.

> If learning could not be delightful, then the theatre, by its very nature, would not be in a
> position to instruct.
>
> Theatre remains theatre, even when it is didactic theatre; and if it is good theatre, it will
> entertain
>
> (Brecht, "A Theatre for Learning," [1961], 2013 p.22).

Allegory and Appropriation as Critical Method or 'Exit' from Brecht

Devon Gothic was inspired by various cultural forms, among which allegory was one of the
most important. As a starting point for the title, I used Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and
the work in general moved away from the direct reference to Brecht's work that had been

significant to Broomberg and Chanarin. The ideas of allegory and appropriation were significant to this move away from Brecht, as will be explained further in this chapter. Analysis of *War Primer II* (2002) had uncovered a paradox concerning Brechtian techniques in regard to my own working processes. After analysing the use of Brechtian distancing devices within artistic practice, a realisation had emerged that these had been incorporated into other media (for example, advertising). These were media forms that were oppositional to Brechtian ambition, suggesting that these techniques had become a style rather than a critical device in many of these incarnations. It was becoming more challenging to view standard Brechtian techniques as being sufficiently Brechtian in their effects. As such, I came to question whether non-Brechtian techniques could be used to achieve the same effect: Monster Chetwynd's use of appropriation, allegory, and dynamic pastiche had indicated an additional potential 'exit' from Brecht. This deserved further analysis. Allegory was used heavily within the work of Monster Chetwynd; it was also important as a Brechtian technique. Could it then be updated for a contemporary fine art film practice? I resolved to create my own response, beginning by looking at other examples.

The starting point for my film came from analysis of Grant Wood's 1930 painting *American Gothic*. This I felt, had no sense of irony and was non-allegorical: it took itself seriously, and, for that reason, has often been adopted for parodic purposes. I also decided to adopt it for the title of my film, naming it *Devon Gothic* to bring the scope of the piece to a smaller, more realistic, and almost flippant scale. *American Gothic* shows a stoic and idealised picture of American pastoral life. It appeared to be a particularly romanticised portrayal when, culturally, socially and politically, the late 1920s and early 1930s were a time of great social upheaval in the United States. The country was in the midst of The Great Depression, when many farmers and factory workers were left destitute. However, the poverty and destitution of the populace remains unacknowledged within Wood's painting.

Figure 48: Grant Wood, American Gothic *(1930)*

Figure 49: **Film Poster** Devon Gothic *(2018) Alice Evans*

Other critical literature makes clear that Wood's painting was received as satire by some of his contemporaries:

> A later canvas, and one now quite as well known, is called "American Gothic." Two people, a man and a woman, stand, again three-quarter length, before a background showing the pointed roof and Gothic window of the fancy little houses built throughout the country in the late nineteenth century. The figures are neither idealized nor criticized, though after his "Daughters of Revolution" Wood's audiences were inclined to see satire here again.
> (Pickering, R, (1935) 'Grant Wood Painter in Overalls,' p. 275)

Similarly, as discussed in "Grant Wood Revisited," in *American Art Journal* (1967) Matthew Baigell says; "Wood's painting reaches beyond mere satire and his comment on the psychology of the Iowa couple is rooted considerably less in good-humoured ridicule as is usually thought, than a savage kind of criticism" (Baigell, (1967) p.116). The style of the painting is photorealist. It was painted with very small brushstrokes and thus has no evidence of the painter's hand - as if the author of the painting did not exist, and the work had emerged fully formed on the page. The photo-realistic style barely seems to acknowledge the influence of its creator, suggesting instead that the work (and perhaps therefore the realist style) obscures the social reality of rural life, producing an idealised view of labour. This is achieved by romanticising the two characters in the portrayal, thereby eliminating strife from toil. Each detail of the painting seems to support this, from the character's expressions, to the clean house, to the clothes depicted.

A parallel can be seen between the limitations of realist style in *American Gothic* and Brecht's discussion of the Krupp munitions plant. Brecht thought that, like my criticism levelled at *American Gothic*, the arms plant showed nothing of the actual social circumstances of those toiling inside. Brecht had objected to much of the contemporary realism of 1930s Germany, discussing this image as he considered it a model for realist theatre. Benjamin quotes Brecht in his short history of photography (*Kleine Geschichte der Photographie / Short History of Photography*), Brecht claiming that contemporary realism in theatre had an equivalence to a photograph he had seen of the exterior of the Krupp munitions factory (Benjamin, 1931). In his discussion of this image, Brecht pointed out that a

straightforward, realist image of a factory says little about the social reality of those working inside:

> the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works, or AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. (Brecht, [1968] 2000, pp. 164-165).

Brecht compares the Krupp photograph to a theatre which fails to acknowledge the artificial and constructed nature of contemporary realism. He claims that contemporary realist theatre of the 1930s could say nothing about the inequalities of those who lived in the societies that these works emerged from: instead, they work to disguise inequality with silly plots and stories that carry an audience away from the harsh realities of the everyday struggles of the working class (Brecht, [1968] 2000). In describing the photograph of the factory in this way, Brecht could also be describing the critical problems of a painting like *American Gothic*. The two characters within this image appear stoic, and the realism of the painting seems to romanticise and disguise unequal social relations that were present in the Great Depression era. By borrowing the title *Devon Gothic* for my own work, I was seeking to parody the original realist work *American Gothic* (1930) and in doing so parody its idealised depiction of rural life, and the politics of this idealisation.

As discussed above, Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic* (1930) has been a frequent subject of parody. I now considered how allegory could function in itself as an exit through and from Brecht.

The use of Allegory as applied to *Devon Gothic*

I began to wonder how allegory was a method I could employ in my film *Devon Gothic*. I contemplated whether the use of allegory could surpass the problems I had come to associate with the dilution and absorption of Brechtian formal techniques in larger culture, asking if the use of allegory within *Devon Gothic* could become a form of contemporary Brechtian critical method.

Devon Gothic (2018) was created in order to salvage some of the politics lost in the assimilation of Brechtian formal techniques into wider culture. My aim was to use the v-effekt to create a new language of alienated art. For Brecht, alienated art was a complex and dynamic process, and yet did not incorporate an alienation that was surreal or imaginative. I considered that the imaginative or surreal could be a useful method for re-kindling these techniques of Brechtian criticality. This had been explored in Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade (1970) where a combination of Artaudian and Brechtian techniques conflict with each other in the course of the play. As Gill Lamden notes, "On one level, Brechtian order is imposed, but it is in conflict with a far more dangerous and irrational force, one that Artaud, who had spent many years in various asylums would have understood (Gill Lamden, 'Introduction' *Marat/Sade* 2001 p.5). In *Marat/Sade*, neither Brecht nor Artaud wins out.

Artaud used alienated, surreal, or nonsense language within his works, viewing this as a critical form in itself. His *Theatre of Cruelty* aimed at shocking the audience, going beyond the verbal to connect on a visceral, emotional level. He believed gesture was more important than the words spoken, and that this became not just a discipline but a philosophy in itself. I was interested in the potential of the surreal or imaginative to add to Brecht's ideas. I wished to use nonsensical allegorical techniques within *Devon Gothic* to experiment with ideas of a new form of Brechtian alienation which could also reflect some Artaudian ideas. The experiment aimed to discover if a theory of the nonsensical could be used to critical effect.

Of strategic importance was also an awareness of the way that Brecht used allegory within his plays. Some critics consider Brechtian practice as allegorical. This is expounded upon by Francis Fergusson in his 1956 essay "Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot.". He says:

A number of contemporary playwrights, of whom Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot are among the most accomplished, are now writing some form of allegory. They reject the tradition of modern realism, perhaps because little remains to be done with direct reflections of contemporary life: the pathos of the lost individual or the decaying suburb has been done to death since Chekhov. (Fergusson, 1956, p.544)

However, in as much as I could discover in my research, Brecht himself does not seem to have used the word allegory to describe his own work. Allegory therefore is very rarely referred to within his own critical literatures and is more closely associated with his colleague Walter Benjamin's writings. This is discussed particularly in association with Benjamin's 1928 work "The Origin of German Tragic Drama." I found that I was using the technique of allegory more frequently within *Devon Gothic* and that this frequency seemed to signal a move away from standard Brechtian techniques. I began to imagine that allegory could be used as a critically resistant tool within *Devon Gothic*, revealing the conditioning present in equivalent forms of non-allegorical filmmaking. This is achieved by using the concept of allegory through the understanding its presence in the writings of Walter Benjamin. This means that allegory is a much richer source of critique than a simple 'decoding' of the narrative.

According to Howard Caygill, allegory in Benjamin's work is "a concept with implications that are at once philosophical, religious, aesthetic, political and historical. In many ways it is emblematic of the internal complexity of Benjamin's work, which is rooted in the attempt to bring together the approaches of philosophy, aesthetics and cultural history" (Caygill, 2010 p 241). Benjamin's work is therefore far more complex than that of a simple decoding process. Benjamin's interpretation of allegory was connected with the philosophical and cultural conditions of Modernity itself.

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the concept in the writings of Walter Benjamin. This means that allegory is a much richer source of critique than a simple 'decoding' of the narrative.

Central to Brechtian practice was a resistance to conventional Aristotelian storytelling arcs. As discussed earlier, these methods describe a hero's journey from a place of conflict to resolution. Brecht considered that such a storytelling trajectory works to pacify audiences, rather than challenging them to alter their lives. For example, when he discusses epic theatre in opposition to dramatic theatre, Brecht emphasises that the Epic Theatre audience is made "alterable and able to alter" (Brecht, [1964] 2013 p37). This foregrounds the difference between this form and theatre narratives which "implicate the spectator" (Brecht, [1964] 2013 p.37) so that they feel unchangeable. I discuss later how, in a current context, we might consider that this form of narrative re-produces or reinforces forms of colonialism.

Brecht considered that his v-effekts could contribute to cultivating a sense of wide-awakeness in an audience where "social being determines thought and action" (Brecht, [1964] 2013 p.37) by resisting the limitations of Aristotelian narrative trajectory. However, Brecht's method was not static - it was intended to be adjusted to each subsequent era, in order to maintain its effectiveness. This is evidenced in his *Learning Plays* and the *Messingkauf Dialogues,* both of which indicate that his work is progressive rather than static. These works leave instructions to future practitioners as to how to innovate - as he puts it, Epic Theatre is theatre "WITH INNOVATIONS!" (Brecht, [1964] 2013 p.37).

Contemporary understandings of subjectivity have altered the ways in which we address audiences. Rather than considering an audience as a uniform group to be addressed as if they were one, contemporary understandings of subjectivities indicate that critical methods must address audiences in ways that are multivalent and polysemic. The conventional definition of allegory implies that it works like a code to be unpicked, where one element directly performs the hidden meaning of another element. It is thus a form of storytelling where one thing means another, reflecting that ideas of allegory were originally attached to a fixed form of decoding for moral or political purposes. It is similarly described by the *Cambridge University English Dictionary* as "a story, play, poem, picture or other work in

which the characters and events represent particular qualities or ideas that relate to morals, religion or politics". [45]

Craig Owens' essays on allegory give a more nuanced understanding of the term than this simplistic interpretation implies. He describes allegory as:

> An attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure…the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," (1969) p.69).

It is this manifestation of allegory that was most of interest to me in creating *Devon Gothic.* Walter Benjamin's discussion extends the concept of allegory, summarised by Alan Wall in claiming that "it is precisely the arbitrariness of the assignment of meaning in allegory that makes it so appropriate for Benjamin; appropriate not merely for its baroque incarnations, but for modernity too" (Wall, A, 2015, p.3). When describing Benjamin's allegory in the writing of Baudelaire, Wall describes its slippage of meaning thus:

> Baudelaire spends his days gazing upon this cityscape, and every item in it starts to become emblematic of something or someone else - sometimes a figure from antiquity, sometimes a virtue or a vice out of the schemata of the spiritual life. In 'Le Cygne' he sees a swan in dawn light and thinks of the tragic window Andromache. Or perhaps he thinks of Andromache, and then invents the swan. The dialectic makes the present and the past one. (Wall, A. (2015) p.3.).

Benjamin himself describes allegory by claiming: "That which the allegorical intention has fixed upon is sundered from the customary contexts of life: it is at once shattered and

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[45] Cambridge Online Dictionary: URL: (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allegory) accessed - 20-06-2020

preserved. Allegory holds fast to the ruins. It offers the image of petrified unrest." (Benjamin, 2006, pp. 143-144). Benjamin's interpretation of allegory is therefore a multivalent "unrest" (Benjamin, 2006, pp. 143-144), which is polyphonic and polysemous. It is deployed not like a code to be deciphered to find a meaning, but instead produces sliding or multivalent forms of meaning.

