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The composer as bricoleur: Notions of contemporary opera in the genesis of a short film

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts (Performing Arts)

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Chapter Four: Behind the Scenes

A film is never really good unless the camera is an eye in the head of a poet.

— Orson Welles (as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 46)

This chapter chronicles the development of the film project from its inception as a Master of Arts by research project, to its completion. The writing of the screenplay, story ideas, music composition, visual composition, practice process, and personal reflection forms the basis for this chapter. Within this, this chapter reveals and discusses the underlying themes of the film, surrealism and its influence on conceptualising the screenplay, the project’s collaboration, and the analysis of the soundtrack.

The stylistic choice for this chapter, and the exegesis as a whole, reflects the complex nature of the research journey. In exegetical writing, the researcher is required to reconcile multiple historical, theoretical, practical and methodological perspectives, while negotiating the various styles and types of writing in literature, and a variety of media (Hamilton, 2011). In connecting and unifying all the above, the researcher is required “to synthesize various perspectives, subject positions, writing styles, and voices” (Hamilton, 2011, p. 1). Jillian Hamilton (2011), a researcher in arts and design, advocated an objective voice in exegetical writing that supports a “hybrid, connective exegesis” (p. 1). She wrote:

this ‘connective’ exegesis offers clear benefits to the researcher in connecting the practice to an established field while allowing the researcher to demonstrate how the methods have led to outcomes that advance the field in some way. And, while it helps the candidate to articulate objective claims for research innovation, it enables them to retain a voiced, personal relationship with their practice. (Hamilton, 2011, p. 1)

In research that contends with art, Hamilton (2011) reported that an evocative voice is usually employed to recall the spirit of the artefact. In research that contends with design, Hamilton suggested that polyvocality ensues, resulting from the multiple needs that lead to creation of the artefact, which often includes the incorporation and interpretation of the voices of its collaborators,
as well as multiple methods and/or disciplines. Polyvocality in exegetical writing refers to the use of multiple styles or voices within the exegesis. Thus, the connective exegesis is the product of the interweaving of various voices, as opposed to a straight layering of styles. For an interdisciplinary collaborative project, such as with screen opera, I resonate with the designer in Hamilton’s description, and employed polyvocality in my exegetical writing, weaving the connective exegesis together through my varying voices. Discussing the short film particularly required multiple voices due to the technical, collaborative, personal and evocative nature of the artefact.

**From the Beginning**

In pursuing a research masters, my intent was to incorporate my areas of interest in film, opera, musicals and film music, and support it with my background as a trained classical musician and experience as a film composer. The short film, *Out of Sight*, and accompanying exegesis emerged as a synthesis of my research period, interests, knowledge and abilities. However, the opportunity to write, compose and direct came with steep learning curves. In addition, my goal was to explore the notion of contemporary opera as film, in which the creation of the eventual soundtrack would become the composition itself. In this case, the dialogue, sound design, positioning of sound effects and music were all components of the audio, from which I manipulated and composed.

The proposal phase of my research led me to establish opera’s early links with film, and helped strengthen my understanding and development of a project that had the possibility to capture these two art forms. The conundrum was determining a direction that would best suit the project. Given the many possible directions opera as film can take, my research project required a clear definition. Through consultation with my supervisors, it was determined that I would create a short film as part of my research into opera and film, and examine contemporary notions of opera as film.
My concerns and questions relating to the assemblage of the project were overwhelming. Despite establishing a plan during the proposal stage of the research, insecurities relating to the production of the film and how it would feel and look led to half-hearted attempts and several false starts. The central concern was how to resolve the conflict between the artificiality of opera and the realism of film. This was a problem that overwhelmed and preoccupied me. Of utmost importance was achieving a balance between these two extremes — I required and desired a story that could balance the two in a stylistic yet seamless manner.

Writing the Screenplay

I wrote the story and screenplay concurrently. During the development and creation of the screenplay, I employed several methodologies and approaches. This included a textual analysis of screenwriting, observing television shows and movies, reading and reflecting on movie scripts, taking classes in scriptwriting, and blogging and re-blogging on Tumblr for inspiration. These methods were sometimes consciously employed and sometimes defined during retrospective reflection. The journey from writing the story to producing the screenplay involved equipping myself with various knowledge sets in order to proceed with the practice.

In 2012, I enrolled with Polytechnic West in Perth, Western Australia, for a short course in scriptwriting. During this scriptwriting class, storylines began to develop, inspired by elements of the stage shows I had viewed in London and New York in 2012. A story emerged that featured flawed characters in conflict with each other. A first draft began to take form, of a story centred on the relationship between a father and son. Having lost my father to cancer in 2011, this was a relationship that I was uncomfortable dissecting, but also one that I thought would be beneficial to explore during the research. Still grieving from my loss, the story shares intersecting points between my reality and what I would write.
Writing the screenplay in earnest began in January 2013 as I sat on a slow boat making its way towards Luang Prabang in Laos. The significance of travelling and releasing my creativity is something that I find difficult to articulate. It can only be said that travelling allows me to escape from some of the realities of life and, through that escape, find inspiration and engage my imagination fully. I recall meditating on the idea of a conflict, which conjured a scene in my head: an argument between a father and his son. I imagined a struggle would ensue and the son would run away. Possibly the son would believe that he had inadvertently killed or injured his father during the fight, and would flee on his bicycle, not knowing where to go.

From there, the story evolved and took shape through several drafts. My writing was informed by influences from my personal history and things I had watched, read or seen. My evening bicycle rides along the Swan River in Perth, Western Australia, were woven into the story. Several drafts featured the kangaroos on Heirisson Island. As the story developed, I added a backstory of a missing mother. Having lost my mother in 2002, I called on the memory of how my father and I had grieved differently. I began to translate these ideas into the script, and imagine and invent how the different characters would grieve for the loss of their mother or spouse.

The screenplay began to change shape during the months prior to filming. The turning point for this was a telephone call from a family friend that eventuated in me finding my lead actor. From the first draft, the story featured a boy, David, and his father, Tony. However, this telephone call inspired the possibility of rewriting the script to feature my friend’s daughter, Giuliana, as the character, Amelia. I made this suggestion to Giuliana’s mother, who arranged a meeting with Giuliana to discuss the possibility of her being in my short film.

Rewriting the part of David to suit Giuliana meant creating a new character, Amelia. The ability to create a character with the actor already cast had several benefits. Having Giuliana’s tangible presence enabled me to use her physical
attributes and talents, and assess her weaknesses. Aside from being the right age for the role, Giuliana had also been taking classical singing and drama lessons. Through rehearsals and our interactions, I was able to adapt the story to best suit Giuliana’s abilities, and my vision. Some of the adaptations included removing the bicycle scene from the original draft. As Giuliana was neither comfortable riding a bicycle nor a strong runner, the script was adjusted to allow her to walk slowly. In this manner, the pace of the film was set.

