

SLIDE ONE:

Navigating Friction:  
A Filmmaker's  
Exploration of  
Collaborative  
Storytelling in  
Fiction Production



SLIDE TWO:



- This presentation is part of a larger **practice-led research** project around the making of **fiction**.
- How fiction is developed and produced is **complex**, and a process that is not often revealed to all.

- As a practitioner and educator in filmmaking practices, my research has begun to focus on the **process** of fiction production and its implications for **equality** and **inclusion**.
- My research is still on going and therefore this paper represents the initial stages of the project.
- Utilizing process-led reflexive praxis, my objective is to explore and foster a **deeper engagement** with fiction production.

### SLIDE THREE:

## AIMS FOR TODAY


- Why research into production processes is important
- Discuss friction as a positive concept within the production process
- Screen the film
- Conclude
- Questions



- I will briefly introduce you to my research today.
- Discussing why I believe the fiction production to be a fruitful site of study.
- I also want to discuss **friction** as a **positive concept**, particularly in terms of the short fiction film I made called *About the Night*.
- I will screen just a clip today so I can frame it around the notion of **friction** as a storytelling **device**, as well as making some closing comments about **friction** within the production process.



SLIDE FOUR:



## Immensely complex product

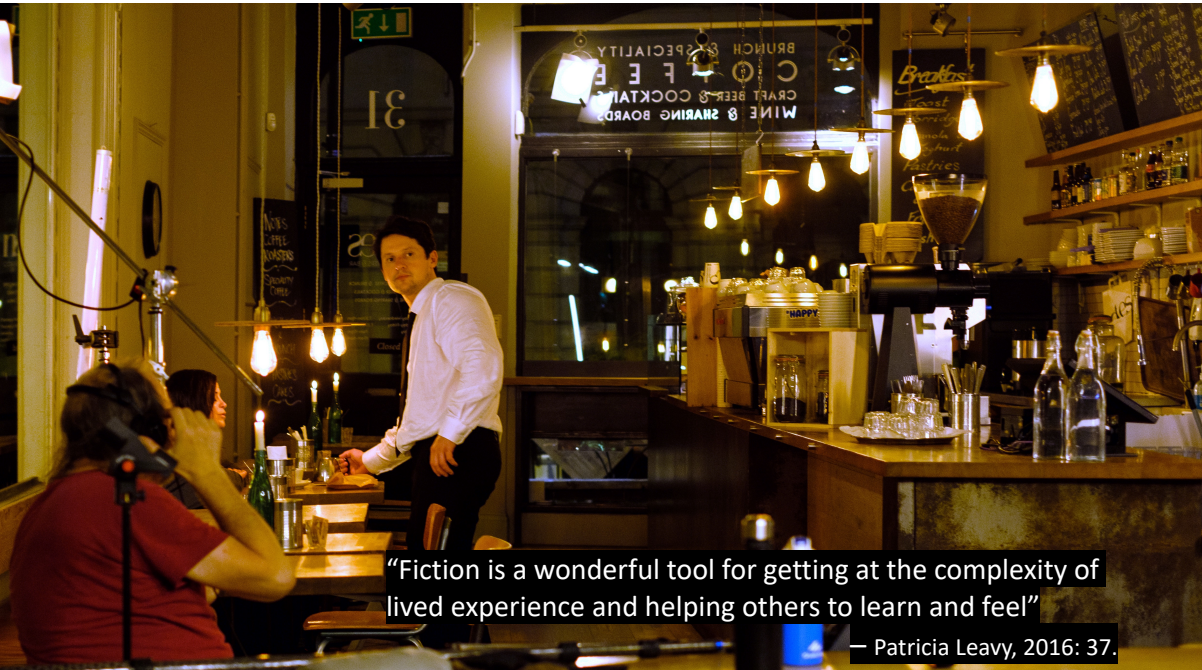
“A film is an immensely complex product, integrating numerous art forms (such as writing, design, and performing arts), and the scope for combining the inputs in order to achieve new content varieties are, in Caves’s (2000) words, infinite.”

- Mark Lorenzen, 2009: 13

*Article: Creativity in Context: Content, Cost, Chance, and Collection in the Organization of the Film Industry*

- While film and media 'products' are undoubtedly **complex texts** for critical analysis, I want to bring your attention to the area of **fiction production**, arguing that the complexity of these productions extends far beyond the realms of **interpretation**.
- Indeed, these works are immensely intricate artefacts to **create**, encompassing a **spectrum of challenges** from the development of an idea, through to the final product.
- As Mark Lorenzen's states, film production is **complex**, suggesting that while it offers scope for **new** content creation with **infinite** potential, the reality is there is **limited** room for **experimentation**.