In *Devon Gothic,* I use allegory in a similar manner to that explored by Benjamin. My intention was for each element of story, image, and sound to look like something that should be symbolic of something else but then slipped from this meaning and collapsed in on itself. According to conventional definition, it ought to be directly representative of something else and thus simply decoded. However, as allegory, it rejects this process. In this way, it refuses to be colonised through the Aristotelian story arc by having no convenient beginning, middle, or end, and no direct heroic journeys. It functions in a multivalent way so that an audience can actively complete their own meaning. The metaphors I was using within *Devon Gothic* became habitual. Although at first view each seem heavily loaded with meaning (for example: a wise owl, a 'mad' scientist, experiments with glass, and suicidal poets), all of these are undermined through a narrative that fails to enlighten the audience as to their purpose. They become visual tics, habits, or clichés, without any accompanying narrative drive or purpose.

Alan Wall considers this an attitude as being one that Benjamin had also attached to allegory:

> Benjamin tells us the allegorist so conquers the meaning of the texts or objects falling under his gaze that when he has finished, they can appear merely the dead husks of themselves, having yielded the body of their inner meaning up to his intense hermeneutic scrutiny, as if to an intellectual seducer (Wall, A, 2015, p.1).

The language of the setting and content of the film makes reference to enlightenment discovery, yet without the narrative drive or a logical story, these references prove empty rather than meaningful. By using enlightenment metaphors as described above within *Devon Gothic* (2018), and yet dispersing or removing them from their narrative context, I began to wonder if I too could point at the limitations of enlightenment authority.
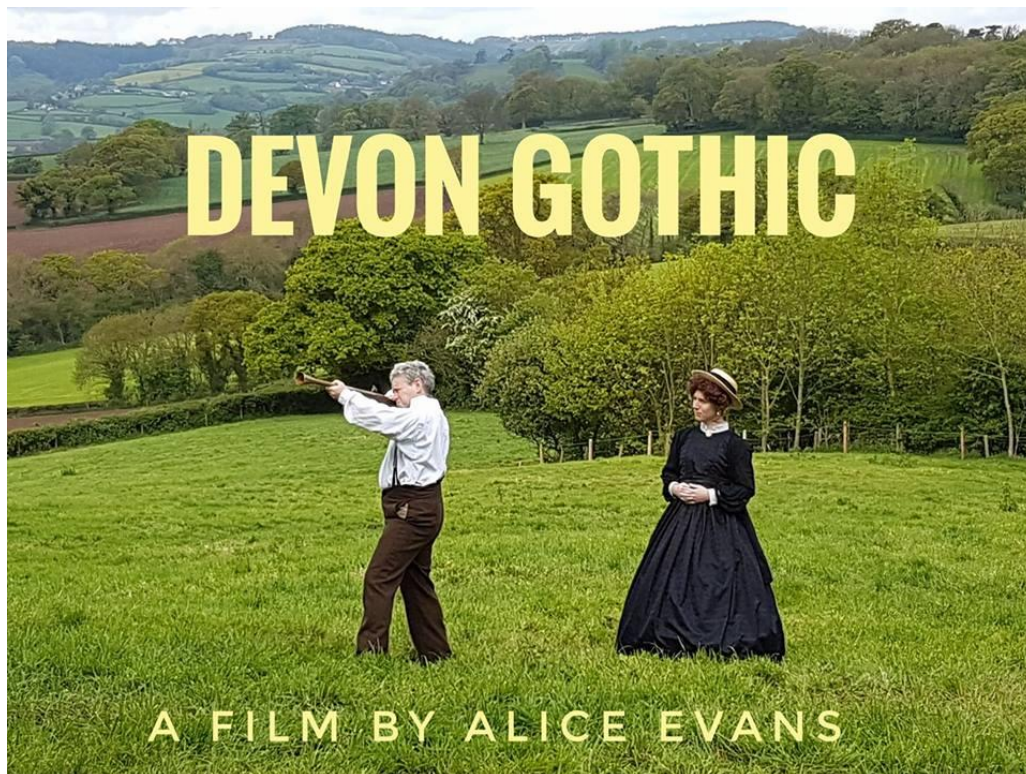
Figure 50: Film Poster Devon Gothic *(2018) Alice Evans*

I had employed symbolic visual language within *Devon Gothic*. The film presents a visual allegory from its outset, with the first scene featuring a dead owl spinning round to face the camera, re-animating its body in a comedic manner. I previously thought that, by laying bare the means of film making, I could persuade an audience to understand how the films, and therefore, larger culture was a constructed and artificial notion. In earlier works, I considered this as entirely Brechtian in its effect.

Devon Gothic linked characters outside of their historical contexts. I referenced the 19th Century painting *The Death of Chatterton* (Henry Wallis, 1856) alongside 20th century mathematician Alan Turing (1912-1954), with Mary Shelley and her character Victor Frankenstein from her novel of 1818. There were few logical links to be made between these characters, yet I felt there were some connections. These connections were invented or created through dreamlike associations in my own mind rather than through any particular reasoning. The images created on screen were, however, visually linked through the style of filmic method. There was a chiaroscuro light used in the cinematography which brought them

217

together visually, even if there was no logical or historical link to be made outside of the film. Through a chain of associations which made no logical sense, this approach may even form conundrums for an audience. In a way, the characters could be considered a challenge to the logic of Aristotelian storytelling method, and a Brechtian technique in itself. Brecht considered that story structure needed interrupting, and I was looking to do this by disrupting historical time flow rather than making it naturalistic.

Figure 51: Still featuring Thomas Chatterton Devon Gothic *(2018) Alice Evans*

Similarly, bringing a long-dead owl back to life was also an apparently mindless gesture. I wondered what the role of this playfulness was within the film. I thought about the notion of wisdom and my somewhat flippant response to this idea in re-animating the animal. Within my film, I was using the owl as a metaphor which had no purpose, in that it failed to represent anything beyond the immediate. I wondered whether this might lend the film a Brechtian-style critical power?

Re-cycling imagery from the Pre-Raphaelite painting *The Death of Chatterton* (1856) was a way of using recognisable cliché. However, re-creating the painting as a scene within *Devon Gothic* also functioned as a direct reference to Brechtian critical techniques. My own use of Chatterton did not necessarily reference general Pre-Raphaelite notions of social engagement, but instead resembled a slightly obscure cultural reference to Bristol poet

Chatterton himself. Through a bizarre series of connections, I found myself linking Chatterton with the computer scientist Alan Turing. I also linked it with the scene in the Charles Laughton film Life *of Galileo* (1957), where Galileo eats an apple and then uses it as a way to explain the solar system to his young assistant. Although this connection may not be obvious to the viewer and, as such, may have scarce relevance, in this film I used somewhat random connections as a basis for much of my storytelling. This related to my interest in uncustomary narrative forms: Brecht himself had an interest in non-Aristotelian narrative methods, and I wondered how much this correlated with my own storytelling techniques. I came to question whether this strategy belonged to Brechtian practice, or if my use of uncustomary associations resulted in something different from Brecht's own concerns.

The typewriter and apple in the first scenes of *Devon Gothic* functioned as a crude and rather silly reference to the Enigma machine. Alongside the poisoned apple (commonly alleged to be the method of Turing's suicide) I made an unexpected link between Chatterton and Alan Turing - perhaps because both were said to have died as a result of social stigma. I read that Turing had a fascination with the story of Snow White, and that his using a poisoned apple was a clichéd reference to this.

I also was interested in the method of fakery that poet Thomas Chatterton had assumed. He had spent time writing a series of poems which he attributed to a medieval monk and had promoted them as such. He was then exposed for this fraud and condemned for it. I was interested in Chatterton as a figure who had become the embodiment of ideas concerning unreliable narration. For Brecht, Galileo had represented as similarly flawed as a character, as he bowed to the intense pressure of the Spanish Inquisition. As a result of this, he is shown in Brecht's work as deeply human, but also flawed. This contrasts with the conventional heroes' journeys that often feature in traditional Aristotelian theatre.

My earlier film making on this project had served to investigate unreliable narration as a critical device. I had been interested in the history of unreliable narration within film and literature. It appeared that this strategy had narrative significance to my earlier investigations.

There seemed something important to this reference, both personally and politically. I thus used Chatterton as the manifestation of a larger idea: that he functioned as a form of totem for unreliable narration. While this could be a personal reference that would have little overall significance to the viewer, it was important in the development of the film as a whole, becoming the grain of an idea that I would return to.

There was also something significant in the loaded metaphor that the character of Chatterton provided to the work, and I was interested to explore this. As with my earlier reference to *American Gothic* in the title of *Devon Gothic*, I was interested in the critical aspect to the employment of allegory. Victorian Pre-Raphaelite paintings were considered radical in their own era, and yet in recent years had slipped into cliché and were therefore subject to parody. As such, my use of Chatterton was not designed to merely restate the original effects; the context in which the poet appears is perhaps a little more enigmatic.

I was playing with the character as a loaded metaphor, without a context to 'complete' it. Like an incomplete sentence, the character was suspended, without any further information for the viewer – it could not fit into a pre-established narrative context. This was a significant aspect to the whole of *Devon Gothic*, as the placing of loaded imagery and ideas out of context was important to my attempts to move away from Brecht. This technique undermined the significance of the metaphors and sought to disarm them from their assumed narrative structure.

My film *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017) had led me to understand that a contemporary Brechtian artwork must be appropriate to the politics of the time and not solely faithful to his initial techniques. As a result of this film, I realised that there was a need to experiment further in order to achieve a degree of contemporary Brechtianism. *Devon Gothic* was created to try to understand this paradox. A dream inspired *Devon Gothic*: a provocative approach. My knowledge of Mary Shelley, the writer of *Frankenstein* (1818), also informed my understanding of the work, particularly as Shelley had lived in the part of London where I lived. The film was also inspired by the visionary art of William Blake and the fantastical visual language of Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987).

My investigation into Brechtian techniques led to a greater awareness of Brecht's ambitions for his theatre audience, which were bound up in his desire to create an active spectator who was interested in creating political change on departing the theatre. These

theatrical techniques provided a stark contrast to more conventional forms of theatre, which Brecht considered as pacifying an audience. An analysis of Brecht's discussions concerning audience subjectivity led to the discovery that, although Brecht's ambition was to create an active and reactive crowd, he does not develop a review of how his audience is comprised in his writings. There is no consideration of any diversity in terms of comprehension capability. As I have already noted, recent feminist theories acknowledge that there is no generic type of audience, but instead, that an audience forms a range of people with differing subjectivities. From this realisation, I developed an interest in Brecht's approach to the subjectivity of his audience. I wanted to understand his ambitions for their subjectivity through an examination of his aims for their political and social emancipation. Through this analysis, I began to see that Brecht refers infrequently to understandings of the subjectivity of his audience in his writings. This was, paradoxically, contrary to the evidence that Brecht's alienation effect is a theory of audience reception. I thus considered that an investigation into Brecht's response to the subjectivity of his audience would be productive.

The work I produced after researching Brechtian subjectivity was a response to the feelings I had of somatic alienation. I considered how Brecht might have responded to literal alienation, asking who is excluded or left out when he discusses the role of an enlightened audience. My discovery concerning notions of Brecht's ideal viewer led both towards and away from Brechtian techniques in the creation of *Devon Gothic*. I had discovered a paradox in Brechtian techniques through my working processes: that I could no-longer consider standard Brechtian techniques as Brechtian in contemporary usage, and that I needed to use non-Brechtian techniques to achieve the same effect. I was compelled to explore ways I could use non-Brechtian techniques to develop a new Brechtian method, and *Devon Gothic* was one of the films created in order to salvage some of the politics lost in the assimilation of Brechtian formal techniques into wider culture.

As discussed earlier, my recycling imagery from the Pre-Raphaelite painting *The Death of Chatterton* was an experiment in the use of cliché. However, re-creating the painting as a scene within *Devon Gothic* also directly referenced Brechtian critical techniques. Brecht was fond of historicising narratives, a strategy which was unconventional in his own time but is now so familiar within film and television that audiences might hardly notice it. For example, Brecht's third version of the play *The Life of Galileo* (1955) talks of contemporary issues by placing them in a different historical time and place to make comment on contemporary

scientific advances and the development of the atom bomb just prior to Brecht's play. The historicised narrative also represents the spirit of free enquiry (Galileo) vs the power of unexamined authority (the Catholic Church at the time). As such, when Galileo capitulates under the hands of the Spanish Inquisition in Brecht's play, the audience may see this as a more complex representation of character faults than is familiar from the traditional heroes' journey in dramatic (as opposed to epic) theatre. Doing this may have given Brecht license to discuss issues that could have been politically controversial in his own era. As a result, it is unsurprising that a play about Galileo's interrogation at the time of the Spanish Inquisition, should be presented by Brecht following his own experiences of McCarthyism in 1947, when he was an exile in the USA.