**Themes**

A central theme in *Out of Sight* is the idea that things that are not visible may be forgotten. As the title implies, this theme is reiterated in several different ways on various levels during the film. Specifically and obviously, this theme relates to the story of Amelia. In *Out of Sight*, Amelia feels that she is unappreciated and misunderstood by her father, Tony, and that she would benefit from being out of his sight and out of his mind. Pivotal to Amelia leaving the house is her relationship with her mother — a woman who is spoken of, but not seen in the film. Amelia feels that Tony (her father) has forgotten about her mother. When Amelia raises the topic of her mother, Tony rebukes her. Tony appears to have moved on, and only has the agenda of inviting his girlfriend Justine over for dinner. In the bedroom scene, Tony does not ask Amelia, “How are you?”, but instead, “What’s wrong with you?”.

Another thematic layer in *Out of Sight* relates to the women in the film. Tony's girlfriend and wife, and a homeless lady are important in the context of the film, despite being presented as minor characters. Information may be gleaned about each character through the choices made in the styling of the character, how the character is spoken about, and the character’s action or inaction in the film. Amelia’s mother, who is only seen through photographs and mentioned in conversation, may be perceived as an involved and loving parent. The homeless lady, presented early in the film as odd and mentally unstable, is actually soft and kind hearted. The intentional underplaying of these characters was designed to create mystery and intrigue, and reinforce the
thematic notion of ‘out of sight and out of mind’. Thus, the title is designed to compel the audience to question who or what is out of sight and out of mind.

My intention was to create a work that would challenge viewers’ expectations and beliefs as they viewed the film. By withholding or limiting information, I intended that the audience would formulate their own theories and draw their own conclusions. The film was created like a puzzle, with clues and answers embedded along the way. The audiences’ ability to ‘solve the puzzle’ of the film is one that I would personally enjoy, and is what I sought to achieve in the film. The nonlinear structure was chosen to create interest and direct the viewer to participate in deciphering the film. I anticipated that there would be moments of:

- confusion, when the viewer is unsure of the timeline and barely following or behind in the storytelling
- clarity, when the viewer understands the timeline and is following or ahead of the storytelling
- surprise, when unexpected plot twists occur
- satisfaction, when expected plot lines or predicted moments fall into place.

In this instance, filmmaking is reliant on codes that the author creates, and the deciphering of these codes through the viewers’ relationship with and understanding of these codes.

**Out of Sight and Out of Mind**

*Out of Sight* is not only about the relationship struggles between Amelia and her father, Tony. As discussed, the thematic title itself begs the question: who is out of sight and out of mind? In addition to this theme, the film has echoes of social commentary on homelessness, depression and mental illness. Finally, the theme encapsulates the double entendre that is connected to the craft of filmmaking — where the hand of the composer, director, actor and cinematographer should be unseen and disregarded during the viewing
experience. This section further reveals and explores the layered themes in *Out of Sight.*

An obvious character that is ‘out of sight’ and ‘out of mind’ is Amelia’s mother. The way that Amelia and Tony tiptoe around her absence is a clue to how each of them has dealt with this aspect of their lives. For Amelia, her mother is still very much at the forefront of her mind. As a teenage girl in her formative years, she yearns for her mother’s presence. Tony is portrayed as a father who wishes to move on with his life, while suppressing his feelings and emotions related to the absence of his wife. The failure to acknowledge Amelia’s questions about her mother transcends her absence — her character is out of his mind. However, Tony’s sobbing at the end of the film expresses his suppressed emotions. As he looks through Amelia’s scrapbook, there is hope for reconciliation and change.

The term ‘out of mind’ in the film’s title is also a signifier of mental illness. In the film, Amelia has a fragile emotional and mental state — she is shown hearing voices and behaving oddly in several scenes. Her breakdown, after Tony catches her spying on him and his girlfriend, Justine, belies her conflicted mental state. Mental illness and depression are topics often left unspoken and undiagnosed in a family and social setting, especially when a child is involved (Reynolds & Johnston, 2013). The stigmatisation that surrounds these issues often further compounds the problem and may lead to isolation, self-harm and even drug use (Crisp, Gelder, Rix, Meltzer & Rowlands, 2000). Associated with this is the idea of homelessness. Homeless people are members of society who are often disregarded and stigmatised. They also commonly deal with issues of mental illness and isolation. The links between Amelia and the homeless lady were thus established. The homeless lady is first seen at the beginning of the film dressed in an old tracksuit and talking oddly to herself, which raises questions about her mental stability. Amelia’s emotional breakdown at her house also raises questions about her mental stability. As Amelia leaves her house with a bag, the audience is drawn to ask why she is leaving home and whether she might also become homeless.
The exploration of ‘out of sight, out of mind’ can be also extrapolated to my role as composer as bricoleur. Specifically, my intent as a composer was to create subtlety in the positioning of dialogue, music and sound effects. Thus, the soundtrack in this film was considered an element that had to feature, but also be ‘out of sight’ and ‘out of mind’. This can be contrasted with opera on stage, where all elements of the production are featured, and the very idea of watching an opera is to be aware of the music and hyperbolical performance.

**Intentions and Conventions**

The intention for my short film was not to follow the path of traditional opera, but to extend the definition of opera and express opera on a smaller scale as a short film. As discussed in Chapter One through the works of Ashley, Glass and Reich, contemporary opera on screen does not have a definitive structure or set genre conventions. However, it has a long history, stretching from the very beginnings of film. Opera has a history dating back to the 1600s. In combining film and opera, I used traditional opera conventions, such as the aria and recitative, and explored the notion of a contemporary operatic voice for film that allowed categorisation through diegesis. The aria is traditionally a long accompanied solo song used in an opera to express the feelings of a certain character. The recitative is traditionally a simple accompanied song that adopts the rhythms of ordinary speech. In opera, the recitative rarely repeats lines and is less melodic than the aria, while the aria is melodic and repeats sections. In *Out of Sight*, the manipulated and natural dialogue in the film may be regarded the recitative, while the song that Amelia sings while walking through the park is the aria. In this aria, Amelia expresses her frustrations at not being understood. Typical of an aria, ‘I Don’t Know’ is comprised of repeating lines of melody and text.

In envisioning a contemporary opera, it was important for me to not feel restricted by the traditional notions of opera. Specifically, I wished to address operatic voice on film and examine sung, spoken and manipulated voice.
Another convention of opera is its melodramatics, richness and ornamentation. In this case, I wished to remove these elements, which have been intrinsically linked to classical opera. The conventions that I applied in Out of Sight are not necessarily a formal guide to making an opera as film. In my mind, there are many ways to present opera as film, and one could argue for the use or abandonment of any single convention. In this respect, the evolution of art often requires artists to blur, bend and create new conventions in order to develop new directions in art forms. In this context, I explored both operatic and film conventions together, and made decisions from the perspective of what aligned with the tone of the film and my personal tastes. In this case, a pared-back and simplistic approach to dialogue, operatic voice, set design and pace meant that the music and visuals had to reflect the same intent and integrity.