SLIDE FIVE:



“Fiction is a wonderful tool for getting at the complexity of lived experience and helping others to learn and feel”

— Patricia Leavy, 2016: 37.

- For emerging filmmakers **lacking reputation** or financial resources, navigating this landscape presents significant challenges to **innovation** and **creative risk-taking**.
- And a medium that has so much potential becomes increasingly **formulaic** and **predictable**.
- While there have been breakout moments both in cinema and television, there is a **narrow understanding** of what makes a **good story**.
- There is also a set of complex networks of **gate keepers** and processes that **inhibit** new and ground-breaking work.
- So, despite the **infinite potential** of the medium, both film and television industries largely adhere to **narrow forms of storytelling**, which restricts **different** creative voices.
- My overall argument is that we need to **change** the **dynamics of the process**, as well as **who** gets to take a **leading** creative role.

#### SLIDE SIX:



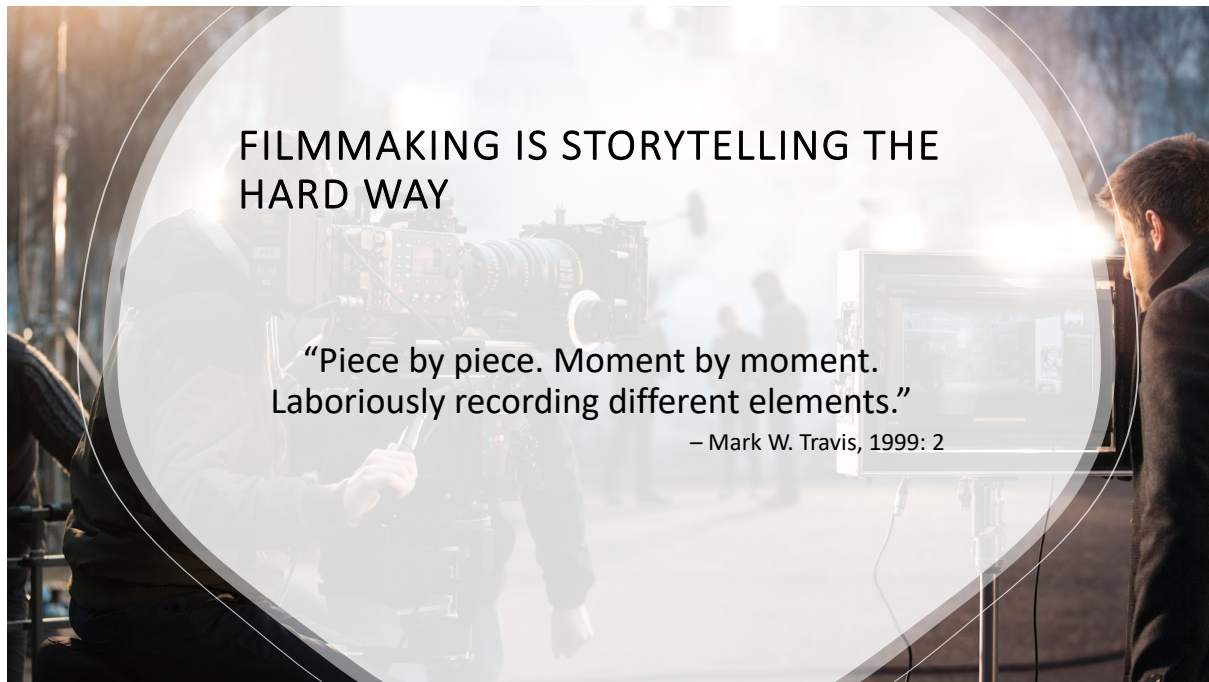
### Research Aims

1. As a producer and director, I aimed to use a script with which I had intimate knowledge, in order to chart the decision-making process from script to screen.
2. To experiment with narrative structures within the film.

- In my research, I had two primary objectives in creating this short film.
- Firstly, as both producer and director, I aimed to utilize a script with which I had intimate knowledge, enabling me to trace the decision-making process from script to screen.
- Secondly, I endeavoured to experiment with narrative structures within the film.



SLIDE SEVEN:



## FILMMAKING IS STORYTELLING THE HARD WAY

“Piece by piece. Moment by moment.  
Laboriously recording different elements.”