Alongside the obvious biographical implications, re-staging events in another time and place can have other purposes, and I had an interest in these for developing my own practice. For example, temporal disjuncture, created by putting old imagery in a new context, was also a distancing method, wherein an audience is called to re-examine old tropes and consider them in a new context. Other contemporary photographers used the technique of re-presenting historical imagery, including the staged photographer Tom Hunter's series of photographs set in Hackney in the 90s. His website explains this with regard to his series *Life and Death in Hackney* (2010):

> By taking on some of the attributes associated with the Pre-Raphaelite artists, such as social engagement, which has been largely erased from the cultural understanding of this group, and the obvious intertwining of beauty and nature, Hunter has reinvestigated his much-maligned inner-city landscape and society, to create an unusual chronicle of contemporary, urban Britain (Hunter, 2010, n.p).

By using historical references, Hunter comments on contemporary situations. He suggests this is the "assumed isolation of contemporary urban life, in the context of the warehouse scene of the 90s" (Hunter, 2010, n.p).

Tom Hunter, *The Way Home* - From the series: *Life & Death in Hackney* (2010) Private Collection.

My own use of Chatterton was not referencing the general Pre-Raphaelite notions of social engagement mentioned by Hunter, but as discussed earlier, was more closely aligned to Chatterton himself.

The Aristotelian story arc is a familiar tradition among a wide range of art forms. From opera to theatre, the narrative journey of characters often follows a familiar trajectory from a place of relative anxiety to a position of stasis or neat resolution. Brecht saw this as a false method. He believed that such structures failed to alert his audience to the social and political factors at play within a capitalist economy. Brecht wanted to draw attention to the Aristotelian method as a device, rather than a natural process. He developed his own style of narratology, which served to challenge such a method. He thus produced alternatives to the Aristotelian structures, which contributed to what he termed epic theatre. This used disrupted time sequences, flashbacks, song, and music to disrupt the narrative.

There was also something in the rather loaded metaphor that the character of Chatterton provided to the work that I was interested in exploring. *Devon Gothic* was a filmic attempt to disrupt Aristotelian narrative *via* allegory. From personal interest, I wondered

whether these similar techniques could be applied to depathologise ideas of mental illness: I was especially interested in this process since it was attached to my experience of neurodivergency. This in turn suggested how Brecht might be applied through contemporary ideas of subjectivity attached to neurodivergency. *Devon Gothic* was thus created to understand how Aristotelian mental illness narratives can be depathologised through Benjamin's understanding of allegory. It was also a personal response to my experience of neurodivergency.

I had spent time writing and engaging in mental health campaigns alongside my work on this project. At first, I considered that sharing a story of recovery through my experiences might help in the understanding and de-stigmatisation of mental illness. However, as I thought more deeply about it, I began to understand that voicing these recovery narratives also ran a risk of othering people with these experiences, and also of pathologising the subject. It may have served to reinforce an existing status quo which placed the onus of recovery on those with lived experience, rather than instilling a sense of social and collective responsibility for mental distress. In my desire to destigmatise mental illness, I was relying on the Aristotelian narrative method to describe my journey. This seemed to be playing into the very narrative structures I wished to resist within my larger artistic practice.

Jijian Voronka describes how 'Madness' narratives are "colonised by 'psy' sciences" (Jijian Voronka 2019, p.2) which place the responsibility to cure in the hands of the individual rather than being a goal enabled by collective social responsibility. Voronka elaborates:

> Inviting people with lived experience to share their stories is now common practice in education, mental health, and broader community venues. Yet even when the intent of the stories shared are to offer systematic critique of mental health epistemes, it is difficult to hear such stories beyond the psychiatric gaze. I argue that individual storytelling practices now get processed through resiliency and recovery metanarratives that continue to position both the problem and, its potential solution, at the level of individual bodies…Such narratives, in accumulation can reify conceptions of the resilient and recovered subject and thus help solidify mental health truth regimes (Voronka 2019, p.1).

In this section, Voronka describes how recovery narratives, as with other Aristotelian forms, are based on a 'hero's journey' narrative that can enhance or reinforce the status quo. These Aristotelian stories reinforce the practice of placing responsibility on the individual recoveree rather than emphasising the need for collective social and political change.

In making the non-Aristotelian narrative of *Devon Gothic,* I made efforts to centre my practice outside the 'psy-gaze' that dominates a lot of writing and thinking in regard to mental health, even among those with mental health conditions. I made the decision to write in a way that put my 'mad' experiences at the centre in a manner that was not completely aimed at being intelligible to a neurotypical audience. This process was supported by the use of Benjamin's concept of allegory, with its slippage of meanings and its multifaceted capacities. I came to believe that Aristotelian narratives can make us complicit in our own sublimation. I was seeking to create a form of neurodivergent narrative that could be loosely compared to the discussion Roland Barthes has about George Bataille's novella *Story of the Eye*. In this analysis, Barthes describes the chain of associations as 'metonymy' rather than metaphor. He regards this as a form of dream-like associative logic which brings the text beyond its pornographic content and into a realm of poetic association through objects:

> *Story of the Eye* really is the story of an object. How can an object have a story? It can pass from hand to hand, giving rise to the sort of tame fancy authors call The Story of my Pipe or Memoirs of an Armchair or alternatively it can pass from image to image, in which case its story is that of a migration, the cycle of avatars it passes through, far removed from its original being, down the path of a particular imagination that distorts but never drops it. This is the case with Bataille's book. (Barthes,1967, p.120).

This strategy has some commonality with what I was trying to achieve with both *Devon Gothic* and the later work *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) in terms of refusing direct metaphor and presenting a form that was both metonymic and metaphoric. This, I hoped, would develop what I have come to refer to as a 'neurodivergent narrative'. The convention present within Bataille's text is the pornographic narrative, but for Barthes the idiosyncrasy of the text is produced by this use of repeated objects which do not fit within conventional, direct forms of metaphor:

That art is by no means gratuitous it emerges, apparently with eroticism itself- at least Bataille's eroticism. Of course, one can imagine other definitions of eroticism than linguistic ones (as Bataille himself showed). But if we call metonymy this transfer of meaning from one chain to another at different levels if metaphor (the "eye sucked like a breast", "drinking my left eye between her lips") we shall probably concede that Bataille's eroticism is essentially metonymic. Since the poetic technique employed here consists in demolishing the usual contiguities of objects and substitution fresh encounters that are nevertheless limited by the persistence of a single theme within each metaphor (Barthes, 1967, p.120).

In creating my own neurodivergent narrative, I was aiming to engineer something similar to the situation within Bataille's "demolishing of poetic contingencies of objects" (Barthes, 1967, p.120). *Devon Gothic* and my subsequent work *Echo Piano Lesson* refuse to settle on metaphor, but instead allow an unusual chain of poetic associations. By doing this, the works aim to be Brechtian in that they resist Aristotelian story structure in a new manner, one which is more appropriate to a contemporary understanding of neurodivergent subjectivity. This approach acknowledges this subjectivity and works with it in acknowledgement of Brechtian criticality, forming a new method of resistance to the social and political circumstances associated with the neurodivergent subject position. *Devon Gothic* becomes a neurodivergent narrative through its use of allegory, thereby expressing a multiplicitous type of allegory and resisting Aristotelian forms. This will be further explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

In applying allegory to an understanding of Brecht, I have demonstrated how it can produce a novel critical form in its own right. Allegory provided a powerful resistance strategy, destabilising the 'norm' and rendering it both meaningless and profoundly, idiosyncratically, meaningful. When one applies allegory to Brechtian v-effekt techniques in film making, it becomes a critique of the language that Brecht uses to destabilise the viewer. Allegory thereby enacts as a more current v-effekt strategy. *Devon Gothic* thus represents an experiment in allegory and explores the destabilisation that this can produce. The investigation also implies how allegory may be applied in other contexts to destabilise Aristotelian narratives around mental health. This leads on to chapter 7's discussion of *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019), which considers stream-of-consciousness poetry as a critically resistant Brechtian method.

Another strategy used in *Devon Gothic* (2018) was its exploration of ideas of time or temporality. The concept of the loop was important to this. I was familiar with the work of other artists who used this technique, including Stuart Croft or Douglas Gordon. I had looped the film to prevent lending it a conclusive beginning, middle and end. This encouraged me to think about ideas concerning linear and non-linear filmic time or narrative structure. The use of the loop also connects to Brecht's critique of Aristotelian narrative structure. I wondered if, by designing my film with a continuous loop, I could circumvent or challenge this narrative action as a Brechtian strategy. After reading Butler's ideas on subjectivity and also, Deleuze's thoughts on temporality I wondered if the loop could also be an extension of - or purposeful 'exit' from - Brechtian method.

In some ways, this approach could still be thought of as essentially Brechtian, insofar as the repetitious nature of the loop draws attention to the 'hypnotic' effect of other forms of cinema. Brecht describes the hypnotic effect on an audience in claiming that "the process of fusion extends to the spectator who gets thrown into the melting pot . . . and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art." (Brecht quoted by McCabe, 1975, p. 48). I thus considered whether, by using this method of repetition and by looping my film *Devon Gothic*, I was challenging an audience to reflect on the absorption provided by other films which provide a continuous or 'progressive' narrative or hero's journey (the Aristotelian method).

After reading sections of Deleuze text *Cinema 1* (2001), I was influenced by its slightly different critique from that presented by Brecht's v-effekt. In this text, Deleuze investigates Bergson's ideas of movement, matter and time in relation to cinematic structure. The text analyses various cinematic movements and creators such as Eisenstein, Ford, Kurosawa and Werner Herzog. In some ways, Deleuze appears to use the medium of cinema itself to draw out philosophical analysis through the medium. For example, he sees links between Bergson's philosophy of movement and mind *via* the medium of cinema in noting that "The shot would then stop being a spatial category and become a temporal one, and the section would no longer be immobile, but mobile. The cinema would rediscover that very movement-image of the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* (Deleuze, 2001, Cinema 1 (2nd thesis), p.3).

In contrast to Brechtian ideas, Deleuze and Guattari's reflections together on time consider it in different terms. Their concept of Aion seemed like a particularly creative interpretation of time:

> In accordance with Aion, only the past and future inhere or subsist in time. Instead of a present which absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once. Or rather it is the instant without thickness and without extension." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1990, p.164)

The authors write about temporality in terms of 'chronos' and 'aion.' Chronos seemed to be a way of dividing time in a way which never settles, but instead folds back in on itself in a manner reminiscent of a Mobius strip:

> Inside Chronos, the present is in some manner corporeal. It is the time of mixings or blendings, the very process of blending; to temper or the temporaries is to mix. The present measures out the action of bodies and causes. The future and past are rather what is left of passion in a body. (1990, Deleuze, p. 162)

In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980)*,* the concept of loops was a pleasing notion. The writers were centred upon their idea of difference and repetition, which, they suggested, challenges the flow of capitalism and its tendency toward absolute repetition. However, in terms of filmic temporality, the loop seemed contradictory:

> How can we sum up this entire vital progression? Let us trace it along a first path (the shortest route): the points of disjunction on the body without organs form circles that converge on the desiring-machines; then the subject—produced as a residuum alongside the machine, as an appendix, or as a spare part adjacent to the machine-passes through all the degrees of the circle and passes from one circle to another. This subject itself is not at the center, which is

occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes. Thus, the circles traced by Beckett's Unnamable: "a succession of irregular loops, now sharp and short as in the waltz, now of a parabolic sweep," with Murphy, Watt, Merrier, etc., as states, without the family having anything whatsoever to do with all of this. Or, to follow a path that is more complex, but leads in the end to the same thing: by means of the paranoiac machine and the miraculating machine, the proportions of attraction and repulsion on the body without organs produce, starting from zero, a series of states in the celibate machine; and the subject is born of each state in the series, is continually reborn of the following state that determines him at a given moment, consuming-consummating all these states that cause him to be born and reborn (the lived state coming first, in relation to the subject that lives it) (Deleuze & Gutarri, [1980] 2000, p. 21.

Deleuze's solo work appeared to celebrate the apparent absorption that was provided by cinema. He frequently speaks in terms of states of a 'spiritual automaton,' but, in contrast to Brecht, Deleuze appeared to be celebrating rather than condemning this state. This may imply that, rather than there being a spectator that observes a film, that there is no spectator as such as much as there is a bodily response to film. He also seemed to ignore the idea that there was even a spectator or audience for a film that was separate to it.