With consideration of the meagre shoot budget available, I created a script that required very little wardrobe and set design. As a result, the film shoot took place in Giuliana’s family home, using her room and clothing, with minimal set changes or design. I intended that this would also provide a naturalistic feel for the film, and eliminate the artificiality of the world of opera, which would usually use extravagant richness and melodramatics. This conscious decision to strip much of the rich, excessive artificiality often associated with opera was intended to balance the realism of screen. I was not interested in over-ornamentation in terms of the visuals — that is, the set and costumes. There is also no ornamentation in the sung voice — this was a constraint designed in the composition to consider the limitations of the singer. However, I did ornament the spoken voice by using effects on spoken recorded dialogue because this was something I could control and manipulate.

I was conscious that I was exploring an area of film that presented diametrically opposing conventions (see Chapter Two): (i) opera — an overtly artificial art form that bears no resemblance to real life, and (ii) cinema — a medium that amplifies reality in its representation of images. To balance these two mediums, incorporate them in a low budget shoot and achieve all that I
hoped, the script and story had to be relatively uncomplicated and easy to film. For this story and film, I made decisions based on how I thought the film would best work to tell the story. From the initial stages of writing the story to editing the film, I chose to keep all aspects of the film minimal.

To achieve the suspension of disbelief, I wished to evoke a metaphysical, transcendental, dreamlike quality in the film. My intention was to create a world that would move between reality and fantasy, in which singing would not be at odds with the drama. To accomplish this, the script and film included questionable jumps in timeline, unanswered questions asked of certain characters, the displacement of characters, and the manipulation of dialogue in a meta-diegetic fashion. In so doing, I used conventions found in films that fall under the genre of surrealism.

**Before Filming Began**

Filming for *Out of Sight* began in the middle of October 2013; however, before filming could begin, I had to finish the script, record any music that would be required during the shoot, settle on locations for the shoots, and audition actors. As my production team grew, I was able to delegate the responsibility of organising some of these tasks to my team members. This section details some of the preparatory work that was required prior to filming.

Rehearsals and vocal coaching with Giuliana began in August 2013. During our initial sessions, I worked with Giuliana to attain the right voice for the character and song. For the role of Amelia, I required Giuliana to tone down her bubbly personality and control her singing voice. We began by exploring the repertoire of songs she was learning privately, particularly focusing on the phrasing and shaping of her notes, before working on 'I Don't Know' — the song that was pre-recorded for the film. This early vocal coaching was particularly important to construct the soft contemplative voice and melancholic tone for the piece. However, this proved challenging for Giuliana because she was accustomed to projecting her voice, and favoured songs with
a quicker tempo. Fortunately, I had devised a song that had a repeating melody line, as well as lyrics. This allowed me to cut and paste the best takes from the recording session for the production of the song.

Between August and September 2013, I conducted several location scouts in Perth with my cinematographer, John Rousselet, and producer, Justin Thomas. These included venturing around Hyde Park, Birdwood Square, Beaufort Street, Bulwer Street and Giuliana’s bedroom (Figure 7) and family living room (Figure 8), as well as the streets surrounding Giuliana’s house. During the scouting process, we discussed lighting, the placement of cameras, and the choice of shot. We also searched for available power points at Hyde Park, and undertook test shots around early morning and evening to determine how the light would appear. During one of our location scouts at Hyde Park, we decided to test an idea I had for the title sequence (Video Clip 5). My initial idea was to make Amelia vanish as she walked across one of the main roads towards the park, as the title appeared. However, because the road that Amelia crosses was moderately busy and not a static image, the vanishing technique could not be applied and an alternative solution, where the title progressively disappears, was applied.
Figure 7: Location Scout Photograph: Giuliana's Bedroom. Photographer: Ben Yap

Figure 8: Location Scout Photograph: Living Room. Photographer: Ben Yap
Ideas to Genre

When creating most film projects, it is logical and tactical to position the film in a genre before the script has begun to take shape. However, in this project, the genre (surrealism) came as a process of discovery, based on my intuitions, research and influences. It partly resulted from a process of elimination, as I had decided what I did not wish to create, rather than selecting knowingly and exactly what I did wish to create. I did not wish to create a song and dance musical, nor a rendition of traditional opera with exaggerated singing. Similarly, I did not foresee the film becoming an art piece that would only exist in art galleries or museums. Despite my awareness of this, staged and filmed musicals and operas, as well as art films and art exhibits, were a great source for inspiration and ideas.

As a bricoleur, I took inspiration both consciously and unconsciously from things I watched and experienced. This meant taking ideas from various genres, mediums and platforms. I watched and observed widely, from television, film, stage, work and life. On retrospective reflection, three themes appeared more than once at various research phases: sunrise and sunsets, homelessness, and surrealism.
Sunrise and Sunsets

In 2010, I worked as composer on the short film, *Kiss*, directed by Alex Murawski (2011). In *Kiss*, one of the scenes of a sunset sequence (shot during sunrise) has a dreamlike quality. Known by photographers and cinematographers as the ‘magic hour’, dawn and dusk present a unique mystical quality that I wished to capture, tonally and visually, in the film. With this thought in mind, I participated in a photography trip to Xiapu — a fishing village in China’s Fujian province — in May 2012. The coastal town of Xiapu is famed for its seafood industry, and has in recent years become an attraction for Chinese photographers who are keen to document the rituals of the fishermen, along with the unique coastal scene. In order to capture the best light during this trip, photography occurred mainly during sunrise and sunset, which coincided with the daily activities of the fishermen.