– Mark W. Travis, 1999: 2

- Throughout my time in academia, which is well over 20 years now, I've noticed a **significant gap** in research attention around the production process of media 'products,' unless we are talking about screenwriting, despite the **wealth** of scholarly work focused on textual analysis.
- I acknowledge that once these texts stand **alone** in a cultural context, they serve functions **distinct** from their **creation**.
- However, while acknowledging this distinction, and having done research using **textual analysis**, my interest now lies in **exploring the creative process** itself and its implications to wider cultures of production.
- If fiction filmmaking is '**storytelling the hard way**,' as Mark Travis suggests, why aren't we scrutinizing the processes behind these complex products, alongside looking at them as cultural artefacts?



- SLIDE EIGHT:

## Powerful Cultural Artefacts

“Television and more specifically British television (for that’s all there was for so long), was central to my cultural life. I came to understand that it was the materiality and ordinariness of television in terms of visibility and everyday practices of engagement, that located it at the heart of the pervasive, slow-creeping and subtle contestations of how cultural difference is produced.”

– Sarita Malik (2002: 2)

*Article: Reflections on representing Black Britain*



- Fiction can serve as the **imaginative** manifestation of our ideals, fears, and aspirations concerning **identity, desires, and actions**.
- Therefore, fiction films or television serve as **powerful** cultural artefacts that can influence and reshape **societal perceptions**.
- Fiction can have potentially radical implications, pushing the boundaries of society from within.
- If then we acknowledge the premise that film and television products can serve as **potent** cultural artefacts, as Sarita Malik suggests here regarding perceptions of race, then it stands to reason that by examining the creative process **underlying** these ideas, we may uncover patterns and obstacles that either facilitate or impede **new works** reaching audiences and having an impact.
- At one point there was a hope that **less expensive** equipment coupled with the internet could **revolutionise media**, that new and dynamic **voices** and stories could be told, however, increasingly this **does not** seem to be the case.

SLIDE NINE:



## Dynamics of Friction

- This Call for Papers deeply resonated with me, and while the term **friction** had not been explicitly employed in the context of my research until now, it has emerged as the most **apt descriptor** for the challenges inherent in both the collaborative creative process and, in understanding the driving force behind the narrative conventions employed in this story.
- Because I am presenting you the film as an output, I am limited on time, so I want to focus on the notion of **friction** as an **alternative** to the notion of **conflict**.
- But also, to conclude by mentioning how **friction** can be a positive force in the **collaborative process**.

SLIDE TEN:



Dynamics of Friction: Risky venture

- Before screening the film, I want to briefly examine the concept of **conflict** and **friction** within the context of storytelling.
- Although film and television is relatively young as a storytelling medium, it must endeavour to continually offer fresh and unexpected elements to **captivate** an audience.
- **Conflict** is a narrative **cornerstone** to storytelling and continues to be a key component that shapes narratives and engages audiences by creating tension, suspense, and resolution.
- Although friction and conflict are **related concepts**, they are often used **interchangeably**, however, they are **distinct**.

#### SLIDE ELEVEN:



- **Conflict** typically refers to a more intense and direct clash or disagreement between parties.
- It frequently involves **opposing** interests, goals, or values, which, within a narrative, typically culminate in overt confrontation, hostility, or struggle.
- Whereas friction generally refers to **tension, disagreement, or resistance** between individuals or groups.
- It can also arise from differences in opinions or values.
- As opposed to conflict, friction can be relatively mild and may not necessarily escalate into **open confrontation** or hostility.
- However, we are taught that this is not so good for stories.