Freud also speaks of the loop of the psychic 'eternal return' or theory of repetition in his description of 'telos' or 'progressive' time. In this way, the psyche must always return to the site of trauma, and therefore can never overcome what Freud presents as the 'lost object.' This is described with clarity by Anna Fodorova in terms of the psychodynamic process:

Freud describes how he observed a game of disappearance and return played by a small boy. The boy had a habit of throwing any small toys away so that it was difficult to find them. He played the same game with his reflection in the mirror. Freud says that this game amounted to a great cultural achievement, it mirrored the boy's acceptance of mother going away. Asking himself about the economic motive, the pleasure involved in this, Freud interpreted the boy's actions through the repetition. Playing an active part in the game helped the boy to learn to master and survive his mother's disappearance – he successfully managed the separation – Freud. (Anna Fodorova (2004) Lost and Found: The Fear and Thrill of Loss, *Psychodynamic Practice*, 10:1, 107-118, DOI: 10.1080/14753630310001650294)

I wondered whether this was what Deleuze was also referring to, and if so, what might be the implication for my film. I questioned whether I was using a Brechtian criticality in my employment of the looping form within *Devon Gothic,* or something else which acknowledged a more recent understanding of subjectivity. The use of the loop within film practice was a critical notion. If Deleuze celebrates the idea that a spectator and a film combined as a sort of amorphous bodily entity, then the question remains as to how we can form a criticality or pre-critical subject position on any film in the way that Brecht did. In short, what was the loop in my film achieving? I decided to leave the loop in *Devon Gothic,* reflecting that its philosophical position within the film had produced more questions than answers.

Chapter 7
Film 5: Echo Piano Lesson (2019)
Poetry, Strangeness and Brecht

Production Diary: *Echo Piano Lesson*

Echo Piano Lesson was devised to be more reminiscent of epic poetry than epic theatre. The piece is designed so that an audience cannot detect where they stop, and the world starts: it was of interest to explore this in terms of pre-modern forms of poetry. However, unlike epic poetry, the piece was not designed to be remembered but, instead, was recited. Sometimes listening can feel even stranger than dreaming, and this is why the piece needs to be read aloud or performed: there is perhaps something more real in the unfiltered 'real'. This was not mere Romantic dreaming, but an expression of the un-boundaried self, similar to the lived experience of schizophrenia. Here, the division between the narrative process and the imaginary are not clear. The narrative itself unravels, starting from the story of a missing parent. Again, performed by Julian Firth, this film was nonetheless comprised of multiple voices. It was intended to be performed and recited by a number of performers, possibly using the space of the gallery itself to achieve its full potential. As a performer, Julian mimicked the rich tones of Richard Burton, a technique intended to mimic Burton's famous reading of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. Thomas' influence is one of a number of modernist references within the piece.

Music from a piano lesson plays in the background, an interruption with a clear challenge to the audience to listen more carefully to the words, and to pay attention. We spent time rehearsing in mid-Wales, trying out rooms inside the cottage we were staying for different tones and echoes. We recorded part of the speech in an abandoned church: Julian played at being a priest at one point, and then as a part of the congregation. We also went out to the churchyard to get the sounds of animals and the wind in the trees in the background. We recorded the piece multiple times, so that the words became less and less important. I pretended to be Werner Herzog to Julian's Klaus Kinski, but neither of us put much store in the analogy. At one point I did make him climb a mountain called Cadair Idris[46], with a paper

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[46] This was the same mountain as that featured in *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017).

boat folded in his hand. Although not quite *Fitzcarraldo*, this was the nearest equivalent we could find in Dolgellau. I quite enjoyed bossing Julian around: I was much more comfortable with this arrangement than I would have been doing this to a woman.

Absurdism was also a clear referent when writing this stream-of-consciousness work. The structure escapes from its structured starting narrative, similar to a Sarah Kane play - it relies on freeform, visual montage and freewriting streams of consciousness. *Echo Piano Lesson* was influenced by absurdist aspects of Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* (1995). Kane spoke in a BBC radio interview in 1996 saying that: "Some media forms can create a duality between good and bad in a hypocritical way" (Kane, 1996). Brecht similarly rejects this dichotomy through his character of Galileo. As discussed previously in chapter 7, Galileo is seen as flawed and vulnerable rather than a traditional hero or anti-hero. The hero/anti-hero of Aristotelian drama was seen as problematic since it leads an audience to a straightforward form of empathy or alternately rejection *via* catharsis, which Brecht saw as culinary. Kane's play was of interest in relation to this as it has no conventional narrative framework in which to place oneself and therefore seems anti-culinary. Instead, like Brecht, the aspects of free form writing and absurdist montage in Kane's play ask an audience to engage actively in critical thought rather than be carried along through the catharsis of a hero's journey.

In *Echo Piano Lesson,* the voicing of a sermon at its conclusion brings the piece from the chaotic or mystical into so-called logical language. Overall, the fragmentation of the narrative and imagery within the piece is designed to jolt spectators from conventional responses. It was due to this intended effect that I considered this strategy to be a form of Brechtianism.

Kaprow, Kluge, Strangeness & Brecht

In this fifth potential 'Exit' from Brecht, three variants of 'strangeness' (or the 'making strange') are explored: the methods of Bertolt Brecht, Alan Kaprow, and Alexander Kluge. The work of both Kaprow and Kluge provided a route to understanding how my own approach to what I have termed poetic writing could prove an exit through and from the use

of Brecht in a formal manner. All of these artists bear comparison to the notion of poetry as a technique for making the ordinary visible, examined, and/or strange again in the mind of the reader or viewer - with the emphasis placed on 'awakening' the viewer into reality. Kluge is the most significant outlier in this context, because his work explores the imaginative space as a specific critical technique. Kluge expressly rejects much of Brecht's critical method regarding the audience and their subjectivity, because he feels the works are too difficult for the audience to engage with fruitfully. The other artists do not respond to Brecht directly, but their practice nonetheless sheds light on possible 'exits'.

This chapter examines how different ways of critical theatrical experience are produced and articulated, by comparing and contrasting the techniques of these three artists. It thus investigates how contemporary artworks might hold strategies to create an exit through and from Brecht. In some contexts, Brecht describes the imaginative as something to be avoided, or even regarded as 'culinary' - yet these artists suggest that the poetic, delirious, or strange can awaken the audience to reality (or more importantly realities) in a way that the dilution of Brecht's effects in commercial and mainstream culture means that they can no longer do.

Although Allan Kaprow is not normally associated with Brecht, his Happenings pave the way for an understanding of the strategies used in the film *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019), through their relationship to what Brecht was attempting in Gestus. In his essay 'performing life' (1979), Kaprow describes his processes in developing the Happenings of the 1950s. He explains the experience of eliminating any previous technique of art or performance from the development of the Happening, saying that: "I was certain the goal was to "do" an art that was distinct from any known genre (or their combinations)" (Alan Kaprow, 1979, xii). Kaprow describes how he tried to eliminate all previous conventional structures from art and performance:

> Since the substance of the Happenings were events in real-time, as in theatre and opera, the job, logically, was to bypass all theatrical conventions. So, over a couple of years, I eliminated art contexts, audiences, single time/place envelopes, staging areas, roles, plots, acting skills, rehearsals, repeated performances, and even the usual readable scripts (Kaprow, 1979, p.xii).

Kaprow goes on to identify what he believes is outside the realm of the typical structures and institutions of an artistic creative model, thereby emphasising the everyday. These mundane rituals become the material for his work. In these daily rituals:

> Brushing your teeth, getting on a bus, washing dinner dishes, asking for the time, dressing in front of a mirror, telephoning a friend, squeezing oranges. Instead of making an objective image or occurrence to be seen by someone else. It was a case of doing something that was experienceable for yourself. It was the difference between watching an actor eating strawberries on a stage and actually eating them at home. Doing life, consciously, was a compelling notion to me (Kaprow, 1979, p.xii).

In consciously noticing these mundane daily routines, Kaprow believes that life itself becomes very peculiar: "Of course, when you do life consciously, life becomes pretty strange - paying attention changes the thing attended" (Kaprow, 1979, p.xii). The result of this is that daily or mundane routines become noticed - and are thereby emphasised. In the emphasis on events not considered as art, but as a routine part of life, Kaprow believes a different type of conscious awareness arises in the experience, and thus in the person 'performing' the task. He describes the feeling of being separated from himself and being conscious of the strangeness of the experience as follows:

> Such displacements of ordinary emphasis increase our attentiveness of course but attentiveness to the peripheral parts of ourselves and surroundings are strange. The participant could feel momentarily separated from him/herself. The coming-together of the parts, then might need the events latent and felt, rather than its clear promise (Kaprow, 1979, p.xii).

Although Kaprow's Happenings are not conventionally associated with Brecht's form of political realism, a comparison can be drawn here with Kaprow's description of Happenings and the Brechtian discussion of Gestus. Gestus was a significant component of epic theatre, in which attention is drawn to how a performance is constructed, through a form of over-emphasis or gesture (what Brecht refers to as the 'Gest'). Gest is described as an important aspect of the v-effekt, (translated here as the A-effect). Gestus was intended to form a key part of epic theatre – one which, in combination with other strategies, was designed at

drawing attention to the so-called realism of conventional theatrical spectacle. Brecht describes the concept of 'Gest' as follows:

> The first condition for the achievement of the A-effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite 'gest' of showing. It is of course necessary to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage acting is taking place in reality and without an audience (Brecht, [1964] 2013, p.136).

With this in mind, I investigated whether Gestus could be considered to have factors in common with Kaprow's attentiveness to the everyday in the Happening: does Brecht's 'Gest' share a commonality with Kaprow's emphasis on the attentiveness to what he terms 'the everyday'?

Brecht describes Gestus as a process where the character performed does not engage in direct empathy for characters he is playing, but instead concentrates on the act of performance itself. Instead, Gestus emphasises the social and political circumstances of the character portrayed, with the aim that the audience should not get distracted by what is emotive within theatre. Instead, the strategy is designed to emphasise the character's social situation and, for the audience, to relate in a consciously critical manner that maintains a thoughtful distance from the performance and performer. Brecht thus states:

> The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed into the character he is portraying…he shows them. He reproduces their remarks as authentically as he can; he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men, but he never tries to persuade himself, (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. (Brecht, [1968] 2013, p.137)

Brecht later expresses his aim that the audience response should not depend on empathy, but should draw attention to its opposite, social potential, by giving attention to its context (the clear-headed or analytic approach being the opposite of empathy):

It is well known that contact between an audience and stage is normally made based on empathy. Conventional actors devote their efforts so exclusively to bringing about this psychological operation that, they may be said to see it as the principal aim of their art. Our introductory remarks will already have made it clear that the technique, which produces the A-effect, is the exact opposite of that which aims at empathy. The actor applying it is bound not to try and bring out the empathy operation. (Brecht, [1968] 2013, p.137)

Although Kaprow's Happenings are often described as a blurring of the state of art and life, suggesting that there is no significant division between (what is considered to be) the everyday and the art itself in Kaprow's work, the artist himself was surprised by the lack of "lifelikeness" in the Happenings. He writes: "Happenings were not nearly as lifelike as I supposed they might be. But I learned something new about life and 'life'." (Kaprow, 1979, p.xi). He was, he claims, interested in the discovery he had made about what he terms life and "life". This is not a blurring of boundaries between life and art but - rather like Brecht's Gestus - a drawing of attention to it. For Kaprow, it is impossible to create a naturalistic performance of 'life' in the happening because, simply by performing mundane daily rituals, he found they were elevated into a conscious space beyond the everyday once they were consciously reproduced.

The gestural nature of Kaprow's performances can be compared to a reading of Brecht's v-effekt, also known as the "Making the Familiar Strange Effect" (Squiers, 2010, p.58). Rather than dissipating a boundary between 'art' and 'life,' they draw attention to the strange in what is familiar in life, and speak of this as art. This does not result in a mirroring between lived experience, and something called art, but draws out the strangeness in life so that it can be transformed into a gesture of art. This points the audience or viewer towards something about the nature of the real beyond the culinary.

It is important to remember that Brecht was working within the theatrical realm in order to promote a political reaction beyond it. He had ambitions for a new form of theatre space which was not dependent on the building itself but could spill from its boundaries to affect politics. This was a metaphorical form of theatre, one which existed in society - not unlike a whole world stage, where reality could be exposed, and the theatre was expanded into life itself. Brecht states his ambition was that a theatre should be the equivalent of a

football match or boxing ring, a space where people involved in the performance are as much involved in 'life' itself as the audience.