However, despite our best efforts to capture that magic hour by preparing for sunrise shoots from 3.00 am and for evening shoots from 3.00 pm, for four consecutive days, the cloud coverage and occasional wet weather meant that the orange and pink hues of sunrise and sunset eluded us. Instead, the sky and its surrounds appeared dull and grey. As a result, most of my photographs were shot in black and white to maximise the drama of the scenery (Figure 9). This trip, organised by a photography club from Singapore and consisting of photographers from Singapore and Malaysia, was partly sponsored by Panasonic, who provided lenses and cameras for the group. I was fortunate to test their micro 4/3 camera, Lumix GH4, during this trip, which led to me purchasing a similar camera, a Sony NEX-5. With my new camera, I began to practise taking photographs and videos around sunset and sunrise back in Perth, Australia — often imagining possible scenarios for the screenplay.
Figure 9: An Oyster Harvest, Taken in Xiapu, China. Photographer: Ben Yap

As another exercise in capturing the magic hour, I decided to create a short film with the camera I had purchased. I shot around Kings Park and South Perth on several early mornings and evenings in March 2013. With no involvement of actors, and featuring point-of-view and scenic shots, I used iMovie to construct a story, composed music with Logic, and layered in the ambient audio track from the footage to create a short film. I titled this *Sunrise\Sunset* (Video Clip 6), and it was shown as part of a music composition showcase in October 2012 at Edith Cowan University.
The experience of making this short film not only enabled me to become accustomed to the camera and its operations, but also to gather thoughts and ideas for the film and shoot around the magic hour. The window of opportunity to capture light was something that I had not anticipated. Due to the limited timeframe, the time spent sorting out equipment, travelling to the location, and determining the placement of the shot could potentially jeopardise the shoot. Although the sunrises and sunsets that I shot over a few days for *Sunrise\Sunset* were fairly similar, not all sunsets and sunrises are equal. This was an unfortunate lesson that I learnt during the shoot for *Out of Sight*. Shot in the spring of 2013, I had to contend with varying weather and cloud conditions, some of which I was unprepared for. As a result, this made it impossible to replicate scenes filmed on different days.
Homelessness

The idea of incorporating homelessness as a theme in the short film evolved out of notions that were generated during the scriptwriting process. Although I have never been homeless, I have had first-hand involvement with homeless people through work, travel and my personal life. In 2012, I became involved in Homeless Connect Perth (Homeless Connect, 2012), working in the capacity of an optometrist (my day-to-day profession). As I examined and interacted with my patients at Homeless Connect, I found my views and beliefs of homelessness being challenged, and I slowly began to abandon my preconceived notions of homelessness.

Feeling that this could be a useful statement to make in the film, I turned to GroupMap — a social brainstorming tool — to learn how other people viewed homelessness. GroupMap aggregates data from other mind-maps made under the same subject or heading, and displays the information as a collated map. Ideas or themes that are similar or popular appear as larger bubbles, while smaller bubbles are used to indicate unique ideas. This indicated that the issues associated with homelessness include poverty, mental or physical illness, and social phobia, as shown in the screenshot in Figure 10.
Figure 10: GroupMap Screenshot on the Topic of Homelessness
**Surrealist Influence**

In creating *Out of Sight*, I consciously and unconsciously sought inspiration from surrealism in both arts and literature. Through retrospective reflection, I realised that I had surrounded myself with surrealistic works to influence the creation of *Out of Sight*. Haruki Murakami is a Japanese author whose novels bear a Kafkaesque quality. As I began rereading his book of short-stories, *The Elephant Vanishes* (Murakami, 2003), while writing the screenplay, I became inspired in creating a story that explored the metaphysical world. Murakami’s writing often juxtaposes the mundane with the unexpected, and I wished to conjure a world similar to those in his works.

My desire to unlock the unconscious and create a dreamlike world may have also led me to explore surrealist artworks. My first visit to the Tate Modern in London — where I viewed their exhibit on dreams and poetry (Tate Modern, 2013) — further informed and shaped my writing of *Out of Sight*. In the following section, I discuss how dreams and poetry — core elements of surrealism — influenced me in the creation of *Out of Sight*. The movie *Biutiful* (Iñárritu, 2010) is also discussed as a work that influenced my project.

**Dreams**

*Dream — a combination of thoughts, images, feelings and sensations that pass through the mind, often when asleep, in a story-like sequence.*

— *(Oxford English Dictionary, 2015d)*

Since recorded time, humanity has questioned and studied our relationship and ability to dream, evidence by the earliest cave paintings (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999). Dreaming has played a significant role in many aspects of humanity, from religion to science to the arts. Its application during the incubation of ideas and its ability to inspire resonate with me, particularly in this research. Particularly noteworthy is the connection between films and dreams, such as the use of film as a metaphor or analogy for dreams, as well as dream’s influence on art movements (such as surrealism).
On reflection, dreams were something I had considered including as an element of the film during the proposal and planning stages of the research project. I had begun with the idea of setting the short film within a dream to resolve my need to explain why the characters were singing. However, my literature and multimedia review of contemporary opera demonstrated the possibility of presenting opera on film without sung dialogue. In addition, the literature on opera’s inability to transfer to film further convinced me to pursue musicality in dialogue and speech, rather than singing alone. Still, the notion of dreams was an ever-present influence during the construction of the short film. The nonlinear story line, elements of the metaphysical, and colour and tone of the film are suggestions of this dream element.

Six months before I began writing the script to *Out of Sight*, I had my first opportunity to visit the Tate Modern and its permanent exhibit of surrealist paintings, *Poetry and Dream* (Tate Modern, 2013) in London. The exhibition featured artworks by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí and Juan Miró, to name a few, and examined these artworks in the context of dreams and poetry as surrealist ideologies. I was fascinated by these works and would spend entire days there, attending guided tours. At that time, the link between these works of art and the film I wished to conceive had not begun to present itself directly. It was only after the film had been shot and I returned to the gallery the following year (April 2014) that I realised how surrealism had played a role in the creation of my short film.

*Poetry*

*Poetry: the expression of imagination.*

— *Percy Bysshe Shelley* (as cited in Verkoren, 1937, p. 118)

For me, poetry expresses thoughts, desires and feelings in a composition — whether via words, images, music or film (which is a combination of all three). The notion of including poetry as the text for the short film occurred during
the conceptualisation of the project as I grappled with the idea of a sung text. In my struggle to choose between artifice and realism, I contemplated an iambic irritation of dialogue, in which the words would have pronounced rhythm and weight. While I finally abandoned this idea, poetry can still be found in the film on three levels. In its plainest and most literal form, poetry can be found in the lyrics of the song Amelia sings. The lyrics below are taken from a section of this song. Reading aloud the lyrics or listening to the song indicates that the words contain rhythm in their composition, and express Amelia’s feelings of pain and angst:

   I don’t know
   Why it’s so
   Why it’s so
   Difficult …

On a secondary level, poetry exists in the way poetry conveys meaning. While the composer on the short film, Kiss (Murawski, 2011), I recall how the director described his short film as a poem. He wished to capture and express a tangible feeling in this film. Specifically, the feeling was that of longing felt by one person, but not the other. In Out of Sight, I wished to express Amelia’s internal struggle — her feelings of rejection and being misunderstood — as poetry on film.