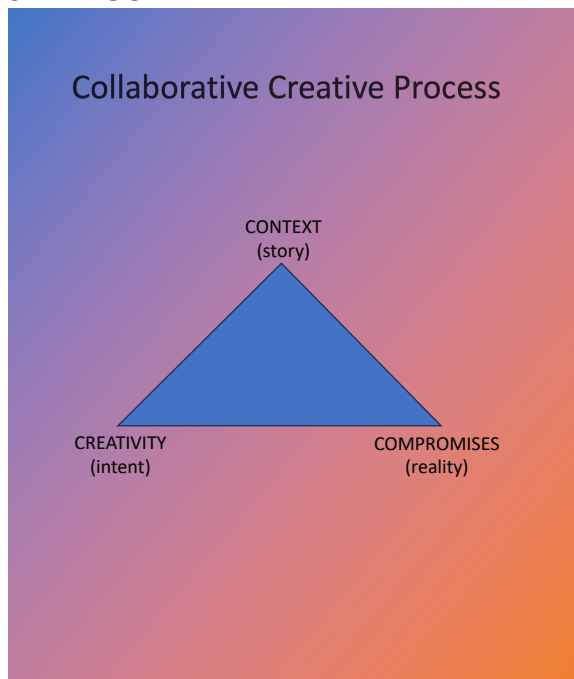
**SLIDE TWELVE:**



- **About the Night** follows the story of a young waiter, and a woman, who seeks solace in a late-night café just as he wants to finish his shift.
- As the director my pitch was: Small act of kindness can change the world.
- I was leaning into the notion of small acts and how they can make a difference.
- The goal was to craft an engaging story that conveys life's complexity and engenders empathy, without having a conflict resolution story arch.
- I wanted to portray the story with minimal manipulation, fostering empathy without dictating emotions.
- My approach was to construct an experiential window on a moment in time, emulating the effectual tone of the script.
- The friction is palpable as Mia enters and sits down.
- There is no outward conflict, not even when Mia won't look at him and writes her order on a piece of paper.
- As the events unfold, there is a notable change in how Josh deals with her, from annoyed and frustrated to acceptance, despite calling his girlfriend and wanting to be home.
- There is no major catalyst other than wanting to be more like his mentor, the manager, and serve the best coffee he can.
- The challenge was to be mindful of not over emphasizing the friction, particularly in terms of sound, so that it tries to compensate for the lack of conflict.
- I will start the clip as we come to the mid-point, she has been in the café for at least one cup of coffee, and the two waiters are hanging around waiting for her to finish.
- Here is the clip so you can gauge what I was trying to achieve.

## SCREEN THE FILM:

### SLIDE FOURTEEN:



- The dynamics of friction are caused by CREATIVITY (intent) encountering the CONTEXT (story) and the COMPROMISES (reality).

- Filmmaking can be seen as a kind of alchemy—a fusion of innate talent, craft skill, and serendipitous moments.
- This mystique is unhelpful, particularly to future filmmakers, it contributes to the '**cult of the director**,' keeps creative 'workers' in their **place**, and overshadows the collaborative efforts of those **diligently** working to complete a film.
- It also masks the critical evaluative work that can go on at any given moment in a production.
- In closing I want to point to the next stages of this research – critically assessing the collaborative creative process that went into making this film.
- Here the notion of **friction** also plays a vital role, potentially serving as a **constructive force** for creativity and innovation.
- As a director you **creatively** negotiate your **content** with the people working alongside you, however, it's a producer's responsibility to keep everything **on** time and **on** budget.
- All the **creative** decisions must triangulate with your **content** as you come up against the **reality** of your budget, and this inevitably means **compromise**.
- This collaborative way working is constant and therefore this means the potential for **friction** is also constant.
- Understanding these major **junctures**, **creativity**, **content**, **compromise**, are extremely important.
- Because who gets to take the **main stage** as the director finds themselves in an **extremely high stakes environment**.
- This then has a **major impact** on who gets to be in that **director's chair**, as well as **what** stories get made.

- Eventually this **risk averse** managing of creativity **shuts down** and **limits** new content varieties as Lorenzen suggested, rather than opening it out to **infinite possibilities**.

#### SLIDE FIFTEEN:

### Dynamics of the Daring and the Possibilities of the Perilous

“We need to encourage and maximize the dynamic of the daring, the possibilities of the perilous, in order to enable the realization of new images and sounds that may contribute to social and cultural transformation.”

– Stoneman (2012: 266)



- Finally, this risk averse culture is very restrictive in terms of what we teach our students particularly if we are trying to be **radical** and **engender** the change makers of the future.
- In fact, as Stoneman (2012) suggests here, both chance and risk play a major role in innovative work, and with chance and risk comes **friction**.
- Therefore, recognizing that filmmaking involves a **myriad of creative** and technical decisions, it becomes apparent that the **creative decision-making process** involved in crafting believable worlds and characters cannot be **solely** judged from a practical/technical perspective.
- Consequently, for me, this highlights the **importance** of more research from others into the **fiction** filmmaking process.



## ANY QUESTIONS:

► As a director you have to embrace the risk taking, but anchor your project in a cohesive vision that has to be communicated to multiple creative collaborators in order to keep that integrity to the very end.

*About The Night Shoot*

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