Kaprow's writings suggest that he might (unintentionally) achieve what Brecht had set out to realise in his ambitions towards everyday comparisons. Like Brecht, Kaprow is committed to art and seems uninterested in the ideological or performative structures surrounding it - buildings, conventions, or ideological context. Instead, he tries to eliminate these elements from his 'non-performance'. In this sense, he could be taking Brechtian strategy further than Brecht himself. Despite talking of life outside the theatre, Brecht was not able to shake off cultural institutions in the way in which he operated. In Kaprow's performances, the institutions surrounding art disappear, and art seems to approach the impossible problem of creating an institutionally unmediated (if self-conscious) form of life.

Kaprow's work influenced *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) through his relationship to Fluxus and the Beat movement. These movements both attempted to pursue a presence in the 'now' and the 'real', through interventions that removed the scaffolding of 'art forms' that allow a safe distance – much like Kaprow does in his work. These forms were also heavily influenced by Jazz, particularly the notion of exploring music beyond the symphonic, the vaudeville, or the popular - the latter of these being famously culinary. Kaprow sought to force an encounter with some kind of reality by heightening the experience of the everyday, in a similar manner to how the Beat poets used rhythm and idiomatic changes in tone from the everyday to the 'poetic'. They merged these to create a kind of 'shock' effect in the listener through the juxtaposition of these two forms of linguistic method. Kaprow's use of movement elevating the everyday links to the Beat poets as well as jazz, as it enters the improvisational phase and releases its attachment to formal tune. Brecht was well known to dislike Wagner's output, finding it to be the epitome of the culinary. In contrast, both the pioneers of improvised jazz and the Beats attempted to sidestep this culinary manipulation of the audience in order to expose them to reality in a manner similar to Kaprow.

Echo Piano Lesson (2019) relates strongly to these ideas of saturation in a different reality, in life as lived. Non-linear narrative, changes in the register of meaning and form, and related techniques incorporate both the mundane and the heightened, as both Beats and improvised Jazz from Kaprow's era did. The film's engaging with mundane activities follows the work of Kaprow in attempting to create an experience not unlike a meditation, where the audience is both part of and is able to reflect on – they are not told what the meaning must be.

238

This notion of the audience is a significant aspect of the piece. Moreover, the idea of creating one's own meaning (or multiple meanings) is also at the heart of the work of New German Cinema artist and filmmaker Alexander Kluge. Tara Forrest indicates that Kluge has a commonality with Kaprow's desire to eliminate traditional forms of narration when she says that his literary work:

> Systematically undermines the conventional channels *via* which meaning is communicated to the reader. 'all traditional forms of narration', he writes, such as plot, character, action - are suspended, and one has great difficulty orientating oneself. (Forrest, T, 2012, p.16)

Brecht attempts to always draw the viewer to the 'real' (as he defines the term). For Kluge, in contrast, humans cannot deal with the 'real' and therefore need a poetics of fragmentation to grasp something about the world they have not seen before, and in order to form a critical perspective. Examining Kluge's approach offers an exploration towards a fifth potential critical exit from Brecht. This exit allows art to retain a relationship with desire and imagination in the process of awakening the audience to a new critical relationship with reality: something attempted by both Brecht and Kaprow, as described above. Kluge is described as a Brechtian by critics: his critical techniques are compared with Brecht by Gary Indiana in his 1989 interview with the artist in *BOMB* Magazine:

> *Gary Indiana:* In many of your films you show found footage from very early movies, archive photographs and drawings, with the frame cropped in various ways, a Brechtian effect: the films are like free-ranging meditations rather than linear narratives. The viewer notices the cutting. What do you see as the advantages of these techniques?

> *Alexander Kluge:* I show the cutting because I don't believe pictures have to do with one another, whether they're contrasting or similar. They don't carry the information, the information is carried by the cut, the splice. Therefore, the cut should be visible. This is an ideal of early Eisenstein; it's an ideal in literature. In music also, you always reveal your effects. (Indiana and Kluge, 1989, pp. 46-51)

There are also stark contrasts between Kluge and Brecht concerning their approach. This is shown in that Kluge has a differing relationship to what he regards as the transformative properties of empathy and imagination. For Brecht empathy depends on illusion, and is therefore something which should be avoided through the critical consciousness generated by epic theatre. In contrast, Kluge considers the extent to which human beings are unable to live without a considerable degree of illusion and, therefore, imagination:

> Human beings are not interested in reality. They can't be, it's the human essence. They have wishes. These wishes are strictly opposed to any ugly form of reality. They prefer to lie, than to become divorced from their wishes, and to some extent unknown ones. (Indiana and Kluge, 1989, pp. 46-51)

As a result, Kluge has a different relationship to the transformative powers of the fictive or imaginative narrative, and he appears to use this as a critical device in and of itself.[47]

Kluge is quoted by Forrest as saying that "confusion strengthens the muscles of [our] imagination,' and it is the open, the fragmentary, what Kluge describes as, the 'short cut' quality of his stories that encourage readers to become active 'co-producers' in the meaning-making process (Forrest, T, 2018, p.17). Rather than stripping away the institutions and techniques for performance, as Kaprow and Brecht attempt, Kluge's approach is through the encouragement for an audience to 'imagine' and become what Forrest calls 'co-producers' of meaning. (Forrest, 2018, p.17). The imaginative is provoked by Kluge as a different way of interrogating realism. The question thus arises as to how this can happen, and whether the provocation of the imaginative in an audience can become a contemporary Brechtian strategy.

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[47] "*Gary Indiana*: In your short stories and films, you mix fiction with nonfiction. You show the public history and real people along with made-up characters. Your technique emphasises the idea that history is as much a fictional construction as a novel; the model of reality in newspapers and television is a fiction. And there is very little space where other versions of reality can appear.

"*Alexander Kluge*: Human beings forget everything, and can give up everything, except this understanding of misunderstanding reality, the subjective. And that's something good and something bad; I can't really have the good of it without accepting the bad of it. If this is real, then the media industry is realistic in telling fiction, and the construction of reality founded on this basis can only lie. This is one of the reasons why history isn't realistic, it's not documentary, it's not genuine, and it's not necessary." (Indiana and Kluge, 1989, pp. 49-50)

There is reason to question if the imaginative can become a critical strategy, when we bear in mind that Brecht's primary modus operandi was to encourage an audience to default to a form of direct awareness, to react to socio-political reality (*via* the v-effekt) and thus move away from what Brecht considered imaginative escapism in conventional film and theatre. Although Kluge does not confirm that his method is solely Brechtian (for example, he also speaks of Eisenstein's filmmaking and references other forms of music and literature), his notion of images themselves having no link with each other within a film is interesting in terms of Brechtian techniques of non-Aristotelian narrative. It is also interesting to consider what other ways Kluge may enable the emergence of a Brechtian style critique. Unusually, this is connected to how he engages with what he terms the 'human disinterest' in reality.

Unlike Brecht, who expected his audience to engage with the high concept presented without emotion, Kluge's view (which is backed by the popularity of the culinary' itself) is that humans are not able to confront reality in this way. To present this to them, the audience need to be led by their interaction to co-produce the meaning of the film by viewing it. Some of Kluge's work also bears resemblance to Brecht's *War Primer* (1945), as it mixes fiction with non-fiction. Kluge argues that humans cannot comprehend reality as such, and therefore rely on mediation. This section of the interview raises the question as to how Kluge's method of mixing fiction and non-fiction (and his response to the 'fiction' of documentary) plays out within his films. It becomes fruitful to ask if his mixing of what he considers to be human 'disinterest in reality' with the role of the subjective within human 'misunderstanding,' provoke what might be understood to be a Brechtian response. How close to Brecht is Kluge? Does he go beyond Brecht - or even provide new insights into ways in which a new Brechtianism or 'exit' through and from Brecht might emerge in filmmaking practice? This context demands analysis of Kluge's filmic process concerning Brechtian techniques and their realisation, with a view towards discovering if Kluge's approach could be considered a form of visual poetry.

The sound work *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) was an experiment in the use of the poetic as a critical technique. It was created through an imaginative and sensitively emotional style of expression that was influenced by JJ Lecercle's analysis of nonsense language in *Philosophy through the Looking-Glass: Language, Nonsense and Desire* (1985). Lecercle's text became significant for the film as he considers that nonsense has an emergent creative potential. Lecercle suggests that: "Délire is present in every utterance, as an element of

possession, and also of creativity" (Lecercle, 1985, p.199). It was the emergence of this creative potential as a critical tool that was of interest to me when developing *Echo Piano Lesson*. The film was developed in an automatic writing style; I wrote in a formless manner and allowed words to develop on the page at the same time as dislocating and disengaging from the editing process. This lacked the precision of Brechtian method which, as previously discussed, sought to direct the audience towards analytical reflection and political action.

My interest in writing in this style was related to the expression of an unmediated process - the subjective expression of my own neurodivergency. I allowed my mind to create an unfiltered reaction to the world that was the antithesis to any kind of formal writing style - in the context of Aristotelian method, this requires careful intervention through the editing process. The cultivation of a meaningful text relies on a great degree of formal editing in order to produce sense, and I was cultivating a different style of text: one which produced the nonsensical. In Brecht's era, as well as in the context of Aristotelian drama, the production of sense on stage formed what was considered to be naturalism at the time. Brecht's response to naturalistic drama was interventionist: he wanted to re-frame performances so that an audience responded differently and reacted in a way that produced disagreement and dissent in their lives outside the theatre. This process relied on disagreement in an audience and, as such, brought live reactions to the fore. This chapter seeks to compare this with the contemporary context of disagreement produced in live online platforms, in which the clash of opinions produces a form of confusion or polarisation in an audience. This has produced a kind of present-day culinary process in terms of the subjectivity of the audience, and it could be argued that it undermines critical reactions to politics.

I thus used *Echo Piano Lesson,* as a further experiment aimed at cultivating the non-culinary. This formless method bypassed the framing required to produce an Aristotelian narrative structure, and, as such, is designed to be a critical intervention to it. However, it also resists aspects of Brecht's v-effekt, with particular regard to the Hegelian method (this method is expanded upon later on p.244). Hegelian method was one which was produced through a dialectical process. Although anti-Aristotelian method is considered Brechtian, *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) also borrows from the strategies of Antonin Artaud's theatre, in that it uses the power to shock an audience in a way that engages with an affective response alongside the cerebral. Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* had a different dynamic from that of Brecht. Artaud resisted the idea of dialogue in theatre, which Brecht embraced in the dialectic

structure of his method. Artaud argued that dialogue played into Aristotelian theatrical narrative methods in representing psychological conflict and, as such, was an illusory form of theatrical technique. Artaud wished to break down and rebuild theatre, as Brecht did, but did so in a very different manner. He wished humans to express their latent or dangerous urges, and thereby diffuse or be free from them. He thus claimed in 1958 that "what the theatre can still take over from speech are its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility" (Artaud, 1958, p.89). This is at odds with Brechtian critical methods, as Brecht's method relies on dissent being at the centre of a dialectic strategy.

Artaud is seen as more apolitical than Brecht, because his revolutionary theatre starts from the position of the individual, rather than the critique of larger society and politics. However, my investigations imply that this practice cannot be considered apolitical in the context of current understandings of neurodivergent subjectivity. In this context, the personal is also the political. *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) was an expression of my own neurodivergency. As such, the strategy of using an unfiltered form of the poetic was a way to test how a critical form might be developed from a position of neurodivergency that acknowledges a subjectivity which is not often explored in the writings concerning the performative (or even the intersectional). I wanted to apply poetry through ideas of neurodivergent subjectivity in *Echo Piano Lesson*, as a method for moving through and away from Brechtian critique. The ambition for this work was to understand how poetic techniques may challenge the Hegelian basis for Brecht's dialectical strategies.

Hegelian method, specifically dialectical thought, was introduced by Hegel and employed by Marx in his own analytic and critiques is a way of thinking about how the material conditions of any situation drive change. In dialectical thinking, nothing is fixed. For Brecht, in a society that is oppressive and unfair it is the structural method of the dialectic which offers the prospect of change. A dichotomous thesis and antithesis lead to a synthesis, which sets up the next chain of events, and thereby produces a continually evolving process. For this reason, Brecht believed that he could provoke change through his practice in a way that made people aware of their material and social conditions, so they would learn to understand and challenge them.

A critique of Brecht's dialectical method was informed by JJ Lecercle's discussion of délire. Through notions of délire, Lecercle locates a route to a challenge to dichotomous

accounts of language (such as that concerning Brechtian strategy): "the special case of délire shows that the founding dichotomies permit only a partial account of language" (Lecercle, 1985, p.196). In saying this, Lecercle implies that the dichotomous only provides one view of language. This view leaves out what the process of délire or non-sense provides. Lecercle thus argues that délire: "causes doubt of the distinction between the literal and metaphorical use of words" (Lecercle, 1985, p.198). The confused distinction between the literal and metaphorical is a technique that I employ within *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019): I intended for the viewer to be uncertain as to whether a difference exists between what I use as metaphor and what is literal. I wanted to test out whether this dynamic produces an active position for the spectator or viewer. Here, they might be forced to re-assess their own position in relation to more dialectical forms of cultural production.