Finally, poetry is reiterated by the title, Out of Sight | Out of Mind. In this case, the title represents several ideas and situations simultaneously and independently. The title captures the essence of the film in its expression of rejection and abandonment. It speaks to the situations and characters in the film to which the title may be applied. Surrealism was the vehicle through which this idea was expressed.
Biutiful

The movie *Biutiful*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (2010), is a work that resonated with me and influenced both story and production elements in *Out of Sight*. The movie features Uxbal, played by Javier Bardem — a complex character who faces a succession of struggles. His complicated relationship with his ex-wife, children, brother, dead father, health and moral compass are all presented in this thoughtfully written and directed film. Significantly, there were moments of surrealism in the film that were significant to me. Particularly significant scenes included Uxbal witnessing the floating spirits of dead factory workers, and the opening and closing scenes of the film, where a snow-covered landscape was used to create a dreamlike world, which the audience may interpret as heaven. The heavy emotional feeling that clung to me after watching this film was both overwhelming and inspiring, leading me to compose ‘Light Reflection’ as a song in my film, and reflect on the tonal aspects of *Out of Sight*.

Collaboration

Collaboration can often be a daunting and stressful exercise between two or more participants, with the goal of achieving a singular piece of work. Although some collaborative partnerships function ideally, not all begin or end in harmony. The messiness, ugliness and tensions that arise are often caused by egos, miscommunication and differing expectations, to name a few. In this project, as the bricoleur, I had a vision for the film from its inception. However, creating the film required relying on the efforts of others to help achieve my aims. Having worked as a composer in past project collaborations, I could foresee compromises being made, and anticipated disagreements and conflict during this project. Amidst this often difficult process, it is also necessary to consider how one can examine collaboration for scholarly research.

Collaboration has been examined at both a macro and micro level in arts practice. Stuart Tait (2013) noted that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari broke
collaboration into molar and molecular levels. The molar (or macro) level contends with the “wholes, structures, and systems of organisation” (Deleuze & Guattari, as cited in Tait, 2013, para. 3), while the molecular (or micro) level examines “changes, particle flows, and the way that elements are forced to interact to produce effects” (Deleuze & Guattari, as cited in Tait, 2013, para. 3). This contrasts to standard discussion of collaboration in which “individuals, groups, project and ‘the world’ are dealt with as discrete unities” (Tait, 2013, para. 3).

Tait (2013) also noted that the success of a project is often defined by its ability to achieve consensus, and that this results from “convivial relationships that make few demands of their participants and remain within the parameters of what is comfortable for everyone” (para. 17). The converse of this, in which dissensus occurs, is viewed as a catalyst for breakthroughs and transformations in arts practice (Tait, 2013, para. 15). Although this may not always hold true, dissent can be a strong power that has its own will and energy in shaping the outcome of a project — whether successful or not — and is subsequently a valid discussion point in collaborative art projects.

Scholars Alex Wilkie, William Gaver, Drew Hemment and Gabriella Giannachi (2010) examined the idea of collaboration from a different perspective. In their paper ‘Creative Assemblages: Organisation and Outputs of Practice-Led Research’, they expressed the idea of collaboration as an assemblage in which “practices, technologies, institutions, authors, knowledge and issues … [are] interweaved” (Wilkie et al., 2010, p. 99). The term ‘creative assemblages’ is useful in “sensitizing us to how practice-led research is heterogeneously composed” (Wilkie et al., 2010, p. 99) and in essence highlights the multidisciplinary nature of collaboration in the creative field. Through their research, they tentatively identified three different arrangements for creative assemblage: (i) compact and closed, (ii) compact and open, and (iii) loose and open assemblages. In short, compact assemblages focus on a single outcome, such as one short film, while loose assemblages allow collaborators to have several outcomes — such as more than one short film. The open or closed
nature of these collaborations relates to the protection or disclosure of intellectual property and technologies, whereby an open form permits sharing such information, and a closed form prohibits it. *Out of Sight* was defined as ‘compact and open’, although there were aspects of ‘loose and open’ and ‘compact and closed’ in the arrangement. The complexity in defining a particular creative assemblage is revealing, and creative assemblages are often transient as they progress from one stage to another, from start to completion.

Barry Bozeman, Daniel Fay and Catherine P Slade (2013) wrote about collaboration as a form of pooling capital to produce knowledge. In the current research, the knowledge gained from the production of *Out of Sight* was only achieved from pooling capital with my collaborators. Working as the composer-bricoleur, I fulfilled many of the traditional collaborative roles (scriptwriter, composer and director) in the project. The other components of the short film relied on collaboration with industry experts (cinematographer, producer, editor, assistant director, sound mixer and actors). In these instances, I did not have full control over the outcome because the efforts of my collaborators influenced the final result. Interdisciplinary collaboration was essential when working with the actors, cinematographer, producer, editor, sound mixer and assistant director.

Collaboration varied depending on the partnership that was required. In some circumstances, there was real collaboration, in which ideas were shared and discussed, with the result being a process of working through a problem as a team or partnership. However, in some situations, there was co-opting and bullying. Claire Bishop (2006) stated about collaboration in the art world:

> what serious criticism has arisen in relation to socially collaborative practices has been framed in a particular way: the social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism .... Accusations of mastery and egocentrism are leveled at artists who work with participants to realise a project instead of allowing it to emerge through consensual collaboration. (p. 180)

Here, the importance of having a cohesive and strong voice in collaborative works is overshadowed by “accusations of mastery and egocentrism” (Bishop, 2006, p. 180). During post-production stage, I worked to incorporate my voice
back into the project whilst building on what my collaborators offered me. By working on the sound and music and collaborating with the editor, colourist and sound editor, my goal was to bring together the efforts of my collaborators to achieve a unified piece of work — a form of authorship.

The subject of authorship in collaborative works can also be controversial, particularly in academic writing and creative fields, where authorship and voice may not necessarily be represented or weighted correspondingly due to marketing, grants, seniority and fame. Bozeman, Fay, & Slade (2013) wrote:

> Authorship on a collaborative work is increasingly a name game … that credit will inevitably be disproportionate to more senior researchers, regard-less of the particular nature or extent of their contribution … co-authors who receive less recognition from a given co-authorship would in some cases feel exploited, especially on those instances where they perceive their own contribution to be more significant than that of a more senior and well known researcher. (p. 13)

In *Out of Sight*, I felt the need to have a clear and unified goal between my collaborators and myself in representing my initial ideas and voice. Chapter Three outlined a number of techniques that were used to achieve this, including resonance meetings, rehearsals, trial runs and location scouts. I hoped that, through these activities, my collaborators would be able to work to their best abilities in consensual collaboration in order to achieve a unified vision. However, in reality, miscommunication, last-minute changes and unforeseen circumstances led to compromises and moved us away from consensual collaboration.