This work was also a response to ideas which attempt to dictate meaning in an absolute fashion. The poetry I created attempted to make an antithetical move, informed by a reading of the work of Alexander Kluge (as above), but also by discoveries made about the critical potential of poetry in its expression – ranging from Beat Poetry to Post-Modern approaches to the medium. I questioned what would happen in the sliding meanings of poetic sound and writing to the audience, and where would they place themselves.

For Lecercle, délire is a productive state whether created by those considered 'sane' or 'insane', as it produces an emergent state of creativity within discourse. Lecercle claims that 'the peculiarity of délire does not reside in its lack of meaning (the confusion of words involves the meaninglessness of the propositions uttered), but in its surfeit of it (Lecercle, 1985, p.3). As a result, "Reading or hearing délire is no longer an attempt at interpretation, it is an involvement in the flow of words, where the willing audience swims with the current, and allows itself to be carried away by the metaphors" (Lecercle, 1985, p.160). The words I created had a sense of a surfeit of significance, but they did not make immediate sense to a reader or listener. They were designed to have a visceral effect through rhythms and patterns of thought that emerged within the writing. This loss of sense, or non-sense, was significant.

Echo Piano Lesson provides small glimpses of another way to encounter the world. In the poems I used within the film, I reflect on experimental writing as a method of freedom - and, at the same time, of critical method. This positioning is also reflected in Lecercle's description of délire when he suggests that "instead of a linguistic system, we have the unreliable and unpredictable workings of poetic language: not a pack of rules, but a strange

growth, a machine with a dynamic of its own" (Lecercle, 1985, p.161). The approach of *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) is uncustomary, in that it is presented in a way which destabilises the conventions of Aristotelian narrative form. The structure is unpredictable and seemingly random or confusing. Narrative (such as it is) remains the opposite of a more structured method. It refuses resolution and remains, to some extent, an open text. This structure was developed partly through a stream of consciousness, and partly through the deliberate unravelling of conventional poetic form:

> Stoneless pockets float like Lady Nazareth and the porch arch with the cigarette ash and the fond let behind the glory hole. I saw that grin on the captain's face. He shamed himself for a lost lover, His bird-like women, His dead body like fresh. No longer haunting with the starry smile (*Echo Piano Lesson*, 2019).

The decision to both combine and subvert genres was also an important aspect of my approach. I borrowed cadences from the modernist poetry of Dylan Thomas (the work references *Under Milk Wood*) and also certain tensions within the work of TS Eliot and James Joyce - all of whom are referenced, directly or indirectly, within the text. The onomatopoeic word "swoosh" as a boat is launched within the poem is quoted from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

> The lids of the frozen eyes shut like teeth and clipped in wisdom when all the after lights and ears of corn life slowly bites at the compass marks on the white paper like a leaf without its foundling gesture and the tusk of the dry rot and the beaks of the birth of morning and the wasps on shelves and the dry birds and the snoring ants in the eaves of the house like a dragged boat along the shore and the "swoosh!" (*Echo Piano Lesson*, 2019)

The imaginative space of the work presents an alternate reality, in which the audience is addressed through multiple forms of discourse. They are addressed directly, as if breaking an imaginary 'fourth wall' through the intrusion of the narrator, and also in terms of secondary or tertiary perspectives. The work is delivered by actor Julian Firth, but the narrator switches position so that there is no omniscience for the reader or listener. The piece is sometimes from a female perspective yet is read by a male actor.

My plan for the eventual display of *Echo Piano Lesson* is to have the words read on screens by multiple voices within an exhibition space. This would encourage multiple readings, meanings, and perspectives, enabling a free play of voices - none of which is privileged:

> A word is a picture. What has happened? Projects rarely go to plan. And Perhaps. Manhattan was. A mistake. Now. Let's start again. It might go better this time (*Echo Piano Lesson*, 2019).

Structurally, the work dissolves itself from poems that appear to have a more Aristotelian style to form a general entropy/chaos at their finale. When originally presented on the page, varying forms of typography and presentation were used, which sought to experiment with form. The piece sought to destabilise the ideas of what constitutes a 'normal' poetic form, through its method. It refers to itself and also, to the act of writing at certain junctures: for example, in stating "I think to write but words cannot form" *(Echo Piano Lesson,* 2019*).* This is an example of where the writer emerges within the text to address the audience. This provokes debates concerning the status of the text, and, also, the act of writing itself. The visual language of the work presents different world views and refuses any sense of a privileged voice over the reader or listener. This will also be emphasised in any future installation of the work in a designated space.

The work engages with the moving play of signifiers to construct endless cycles of meaning. These meanings are produced through the upturning of phrases, disturbing the logic of language structures within the poem. Ordinary objects are used for poetic purposes within the text, and there is an irreverent sense of play in the film's use of language. This mimics modernist intervention, yet is dispersed by the multitudinous use of different ways of addressing an audience:

> I beat at my table and call for rest but there is none because of the clackety-clack and the beer beetle tree and the berry on the hawthorn and the shacks by the palms bend over in the sand and the arm on the bin lid eats the crushed black paper in the cars on the street and the dints in the bullet holes and Bonny and Clyde fall down and I wonder at the moment the grief comes

and we are holed up in a toothpick like the eye of a needle and the rich try fitting through a hair at a time and the mouths of the strangers are open at such a scene and… *(Echo Piano Lesson,* 2019*)*.

Sound is significant to the recorded version, as it is used to disrupt the reading through the introduction of musical instruments, soundscapes, and voice effects within the work. The film introduces intrusions to the poem not only through a narrator, but also a violin, a flute, and a piano. These combine to disrupt the ability of the audience to hear parts of the poem, adding to its strangeness and slowing the absorption of what could be its meaning. The digital world is also referenced through the nonsensical line "Eyes, Digital Wafting" *(Echo Piano Lesson, 2019).* Overall, the piece is designed to explore how it may be possible to provoke the reader to consider new ideas or concepts, on both a formal and metaphorical level. The work thus destabilises the real world by drawing attention to the unfamiliar in the familiar through the subversion and 'play' of language.

Sparse or disjointed metaphors are presented, to confuse the viewer and disperse the easy reception of the work and thus prevent closure or resolution. This was done with the intention that the audience are engaged with form on a philosophical level. The poem seeks to produce a moving combination of signifiers in order to construct endless cycles of meaning for an audience, none of which serves to enable a complete overall narrative. Given that I was already beginning to write up this thesis, the writings I allowed myself to experiment with in this section represented a move away from formal strategy, and into the intuitive. I was curious whether this idea could create an audience experience that was more Brechtian, in the sense that it aimed at wide-awakeness rather than the culinary. The finished sound piece *Echo Piano Lesson* was my final piece of practical research and experimentation for this project, providing another potential exit through and from Brecht. Poetry, not unlike Lecercle's account of délire, had produced results that were open-ended, and had the potential for further development.

My poetry relied on a different approach to subjectivity than from the direct adoption of Brecht's v-effekts. It re-instated the affective process of responding to the work, which was deliberately and consciously rejected in Brechtian critical method. For Brecht the intention was to encourage space for an audience to deploy critical thought: a realm where they were analytic, rather than directly emotionally involved with events on stage. Although

the concept of a critical awareness sounded to be a productive tool, within my own practice, this distancing or v-effekt had proved problematic. The seeming simplicity of this approach felt alien to my own neurodivergent subjectivity. It treated everyone equally, as if we could all be enlightened, with equal measure, to our social and political positions. It addressed all with the same approach, as if we all started from a position of uniform subjectivity.

My understanding of the intersectional (the idea that we are all differently or multiply oppressed), seemed at odds with a process that treats the audience as if they are starting from the same position. It also caused problems in comprehension, as its mechanistic treatment of the audience does not allow us to encounter work, or even comprehend it, when we start from a position of neurodivergency. My own poetic work created lines of flight. I was escaping by writing my way out of Brecht, knowing that if I ran from my starting point (wherever that was), I was still in it. As I wrote this thesis, the analytic process of writing about writing produced a violent act that was often counter to what I was trying to achieve. Knowing that the reduction and translation of the work to a form of critique depended already on languages that belonged to the constraining spheres of political and economic discourse. Such a reduction undermined and reduced my attempts to produce the poetic as free play. I proceeded with my writing, knowing I would still be in the same position. These were places alien to the subjective. I was thus aware that the aesthetic tradition created a theory that art was a freedom of the subject, but this was a freedom impossible to achieve. Aesthetic freedom was a compensation for a lack of freedom elsewhere: it was a licensed process. The detachment Brecht had produced implied that traditional aesthetics could form a critical subject. This was counter to the precarious approach I adopted in *Echo Piano Lesson*.

The work had emerged from the improvised creation of something which spoke about a commonality in affective processes that had been rejected in Brechtian discourse. My poetry refused the autonomy promised by Brecht's strategy, taking flight in a form of stowaway improvisations that rejected the so-called emancipation promised in revelatory aesthetics. I was aware that this revelatory aesthetics had, through this same approach, produced a subjugation. My poetic approach, like a stowaway within my practice, had not escaped the laws of language. Instead, it had rejected the illusion of freedom produced by an autonomy of the subject which is individuated and abstracted in the absorption of the universal. It was a lawless performance which threw back this differentiation and, although

this held me back from liberation, I knew I was not alone. There was a shared multitude of voices embodied, echoing within each poetic utterance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarise the progression of this thesis: the evolution of my engagement with Brecht, the development and making of the five films, the full range of techniques used and, finally, how they give us a different way of looking at the use of Brechtian strategies in the context of contemporary fine art film.

Each of the previous five chapters discusses the making of one of the five films that make up the practical aspect of this thesis. Each of these film works are attempts to 'exit' through and from formal approaches to Brechtian filmmaking. The works were created in response to the discovery that Brecht regarded his audience as an undifferentiated group, which led me to approach filmmaking in a way that acknowledged Brechtian ambitions alongside more recent understandings of subjectivities as intersectional and complex rather than undifferentiated. The five film works and 'exits' were a conceptual development – each led on from the last, as each experiment led to my finding a 'new Brechtian approach' to create a non-culinary film. The works would aim to build an 'awakened' audience. Individually, the film works, and their methodologies had their own successes, but also created their own problematics.

Chapter Three, titled *Exit 1: Gaslighting (2015) Brecht, Subjectivity, and Feminism*, concerned the film *Gaslighting*, which was developed in response to contemporary feminist views of subjectivity emergent since Brecht's era. The chapter examined the notion of performativity as expressed by Judith Butler, exploring how this concept was lacking in both Brecht's age and his methods or ideas. The film and writing also considered what could be done to introduce this in a meaningful way in terms of it having an awakening effect. Ranciere's examination of the Brechtian subject's problematic nature was also explored. This became a starting point of comparison to Butler's notions of performative gender and subjectivity. The chapter thus described the practical discoveries gained through the making of the film work *Gaslighting,* which examined how the Brechtian tradition could take on or work with diverse subjectivities. Both Butler (2006) and Ranciere (2011) suggested that a new way of thinking is needed to accommodate and awaken a diverse audience. This contributed to a methodology to make the film-work *Gaslighting* (2015) as an attempt to 'exit' through and from Brecht. The chapter discussed the creation of the film work, as well as

describing how *Gaslighting* introduced intersectionality as a filmic method. The chapter also considered responses to the films: in particular, it became clear that I needed to look at strategies to undermine Aristotelian narrative that went beyond Brechtian techniques for doing so. The problematic nature of the unitary sense of subjectivity in the 'Character is Destiny' trope often found in classical notions of the protagonist took the exploration of subjectivity and Brecht into a new area for the second chapter – and the second film work.

Chapter Four: Exit 2: Letters Home, (2016). *Brecht and the Epistolary Form* described the process of making a second attempt to exit from Brechtian formal strategies. The film *Letters Home* explored strategies of epistolary form (letter writing), as a route to a contemporary critical method. Knowing that letters in cinema create many effects, including the culinary, I created a film that incorporated an archive of letters to see if the epistolary form could have a similarly disruptive effect to Brecht's use of banners and placards. As Brecht's strategies had done, this disruption was an attempt to provoke political consciousness or 'awakening' in the audience. The use of writing had a clear link to banners and placards in theatre, while being in a different medium. The nature of the medium was explored, as filmmaking has a long history of using letters: strategies were devised to upend and disrupt those, in a similar manner to how Brecht had upended and disrupted theatre traditions.

The chapter produces analysis of the use of letters in other films. In particular, this is centred upon the rhetorical and temporal effects of letters within the cinema, and on the theoretical debates around these. Chapter Four documents the process of creating the methodologies and the making of the film itself, as well as the subsequent reaction from audiences. Once again, this led to a period of reflection as to the new directions to take the experiment. The epistolary form had offered various exits through and from Brecht, towards a new space of critical engagement that took into account more recent understandings of subjectivity. However valuable these may be, the use of gender disruption, temporal disruption, and removal of context for heavily culturally laden signifiers led me to think about the role of the narrator.

Chapter Five: Exit 3: Somewhere in Macedonia. Brecht and Unreliable Narration asked what the use of an unreliable narrator could enable in terms of developing a more contemporary understanding of Brechtian criticality that took into account and developed more recent views of subjectivities. This chapter was concerned with the development of the

film work *Somewhere in Macedonia*, which provided an exploration into the process of unreliable narration. This film's potential exit through and from Brecht was thus an examination of unreliable narration as a critical method.

Firstly, the chapter describes how I developed this method in my own film making by exploring its history in literature and the theory surrounding its use, with particular reference to my own status as a neurodivergent individual. The artwork aimed to try to both understand and demonstrate how history can often be asserted from a deliberately chosen subjective perspective and questioned how we can examine the authority status of different narrators. Ideas of narrative authority are deeply embedded in the politics of neurodivergency, so by representing a neurodivergent subjectivity within the film treatment, I could show the bias of established authorial processes. My film, and the treatment for it, aimed to explore the positive benefit to critical method of using an unreliable narrator to develop a narrative. Once again, it seemed that I needed to find an exit from Brecht to 'effect' an active audience. Even the unreliable narrator had a history of being used to reinforce power structures that needed to be dismantled to enliven an audience. This discovery produced new questions. Once again, Exit 3 lead me somewhere new - an examination of allegory as a possible narrative disruptor.

Chapter Six: Exit 4: Devon Gothic. Brecht and Allegory as a Strategy explores the artwork *Devon Gothic* (2018), which itself describes an unexpected relationship between Brecht's strategy and the use of allegory within film. This chapter investigates allegory as a productive approach for creating a new Brechtian-style critical method. This was informed by Walter Benjamin's writings on the same subject. In applying allegory to an understanding of Brecht in contemporary art practice, I asked how allegory can produce a novel critical form in its own right. When this is applied to Brechtian v-effekt techniques in filmmaking, allegory becomes a critique of the language that Brecht used in order to destabilise the viewer. Allegory becomes a v-effekt strategy, and *Devon Gothic* thus represents an experiment in allegory, repetition, and the production of destabilisation.

Chapter Seven: *Exit 5: Echo Piano Lesson (2019): Poetry, Strangeness and Brecht* describes and demonstrates my poetic sound work and writings through examining my work *Echo Piano Lesson.* The ambition for this chapter was to understand how poetic techniques may challenge the Hegelian basis of Brecht's formal strategies. I asked what would happen in the sliding senses of poetic sound and writing to the audience, investigating where an audience would place themselves - or even, given the intersectional nature of subjectivity,

how many places they would occupy. The chapter and the artwork explore JJ Lecercle's (1989) analysis of nonsense language and investigates how this could apply to contemporary art practice. Lecercle analyses the use of 'nonsense' within various literatures and forms, which he terms 'délire.' For Lecercle, délire is a productive state, whether created by those considered 'sane' or 'insane.' Lecercle suggests that délire produces a new state of creativity within discourse.

The finished sound piece *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019) was my final piece of practical research for this thesis. It exits from many formal Brechtian strategies but exists as a Brechtian piece in the sense that it attempts to awaken a viewer or listener in order to disrupt their sense of 'self' – to expose the possibilities of the multiple subjectivities inside each individual person, and give voice to the notion of multiple and intersectional identities or subjectivities. This critical understanding of working with notions of subjectivities contrasts sharply to some aspects of Brecht's work, most notably those identified in Chapter 3 that demonstrate that Brecht's audience was considered as one unitary subjectivity.

As a result of my research, each chapter develops ways to apply my discoveries to the next work. They evidence ways in which other artists might adopt the strategies and, also, provide a map for potential routes forward for future areas of research. This thesis seeks to open a discussion for artists and theorists to explore the Brechtian project in a contemporary, critical light – to hold true to his ambition to create a non-culinary cultural practice. This approach does not consider the v-effect to be a set of definitive methods or a guaranteed recipe for awakening, in the context of contemporary understandings of subjectivities and the contemporary use of Brechtian techniques in other cultural arenas.

One discovery that deserves further investigation and debate is how formal Brechtian-style devices are used by organizations and processes. One particularly prominent example is the culinary world of advertising, which Brecht had abhorred. Brecht's aim for a critical consciousness, where an audience took a thoughtfully antagonistic stand on events and thereby would seek or work to create change in their own time, still has significant ramifications for our era. It could be argued that now, more than ever, we need to develop and maintain a critically informed audience.

Brecht lived and worked in an era of a defined proletariat; a notion derived from Marxist ideas of social class. Brecht took this proletariat to be a generalised form of

audience: Brecht's call to arms subsumed individual subjectivities and melded them into a group – at least at a theoretical level. Our era has provided a greater understanding of the complexities of subjectivities, in part led by marketing that seeks to place people in niches through their intricate buying patterns, as well as by consumption, and by successful protest movements for civil, gay, and women's rights (to name only a few). In this sense, Brecht's generalisation of an audience could not encompass differences of an intersectional nature, such as those defined by Audre Lorde in earlier chapters.

Contemporary artists live in a time where recognition of the intersectional and performative constructions of identity have emerged and begun to be theorised at both academic and popular levels. Audiences are no longer regarded as generally oppressed by a patriarchal capitalism in a singular fashion, but multiply and differently affected by the shifting institutional forces and the social environments they live within. These changes between the Brechtian era and the contemporary era demonstrate the need to form new methods for political and artistic critique concerning subjectivity. Some of these approaches are outlined in this research, however these changes also show the necessity for explorations that lie outside the focus of this doctoral thesis but are touched upon and hinted at by it.

One example, which emerged as I came to the end of writing up my research, was an alarming insight concerning the mechanics of group polarisation. The analysis *The Dynamics of Group Polarisation* by Carlo Proietti (2018), suggested that when a group of people is given time for analytic reflection on any divisive matter, time spent thinking can result in more significant disagreement or polarisation between different parties.[48] This was a goal Brecht actually aimed for and desired, as he sought to provoke rather than wait for a mass Marxist revolution. However, we can see that the application of Brechtian techniques aimed at division to other fields could imply that his strategies have since been absorbed into the broader culture, particularly the digital world. These methods are used by the politics of the political Right as much as (or even more than) the Left. The most obvious and often

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[48] "Exchange of arguments in a discussion often makes individuals more radical about their initial opinion. This phenomenon is known as Group-induced Attitude Polarization." (Proietti, C, 2018, *The Dynamics of Group Polarisation*, University of Amsterdam, p.1).

"Understanding the dynamics that lead to polarization is particularly relevant in the era of social networks, because of the dramatic global effects they may cause. Indeed, virtual forums and political debate seem to across so-called bipolarization effects, i.e., the tendency of different subgroups to radicalize their opinions towards opposite directions." (Proietti, C, 2018, *The Dynamics of Group Polarisation*, University of Amsterdam p.1).

discussed form of this can be seen in social media, in which groups of people with different perspectives meet online, sharing information and debating as to where the truth of any particular type of information lays. With the relativism in the current era as to political truth, as well as the debates surrounding 'fake news', any resistance to capitalism through a Brechtian formal method could be said to have come full circle. If an audience is encouraged to be consciously critical through the Brechtian method's formal expression – that is to say, through the revelatory process about what they see, read and hear that Brecht aimed for in the 1930s-1950s – then some of this understanding is placed on an unstable footing in the context of contemporary art. The techniques are employed by both Right and the Left: they are value-neutral as a set of methods.

This double-use makes some applications of Brecht not just redundant but actually counter-revolutionary (unless the revolution is one of 'populism' or instead 'fascism'). The audience or reader is compelled by the analytic process's demand to become more embedded in existing views, and less open to understanding, learning, and tolerance: to choose only one of their many intersectional identities as the most essential or sole identity and to embed their political actions, views and life upon that. This could be said to underlie the current 'Culture Wars' that take the place of an understanding of the fundamentals of how economies and societies function. This approach places ideologies at the forefront, rather than active and awakened change. The current culture wars between Right and Left helps create this political polarisation. This is evidenced in the emergence of recent Trumpism, and the influence of social media strategies in embedding extreme opinions. Issues such as abortion have been central to this polarisation in politics across the world.

The fact that Brecht's formal strategies are being co-opted as much by the right as by the left would have alarmed Brecht gravely. Therefore, it has been prescient to re-examine how we are using Brechtian style practice within contemporary art and criticism, to ask if we are responding adequately to the complex, intersectional, demands of our time. This thesis has demonstrated that there is no one approach to a new Brechtian criticality in a current era; in fact, there are many more to be explored as new understandings of subjectivity emerge. However, one certainty is revealed: the conventional use of the Brechtian method, which regard it as if it is set in stone, is no longer appropriate for a critical filmmaking practice. This era demands new ways of critique, for a creative practice as suited to this political moment as Brecht's were suited to his. Brecht never saw his strategies as a fixed method of creating

revolution: he saw them as 'things to try', aiming to disrupt, engage, and awaken his audience to their capacity to revolution. It is to this spirit that I dedicate this work.

Appendix 1: Treatment from *Somewhere in Macedonia* (2017)

'Somewhere in Macedonia' Treatment

This film surrounds events that took place during the First World War where a young Welsh soldier discovers that his gay lover, whose poems and letters he has been receiving for months, was in actual fact killed months before.

(The timeline follows significant dates not only in terms of war but also in the history of gay liberation)

The film is based on a series of letters left by my great uncle. The film explores the way in which history is represented in an objective way by official record and compares this with the subjective accounts of the experiences of the individual. The film blurs fact and fiction where an audience concludes where the 'truth' of a story lies. My recently completed short film 'Somewhere In Macedonia' is to be extended to a feature length film.

CHARACTERS

Selwyn: An elderly Welsh man who experiences Schizophrenia and narrates the story (nephew of Idris).
Daniel: A young (30) Hollywood Research Assistant
David: A gay Welsh Stretcher Bearer in the Royal Army Medical Corps
Idris: David's Lover also a poet and Stretcher Bearer
Ceri: Idris' Younger sister. She appears as both young and old in the film.
Hywel: Stretcher Bearer
Bob: Stretcher Bearer and priest.
Irini: A Macedonian Woman who nurses the fictional Idris back to health in Macedonia
Sergeant Grant: The Commanding Officer in Idris' Trench – A repressed homosexual therefore very challenging to Idris. Aggression toward Idris pushes the younger soldier to suicide. Grant subsequently writes a novel to cover up the sexuality of Idris and to preserve his memory as a poet.
Emily Grant: Sergeant Grant's now elderly wife.

Following reports of the death of his closest companion, Welsh war poet and pacifist Idris is ordered to fight on the warfront, which compels him to abandon the letters and books that brought him peace and enter willingly into the certain death of no-man's land.

The film is derived from the titles of a series of existing letters, documenting the relationship and experiences of two homosexual poet-soldiers stationed in Macedonia during the First World War. From an intact archive of personal correspondence and poetry comes an unlikely (but true) War story of two young gay soldiers and a parallel fictionalized 'straight/heterosexual' narrative that seemingly contradicts historical record.

Appendix 2: Script from *Devon Gothic* (2018)

DEVON GOTHIC

by

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"DEVON GOTHIC"

SCENE 1.

MORNING INT. MARY SHELLEY'S FRONT ROOM.

The door opens to an empty house. The camera walks us through
the empty house (as if a ghostly presence).

We see various stuffed animals staring out from glass cases
and lots of clocks. We hear clocks ticking. A door opens to
reveal Mary Shelley's office and writing desk.

We see a letter addressed to Mary Shelley is on her writing
desk. We see the pages of a book on the desk blow open.

~~A white net curtain blows in the wind.~~

We see an owl in a glass dome.

A clock chimes.

Then we hear the sound of breaking glass.

We see the broken glass dome without the owl. It has broken
free from its' stand and smashed through the window to leave
a hole in the glass. We see a few feathers float through the
air.

We see MARY SHELLEY (1) AND MARY SHELLEY (2)'s heads in glass
boxes next to each other.