The quantity of compromise and consensual collaboration varied constantly between: (i) what my collaborators wanted, (ii) what I wanted and (iii) what we both agreed to want. This can be described as a ‘tug of war’, as shown diagrammatically in Figure 11.
Compromising is a part of collaborating; however, one must make decisions about the extent to which compromises should be made, and for what reasons. In my debut role as director, I encountered a steep learning curve, which may have resulted in me making compromises in areas in which I was unfamiliar. In such situations, I may have been unable to articulate fully what I wanted, and instead agreed with the suggestions of my collaborator in order to save time, particularly when on set. I also compromised when I did not have complete control over certain processes, such as holding the camera, and detailed editing. While I believe that the result was still an affecting short film, I acknowledge that there are areas that could be improved as a result of the compromises I made.

The compromises made during the project began early on. As a Masters by Research student of the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), I had hoped to collaborate with the students from WAAPA and the Western Australian Screen Academy; however, this did not eventuate for various reasons. Restructuring my supervisory team led to new pathways for my research and, as I approached the final draft of the short film, the overwhelming support of the School of Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University, afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with their students and make use of their equipment. The production team was firmly established one month before shooting began, with the help of my associate supervisor, Dr George Karpathakis — a lecturer in film studies.
During any collaborative project, the project is an investment to which the collaborators contribute their time and interest for various reasons. The invested interest of a particular collaborator has a direct effect on the outcome of the project because it is the motivational stimulus for the collaborator to do his or her best work. As the key driver and bricoleur of the project, I had the most invested in this short film. For my collaborators, some possible motivations for them to work on the short film included using the project as a way of learning and increasing knowledge, to pass a grade, to have their names credited on a short film, to have material for their show reel, or as a way of meeting and working with people in the film community. The potential for the short film to be successful and enter film festivals was another incentive for collaborators to be involved in the project.

Music

The music in this short film is comprised of all the sounds found in the soundtrack. It encompasses Cage’s (2011) notion of composition by layering sounds and using silence and noise as aspects of music. This section analyses the short film to highlight the ideas and intentions for presenting opera as film, in which ‘music’ is integral to the work. In Out of Sight, the pauses in a section of dialogue and chosen nuances in rhythmic patterns of speech are the results of careful ‘composition’ when creating the short film, via editing. The clip from the short film (Video Clip 7) is an example of how the dialogue was created as a ‘composed dialogue’ that used all aspects of speech, including the silence between speech and nuances in speech from both Tony and Amelia.
In Video Clip 7, the edit was composed to create tension and awkwardness between Amelia and Tony. After locating the best takes for this scene, and arranging it to create a seamless conversation, additional cuts of Amelia scrapbooking were included between her responses to Tony in order to increase the moments of silence between the two. This was essential in highlighting their awkward and cold relationship. In fact, the shot at 38 seconds in Video 7 was ‘time stretched’ to elongate the pauses further.

‘Composed dialogue’ or dialogue that has been changed and manipulated with effects was used in place of a traditional score in order to create mood in the opening section. In this scene, the juxtaposition of composed dialogue against the action creates mystery and tension, as well as raising questions regarding Amelia’s motive for leaving the house, and to whom the voices belong. In addition, the voices echoing through Amelia’s head hint at Amelia’s mental state and enforce the title theme of ‘out of sight’ through this motif (Video Clip 8).
As Amelia walks through the park in the late evening, Tony’s voice can be heard echoing in her head. Here, Tony’s voice was treated with reverb, resonance and delay to further emphasise Amelia’s emotions through his words. Rather than composing a traditional score, the composed dialogue acted to enforce Amelia’s state of mind and emotional rawness. The placement of the dialogue was composed to match the eeriness of the scene for visual, aural and emotional effect. Video Clip 9 is taken from this scene.
**MIDI and Sequencer**

The use of a MIDI and music sequencer has been instrumental in my practice in screen composition and electronic music production. These are the tools of my practice — the brushes, paints and canvases for my musical creations. The MIDI is a formalised electronic system that allows an electronic instrument — such as a MIDI keyboard — to communicate with a computer and other MIDI devices, and vice versa (Shuker, 1994). The MIDI carries ‘event messages’ that correspond to the information that is acquired when an electronic instrument is played. A MIDI player alone does not generate any sound. However, its captured input can generate sounds through a sequencer that is either inbuilt in an instrument (such as a synthesiser) or processed externally via the sequencer. The note length (note duration), pitch (note frequency) and velocity (note intensity) are basic information that is captured and relayed to the sequencer to produce or reproduce sound.

A sequencer is a device that interprets and translates the MIDI information into sound. Sequencers may be analogue, in which physical electronics are applied, or software based, in which computer-based algorithms are applied instead of electronics. The ability to layer MIDI data and run concurrent sequencers as a multi-track enables creative versatility and control. Compared to traditional composition with pen and paper or notational software, this method of composing encompasses musicality that is linked to performance. The appeal of composing with a sequencer lies in its ability to transfer a composer’s exact desire directly to the final audible or ‘recorded’ performance.

Sequencers enable adjustment of almost every possible aspect of a performance. Another aspect of audio control is the sequencer’s ability to ‘automate’. Automation refers to the ability to edit certain features of the performance. The most common uses for automation include volume changes to fade in and out of music tracks, spatial position or panning of sound, and equalisation to boost or reduce certain frequencies of sound. All the above automations may be performed live or pre-adjusted for playback.
Commonly used software sequencers for film scoring include Logic, Protools, and Digital Performer. My choice of sequencer is Logic not only because this is what I was introduced to when I began to study film composition, but because of its sound library and its ease of operation. The combination of MIDI instrument and sequencer has become my mainstay for musical compositions, and has reduced my need to produce a notated score, unless the additional recording of live musicians is required for a composition.

**Using a MIDI and Sequencer**

The ability to create directly into a sequencer via a MIDI instrument, and then play back and edit the recorded performance, is my preferred method of composition in my practice as a composer. The exact sound and musicality of the final performance can be edited through the captured MIDI events and the sequencer. In particular, the sequencer allows me to control and edit every note’s length, placement and intensity, as well as any other audible characteristics, such as a note’s resonance quality. This allows total control over the composition. Highly realistic-sounding instruments are now available from various sample libraries, which have generated a plethora of creative combinations. I can also create or sample my own instrument for a composition. Musical sampling involves recording instruments or sounds that can be allocated and played back on a MIDI instrument.

Given the control and power of contemporary sequencers, and the variety of instruments and sounds in sound libraries, composers have a wealth of possibilities when determining their sound palette. Through a sequencer, a composer is able to create a score using traditional orchestral instruments, mixed acoustic with electronic instruments, or pure electronic instruments. For *Out of Sight*, I settled on a restricted instrumental palette. From the Logic sound library, I employed sustained strings, bass drum and piano, as well as noises such as crickets and traffic sounds, when building and shaping some of the film’s aural components.
Composing ‘Light Reflection’ and ‘I Don’t Know’

Out of Sight features two key lyrical pieces: ‘Light Reflection’ and ‘I Don’t Know’. ‘Light Reflection’ is a purely instrumental piece that is layered among other aural components at the start of the film, and heard on its own at the end of the film. ‘I Don’t Know’ is discussed in this section as an aria by highlighting its similarities to the way arias use sung text to express emotions in opera.

‘Light Reflection’

‘Light Reflection’ (Audio Clip 1) was composed as a musical response to watching the movie Biutiful (Iñárritu, 2010). The piece was written before Out of Sight was shot, and based solely on an emotional reaction to the film I had just seen. I was particularly inspired by the film’s use of the second movement of Ravel’s (1931) piano concerto in G, ‘Adagio Assai’, towards the final scene and during the end credits. The simplicity of its instrumentation and its contemplative tempo moved me to create a response on the piano.

Audio Clip 1: ‘Light Reflection’ (click to play) Composer: Ben Yap

‘Light Reflection’ is a simple, one-handed, melodic piano piece. I composed this piece without planning, via complete improvisation on the MIDI keyboard played directly into Logic. Organic and responsive, improvising is a method of composition that occurs in real time with little room for hesitation or conscious considerations. It is a method of composition that condenses several aspects of composing that occur when writing with pen and paper or notation software. For example, the time signature, key and tonality of the piece are subconsciously felt and transferred to an instrument — or, in my case, played on a MIDI keyboard. This contrasts to composing by establishing a structural

1 Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo2ilAa7vzE
framework for the composition when notating. For this reason, no score was created for the two works. Another reason for not providing a score was because no other instrumentalist was expected to perform the music aside from Giuliana, who had a sung part that she learnt by ear. I played all the musical tracks via MIDI onto my computer, and assigned the appropriate instrumentation, according to my aural and emotional response to the work.

Once my initial improvisatory passage was recorded on MIDI, I was able to play back and adjust any mistakes in my playing. These included wrong notes I had unintentionally played, and any rhythmic errors. In addition to editing, MIDI enabled me to manipulate the recorded track by adding effects, such as resonance, and altering the velocity (or the intensity of a note). In addition, it offered the possibility of reversing a recorded track, as was the case in this piece. With each playback, I analysed, edited, manipulated and improvised another track on top. Drawing from my tacit knowledge, this process occurred instinctively and naturally as a series of edits, checks and addition of tracks. Sometimes, I would edit to an idea that had formed as a result of my efforts, and sometimes the creation of sound and texture would be completely new and unexpected, further inspiring future checks, edits and additional tracks. Through this process, my initial improvisation eventually resolved into the final piece. While ‘Light Reflection’ was composed as a direct response to watching the movie Biutiful (Iñárritu, 2010), its ability to evoke the required mood and feelings allowed me to embed it in Out of Sight.

Part of the creativity and fun of composing this piece involved harmonising it with a reversed wave file of the original track. This required me to first create a track that had a very resonant quality. This caused a pleasing effect when reversed and layered back with the original. Figure 12 is a screenshot taken from the working file in Logic. In this screenshot, the original MIDI file is the track on the top. The track below this is a sound wave visualisation of the original audio file, which has been reversed. Automation of the volume can be seen on both tracks. Importantly, I reduced the volume in the middle section of the reversed track because it did not harmonise well with the original melody.
At the bottom of the screenshot is a piano roll of the original MIDI track, with the velocity of each of the notes visualised by the colour variations and by the height of the orange bars below it.
Figure 12: Screenshot of a Working File of ‘Light Reflection’ in Logic
‘I Don’t Know’

The aria ‘I Don’t Know’ (Audio Clip 2) is a composition devised from the lyrics written in the film script. The simplicity of the text led me to create a repeated melodic line that is reminiscent of a lullaby or nursery rhyme (see the score in Appendix 2). Like an aria in an opera, ‘I Don’t Know’ expresses the character’s concerns and emotions. In this instance, Amelia sings about feeling misunderstood, and the difficulty she has expressing herself. This piece is set to a montage of Amelia walking aimlessly through a park and a flashback to a tense scene from her home, further highlighting Amelia’s feelings of being misunderstood.

Audio Clip 2: ‘I Don’t Know’ (click to play) Composer: Ben Yap

In composing ‘I Don’t Know’, I wanted the film to lead the musical composition, rather than the other way around. As a result, I only composed the melodic line initially, and completed the instrumentation and harmonisation at a later stage. I used this melodic line to rehearse with Giuliana, ensuring it was singable and sung with the correct expression and intentions.

During the recording and production stage of the song, the simple repeating melodic line became highly beneficial. Due to the song being comprised of repeating phrases, I had the ability to cut and paste the best takes from the various recorded sections, thereby reducing the total recording time. As a result, I had Giuliana whisper the words to the song as an experiment at the end of the recording session. The whispered words were later layered into the song in its final production.
Similar to ‘Light Reflection’, I worked on the harmonisation and instrumentation of ‘I Don’t Know’ in an improvisatory fashion. This required playing with different ideas for the track, and then listening and editing when I felt necessary. In ‘I Don’t Know’, sustained strings, bass drum and piano were added to the vocal and whispered track to complete the composition (Audio Clip 2).

One of the complexities related to filming singing is whether to film live or to playback. My decision to film to playback resulted from wishing to avoid the complexity of recording live. Recording live singing on an open set would have been problematic due to the potential of unwanted extraneous sounds and noises from the park, film crew and road traffic. An additional issue was the complexity of getting the actor to perform and sing well in front of the crew and in public. Ultimately, a guide track was played through Giuliana’s headphones, which she operated herself, thereby enabling her to sing in time to the music that would be eventually produced (Audio Clip 3). This process was different to filming to playback, during which a speaker would play the music and allow the actor, camera crew, continuity supervisor and director to match the music to the live action.

Audio Clip 3: The Vocal Guide Track Played through Giuliana’s Headphones (click to play)
Composer Ben Yap
Musicality in Non-lyrical Components

The non-lyrical components in *Out of Sight* include dialogue, manipulated dialogue and atmospheric soundscapes. Excluded are diegetic action sounds, such as turning a page and footsteps, which were recorded as part of the scene and not overlayed or intentionally manipulated or positioned. With my background as a musician, both the placement of non-lyrical components and the absence of sound were carefully considered. The following section explores the musicality of non-lyrical components of the audio track.

Identifying Non-lyrical Components and Assimilating Associations

In this film, the non-lyrical components are composed sounds. They are composed in the sense that they have been positioned for a purpose other than the fact that they are there to fit the scene in a diegetically. Aspects of the composition of these sounds include timbre, pitch, placement and effects made to the sound. These sounds often also generate emotional qualities as a result of listeners’ associations with a sound. As discussed in Chapter One, I used Kassabian’s (2001) definition to describe this as ‘assimilating associations’. Assimilating associations typically transport the perceiver to known and familiar territories based on the scored music — or, in this case, the non-lyrical components.