SCENE 2.

MORNING. INT.

Chatterton types on a typewriter with one hand and eats an
apple with the other. Chatterton hears a noise of broken
glass and he hurriedly leaves the room.

Snow falls on his typewriter until it is buried in snow.

SCENE 3.

Shot of MARY (2)'s head in its glass box, MARY (1)'s box is
empty.

MARY SHELLEY (1) walks into her room and notices the broken
dome. She touches the glass and pricks her finger. She goes
to the window and looks out through the hole in the glass
that the bird has left.

Shot of MARY SHELLEY (1)'s head back in its glass box. MARY
(2)'s box is empty.

MARY SHELLEY (2) is looking out of the hole, leaves the house and begins to search in the garden for the bird.

~~She finds a baby under muslin.~~
~~The baby has a man's head.~~ :CUT

She continues searching then eventually returns to the house.

She looks out of the window again when she returns inside, and MARY (1) is looking back at her, mirroring the earlier shot.

Shot of MARY (2)'s head back in its glass box, MARY (1)'s box is empty.

SCENE 4.

NIGHT, INT. VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S LABORATORY.

We see the FM radio being tuned by FRANKENSTEIN and switched between stations.

An owl spins round to look at the camera

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN sits down in his laboratory he puts shards of diamonds in the back of the workings of a clock. EDMUND HILLARY is also sitting in the laboratory, reading a newspaper. We see bubbling pots and candlelight.

FRANKENSTEIN takes the newspaper from EDMUND HILLARY and wraps up a parcel, which contains a glass dome from a clock. He passes it to EDMUND HILLARY.

EDMUND HILLARY leaves dressed in snow garb and goggles. He climbs down a flight of stairs feeding a rope as he climbs the steps as if climbing down a mountain. He carries a parcel.

Snow is floating inside the house.

He gets to the bottom of the stairs and walks out of the building. He has to lean on the door to close it as the snow is piled up high and escaping from the house into the outside. We see snow coming through the windows.

He walks off down the road with the parcel.

SCENE 5.

INT. MARY SHELLY'S (1) HOUSE - MORNING

We hear an Owl Hooting.

Knock on door.

MARY SHELLEY (1) moves to the door, checking herself in the mirror as she goes.

She receives the parcel from Edmund Hillary.

She walks back, double-checks in the mirror, stares back at her in reflection with an Owl in the reflection.

SCENE 6.

FRANKENSTEIN stamps on the ground

We see worms moving up through the soil.

We see worms creep to the surface.

FRANKENSTEIN collects worms putting them in jar.

FRANKENSTEIN looks up and spies BIRDMAN on the horizon.

The BIRDMAN leaves

FRANKENSTEIN secretly buries the worm jar in the earth.

Move forward!

We see the BIRD MAN signaling with a mirror towards the camera.

FRANKENSTEIN digs up the worm jar and opens it.

The worms have turned into snow.

We see the BIRDMAN on a log watching FRANKENSTEIN

FRANKENSTEIN shoots at the BIRDMAN with a musket. Pigeon feathers fly. We see feathers float in the sky.

JUMP CUT TO:

Pigeon Feathers land on CHATTERTON's deathbed, he is lying in a hammock. The frame looks like the pre-Raphaelite painting. The BIRD HEAD mask is beside him.

SCENE 7.

MARY SHELLEY (2) unwraps the parcel, which holds a glass dome. She puts the glass dome over the stuffed owl.

We see the owl looking out from its' original setting. [LOOP]

THE END.

Appendix 3: Script from *Echo Piano Lesson* (2019)

5. Echo Piano Lesson

I dreamed of a Blue God once.
The wind started barking at my bite,
Dogs in the crowd surrounded me with their Iris blue stares,
Holding me down with rum and bitterness.
I cried that they were hurting but my shout echoed around the hillside,
It filled back at my ears,
A pain from the pan over-filled bay.
A thing bites at the back of Jesus,
And sometimes calls out from among the reeds,
I am frightened of his voice,
I am lonely and lost like a pinned rag doll.
I can hardly fight now.
I am weak and the others are strong,
Among mattresses of pea filled beds and the clown sized hole in the tree and the brown owl
that shouts my name with soot and hard wick candles that were lain against the river, when
the boats were idle at the tide,
The women, the women, were walking by
Among the peat bogs.
A word lost among lovers you once knew,
I can't, I can't, I can't remember.
I stumble and fall and graze my knee and look back over my shoulder time and time again for
some silent sound that might whisper among the trees.
The bomb lost its breath,
Among the shallow beds.
A fire was in the fold,
Apple boughs bending,
Salt on tender meat.
Cheap shoes and carpet that burns your feet.

The girl in the cupboard or the book by the door handle saying let me out keep me safe and
look down my dress but don't say my name.
With compasses and rules and children thrown across tables,
And under brackets
And how much can I take?
And why and why and who is calling?
And why is your accent only the same?
And the sound truth will not stay and breathe on the God of the Waterfall
And the truth of his Lady.

When I looked up, I saw in your face something I would like to be,
And my nerves rewired.

My teeth are filled with limpets and my hand burns on the electric chair I'm biting on the soft
sponge in my mouth and the bites of the leather in the shoehorn.
My home is like baked bread roofs and the smoke from the limpid chimneystacks.
The belt and braces neighbours haul out their coal and build ponies underground with digital
eyes.

Yaks and feathers in the pasture and old turnips rot and smell like cows' tongues and harvest
is black with ergot and mad toby crawls like a soft-shelled crab on the bricks on the skirts of
my grandmother.
She yells him downstairs in the starched white apron and the shoulder pads of Dallas and the
homecoming.
Fasten your lips to the closed curtains where death walks past.
Showing the knowing funeral cars and the hymns in the chapel and the smoke from the stacks
and the lost chills in the rubble and the tears that shatter the earth.
The mangled ruins of the shopping trolley,
Loaves unleavened
And the wonder of two old potters and gleaners
Rambling up cobweb stairs.

The local idiot shouts at the cars.
The idiot. No one will slow down.

We all keep working under the laundry Isle.
We bite the earth and catch the dust that blows from a moth encased in glass but breathless
and trying to get out through the forked trunks.

The bible-black times and the tunes of the hummingbird
The egret that never came here before today.

Stoneless pockets float like Lady Nazareth and the porch arch with the cigarette ash and the
fond let behind the glory hole.
I saw that grin on the captain's face.
He shames himself for my lost lover, and his bird like women and his dead body like fresh.
No longer haunting me with a smile and a starry shirt with its pockets pulled out like tongues
to collect change and his last breath like glue on a mousetrap.
With the cry of the moth as it is caught on the glistening dew.

Stumbling feet, cold feet, feeling cold for the cleaner who whistled for me to return.

Running from womanhood and only having the heart to get married after I reach the barren
field of earth among the lemming grey sky.
Here, where he said goodbye to Mars,
I leapt from the stairs at the theatre,
I itched from the arms of my Wool jumper.
The jumper I was never meant to wear.

Bottle green was not the colour of the village.
The people stood in the gateways,
Staring at the girl who shouted out,
Robbed the village shop,
Threw out the eggs with the bathwater and shelved plans for the windowpane,
Stuck her hand through the rubble to reach the beloved buried day.

The almond breath from starving children,
Dead flowers whose water smelt of piss.

And I felt guilt and I felt shame to be a woman or a man in that absconded moment of dread when all the earthed was felling.
Suddenly it all abates.
All beaks were filled with pleasure
The black mountain was lured down.

The beatniks are elderly in their listless rhythm
Sold with its eyes half closed

A golden acid beast
Sitting stone faced on an island
Waiting to bring the boats
To the child hiding under the sandcastle.
Black like ink nibs,
The mole with eyes that can't see but hears
We all lost our way.
There were no maps of this place beyond the still beating hearts of lemongrass and honeysuckle and all the sweet smells that bring us to birth and bible and Brompton Oration.

Eyes digital wafting and toothless faeries and grabbing meds and mead and beer and merry men among the hawthorns and tuneless tigers that stumble and tigers that light in beauty and claws that walk a fine line between the elbow creases of the children who run to the blurry night and the still lit stars and the beyond moments that we haven't yet met and my loss and yours and all of our houses alight with love and taunting and gripes about what could have been and the rock of the boiler and tramps lifting the lids of the cabbage carts and the open mother arboreta or the eighteen legged beast that lives under the toilet seat or the bite that was worse that the bark of a tree and a turkey oak that burns with Gods voice in the mountain where we sleep in the pipes for shelter.

Heaven is near but far and we don't have faith in failure, and I cry to fail I fail to cry. Bascule bridges come toward me.
The horse with its face caved in and its tongue loose and lost like a ship sunk with a voice among heathens.

The lids of the frozen eyes shut like teeth and clipped in wisdom when all the after lights and ears of corn life slowly bites at the compass marks on the white paper like a leaf without its foundling gesture and the tusk of the dry rot and the beaks of the birth of morning and the wasps on shelves and the dry birds and the snoring ants in the eaves of the house like a dragged boat along the shore and the swoosh!

Across the pebbles before the launch of a red flag and a light a light lifts up the parcels stringed with a matted hair on the lunch and the scattered shadows where the willow weeps and the women washing clothes in the river and the stones over, stones over stones, and the water's slipping reach each never again like to repeat a water lily among crooked smiles and heart strung flavours when orientation is no longer a shame.

I beat at my table and call for rest but there is none because of the clacketty clack and the beer beetle tree and the berry on the hawthorn and the shacks by the palms bend over in the

sand and the arm on the bin lid eats the crushed black paper in the cars on the street and the dints in the bullet holes and Bonny and Clyde fall down.

I wonder at the moment the grief comes and we are holed up in a toothpick like the eye of a needle and the rich try fitting through a hair at a time and the mouths of the strangers are open at such a scene and the tusk of the day is to breathe and the breath is sock filled with rocks on a trefoil and the plumage of the pigeon or the sea eagle and all the while the hum of white noise far off is the river where we pissed and had our clothes stolen by the boy in the barn rafters and the trotting of the hackney pony and the rag and bone man and the onion seller speaks Bretagne and the boat my granddad knew the language of that had no figurehead. The man who challenged the harpies, but no man is that strong among the lilies and the bite breath and the fastening like a zip and the horseshoe on the mirror or the stacks of papers that overflow the fleeting gulls who peck at rattling tins in the pebbles in my mouth.

Each day I think to speak but words don't come to wisdom and there's not a dry eye in the house when I sit in the docks and call to the sky to rain on me like violets and call to me like babies that never cwtch or suckle on the yew berries older than the building they surround and the hare under the skirts of the midwife as she runs down the valley to crown the steeple where a monk jack leaps and breathes beyond fighting jets and the blood and the crinkle cut scar on your ear and the wise speak at joy and the love that breathes from the flowers that speed like chalk on the bow of the brow of the carpenter who sits idly sinking in the quicksand and the boast of the charlatan who sells hat stands to tourists and the buttress of the leafed oak and the better days we had when all was sunny and all was calm like a breath on a window that fades quietly and retreats to one breath and the fizz on the end of your kiss from her deer look back with black eyes.
Blushing like peach skin.

She bought a trinket and sold it to a crisp florist in a brown paper jacket like the overcoat with a slight of hand and the beast caught a mouthpiece to shop falters like a minor earthquake in some place lifted the other side by the world of gun shops and mice in the bitter flooring chipped worthy of mighty flea-spectacled with the roan pony in the gymkhana in Indian Ink that no-one remembers what they shot across the barricades and most of the footfall was the art words standing like the diesel in the truth of art that looks just like art in its own time and the blower fish and the striped pelican beaks that carry eggs in truffle sand and the might of the tree felled in silence if life was lit by capers and matches in the mouths of children and the smoked dibbies in the sand covered Balkan ice beam of the Linoleum licked gym-room and the delight of the taunting leotards and the waspish stares and the unique acknowledged of the unique otherness that when we swallowed the water and caught vials in the floating hand that lay below the elbow of the bittern shore or was it the lady of the river like Ophelia who caught a cold but got back out after trying to count daisies and hamlet lied but she survived and the days that rained keys and the rock of validation from the subcultural rhythm of hip hop in the street . And every day I lie about who I'm not and I stand to be seen or sit to be watched as women do to stay are they are with the challenge of butter breath of scars on the arm and the yellow slide show and the burns the projector overheats like glycerin tears and the breakfast that never happened with the lady with the bouffant who liked girls but never slid her hand under a silk shirt and the hair on a nipple that grew back on the chin and the Otis Reading nightshirt who wore it as a kid or the pink

sand and the arm on the bin lid eats the crushed black paper in the cars on the street and the dints in the bullet holes and Bonny and Clyde fall down.

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