Audio Analysis of Non-lyrical Components and Lyrical Components

Audio Clip 4: Audio to Opening Scene (click to play) Composer: Ben Yap

The film’s opening scene is filled with assimilating-associated, non-lyrical components. From a black screen, the viewer hears the high-pitched frequencies of insects and birdcalls against a low to mid-range metallic rumble,
which is eventually revealed to be the gate of a house (Audio Clip 4). The viewer then begins to be transported to the outside of a house. A woman’s voice can be heard intimately making a toast, followed by a man’s voice, which are both engaged in casual conversation and laughter. However, their conversation is spliced and the dialogue manipulated in an illogical manner by juxtaposing answers to unasked questions, and positioning unwarranted laughter. The purpose of this was to indicate elapsed time, and create a sense of mystery and intrigue to draw in the audience. The rumbling of road traffic with the manipulated dialogue also creates confusion and angst.

‘Light Reflection’ can be heard underneath the snippets of dialogue. Here, the music is used to frame Amelia’s mood. The piece is slow and comprised of rising and falling fifths in a pentatonic scale (Figure 13). This can be considered reflective and evocative of a musical sigh. Here, the score is also an assimilating association. Based on Western musical connotations, my choice of instrument, the resonant quality of the piece and the music’s stylistic choice were intended to place the audience in a sad, reflective state.

![Figure 13: Rising and Falling Fifth, Taken from the Score to 'Light Reflection' Composer: Ben Yap](image)

Up to this point in the film, the non-lyrical music elements and instrumental piece are a combination of non-diegetic, diegetic and meta-diegetic. Diegetic components are sounds that directly respond to what is seen on the screen. In
this film, these include the sound of a closing gate and traffic noise. The main
non-diegetic elements are the underscored music and, to a lesser extent, the
birdcalls and insect noises. The manipulated dialogue is non-diegetic, but also
meta-diegetic, because it is inferred that it is hallucinated or imagined by the
character. At this stage, the audience may guess that the homeless woman is
hearing these voices.

In the next section of the film, the music changes from piano to strings, and
Amelia begins to sing. This turns into a montage of scenes, before the viewer is
transported back to Amelia’s house. When the instrumental music begins, the
music is considered non-diegetic; however, as Amelia begins to mouth the
words of the song, it becomes diegetic. This slowly becomes meta-diegetic as
the song continues along in the montage, with the ever-present undertow of
the whispered singing rising and falling gently.

In the flashback to the scene at the house, Tony sees Amelia and calls out to
her in muffled tones. I chose the effected use of dialogue to evoke the feeling of
the past, and place the viewer in Amelia’s perspective, where she is not seeing
or hearing things completely or accurately. Here, the dialogue is diegetic
because it corresponds directly with Tony’s speech.

The simple and childlike melodic line in ‘I Don’t Know’ was constructed to
evoke a sense of innocence, and is an assimilating association to transport the
viewer into a similar mind frame. However, the lyrics reveal something deeper,
darker and more disturbing. I intended the crux of the story — Amelia’s
internal struggle — to be revealed through the montage and music. The song
then transitions out and is layered with the diegetic sounds of Amelia working
on her scrapbook, and Tony’s footsteps approaching the doorway to her
bedroom. The sound of Amelia’s colour marker drawing on a page is
heightened and stands out against the quiet room.

An awkward exchange in dialogue ensues between father and daughter. The
tension and awkwardness is reinforced by moments of silence and
unanswered questions. This daytime scene is purely diegetic in order to contrast the scenes leading up to it. The rawness of the scene was devised to emphasise a sense of realness in the drama. Musicality was required in the editing of this scene, and required careful consideration of the positioning of dialogue during the edit. This was a particularly difficult passage to edit due to the combination of useable shots — matching performance with the various camera angles and takes available.

In the next scene, Amelia is in the park. The use of meta-diegetic dialogue again highlights her internal struggle. Tony’s voice is affected with resonance and various equalisation techniques. His voice is muffled, echoed and distorted. The spacing of Tony’s dialogue quickens as the scene unfolds. Underneath this dialogue, the croaking of frogs transports the viewer to an outdoor dusk setting. As Tony’s voice intensifies and builds, the non-diegetic sustained strings surreptitiously creep into the scene, heightening the sense of foreboding. A homeless woman calls out to Amelia and awakens her from her thoughts. A sense of reality is returned to this purely diegetic scene when Amelia trips as she runs, drops her scrapbook, and is comforted by the homeless lady.

Non-diegetic sobbing becomes diegetic as Tony is revealed sitting on Amelia’s bed, in the family home. Again, the positioning of dialogue was carefully considered to maximise the emotional effect of the dialogue in this scene. As Tony and Amelia reconcile, non-diegetic piano is overlayed. The assimilating association of this melodic theme recalls Amelia’s earlier sense of melancholic reflection, and belies a sense of the unresolved. There is still sadness and heaviness as the music carries the viewer to the end credits.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter brought together the findings of Chapters One, Two and Three to reveal the influences and processes behind the construction of *Out of Sight*. In its writing, I applied Hamilton’s (2011) notion of polyvocality to reflect on and
report the research, thereby stylistically combining personal, evocative and academic voices. The initial section of the chapter discussed the struggles encountered when creating the screenplay. This was followed by a discussion of themes — from homelessness and depression to the title theme of ‘out of sight and out of mind’. Following this, I acknowledged my intentions in the project, and how these influenced the way I approached combining operatic and film conventions.

This chapter also delved into the influences from literature, art and film that I sought both consciously and unconsciously, leading me to realise that I had created a work with surrealist influences and intentions. This chapter then examined the collaborative effort involved in creating the film, noting the techniques employed to unify the project and how collaboration is often a tug of war between the goals of the individuals working on the project. Finally, this chapter explored music’s application in this project by elaborating on the tools used during composition (a MIDI and sequencer) and analysing the film’s audio track in terms of its lyrical and non-lyrical components.

The presentation of Out of Sight | Out of Mind in the next chapter is the culmination of the discussion points and research aims and intentions established in this exegetical writing. This short film captures my efforts to examine the possibility of readapting opera in a contemporary form for film, encompassing measured thought and consideration based on research into past screen operas and resolving the conflict between the conventions of opera and cinema. Much contemplation was required in generating a work that would accommodate the resources available within the parameters of the research. While it is foreseeable to present contemporary opera as film in a multitude of ways, Out of Sight presents, in a short form, an insight to the ways one might possibly create a long-form screen opera. With this mindset, Out of Sight should be viewed as an experiment in the synthesis of screen and opera, where musicality can be found in the labour of the composer as bricoleur, assembling specifically the words, structure of the work, its aural content