

Lucy Drives a Car:

Art Cinema and Dramey as a framework
for the practice of screenwriting

Jordi Capó Valdivia

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing

Department of Film and Creative Writing
School of English, Drama and Creative Studies
College of Arts and Law
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Abstract

This practice-based PhD explores the writing process for an original screenplay titled *Lucy Drives a Car*, a 65 page script written within the style and sensibilities of art cinema combined with dramedy, a genre that blends both drama and comedy. The thesis carries out a detailed analysis of selected screenplay fragments from the film *Ratcatcher* (1999), and the television series *Atlanta* (2016-18). Both of these objects of study illustrate how the narrative modes of art cinema and dramedy function at a creative, formal and practical level. This allowed me to determine how I could incorporate these film narrative modes into my screenplay.

The introduction of the essay examines the predominant features of art cinema and dramedy, and presents an overview of *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta* that outlines how these narrative trends are used. The key research question, separated into four key aims, is introduced and the methodology implemented to achieve each of them is explained.

Chapter One investigates *Ratcatcher's* narrative structure, and carries out a deeper analysis of its 'James and Margaret Anne' storyline. It distinguishes the plot's narrative elements and how they are used to imbue emotional significance to unimportant events. Specific sections from the screenplay are studied to resolve how they convey the film's melancholic mood, and how the script communicates the character's feelings with minimal use of dialogue. Other strategies, such as the handling of open and unresolved narratives, the implementation of ellipsis, the use of close ups, and how it conveys an ambiguous sense of time are also analysed.

Atlanta is examined in Chapter Two with the analysis of the series' comedy and drama elements. It discusses how the show comments upon social themes within relatable, everyday situations, and how it handles surrealist elements in hyper realistic settings. A scene by scene analysis of the *Streets On Lock* episode examines the series' blend of societal observations with comedic moments, and how this combination may be both copious and nuanced.

Chapter Three looks into the writing process of the *Lucy Drives a Car* screenplay which deals with the emotional repercussions of a family trying to continue with their daily lives after the disappearance of a loved one. It examines the development of the early story ideas from a plot-driven narrative to an art cinema style, and the use of a free writing approach that highlights character development. It also discusses narrative qualities, including the use of commonplace situations, surrealist elements and how the screenplay attempts to present social commentaries without infringing on the audience.

The fundamental ideas framed in this research are the detailed analysis of selected screenplay texts. This analysis, performed at a granular level, aids the comprehension of the narrative strategies found within specific scenes, yet it is an uncommon method in screenplay studies. The thesis also delves into seemingly uneventful story situations to develop deeper meaning within the mundane. Furthermore, it explores how humour can expound on a film's themes and accentuate a story's dramatic elements. The findings within this thesis may be useful for screenwriters that develop scripts in the art cinema or dramedy style.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Birmingham and is the original product and sole effort of the author.

No part of this thesis has been submitted as part for any other academic award other than the one it is initially intended, i.e. of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of English, Drama and Creative Studies of the University of Birmingham.

This thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed hereby are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Yordi Capó Valdivia

January 2022

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Screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car*

LUCY DRIVES A CAR

written by

Jordi Capó

Lucy Drives a Car

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS - DAY

Grey sky. An open field. The faint SOUND of highway traffic and cicadas.

WE MOVE SLOWLY across the empty terrain, we HEAR A RATTLING of a car engine. We then see a tattered, blue, 1998 Pontiac approaching. The car stops.

A young woman steps out of the car. This is Lucy: twenty-three, dark hair, thin, her face gives out the impression that she is permanently tired.

Lucy looks around. She takes out her mobile and takes a couple of pictures.

MOMENT LATER --

Lucy is now sitting on the boot of the car. She is smoking a cigarette. Numb. Blank stare. Thinking.

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK: LUCY DRIVES A CAR

INT. CAR - MOMENT LATER

Lucy gets into the driver's seat of her car. She sits for a few moments. She uncaps a half empty bottle of orange juice, she uncaps a bottle of vodka. She pours vodka into the bottle and takes a drink, then she takes a breath.

She starts the engine, shifts gear and drives.

INT. CAR - DAY

Lucy drives her car. On the passenger's seat, there is a folder with some loose papers inside.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Lucy walks up to a lamppost covered with different flyers that read: 'Missing poodle', 'Want to make more money?', and so on.

Lucy Drives a Car

She takes out one of her flyers and a SMALL ROLL OF TAPE. She slowly turns the tape and carefully looks for the beginning edge... she finds it. She tapes the flyer to the lamppost without cutting the tape. She circles the lamppost several times, unspooling the tape as she walks, before finally cutting off the tape.

AT THE ENTRANCE OF A SUPERMARKET--

Lucy tapes a flyer to a wall alongside many other flyers.

We see that the flyer she is taping reads: MISSING. It has a picture of a young man in an identification style photo. Beside it there is a small photo of a white car.

OUTSIDE A GROCERY STORE--

From a distance we see Lucy talking to the CLERK of a small grocery store. We cannot hear what they are saying. She explains and shows the flyer. The clerk listens and shakes his head.

AT THE ENTRANCE OF A COFFEE SHOP--

Lucy finishes taping another flyer on the wall. She looks to the side... WE SEE a worn and torn *Oscar flyer*. Lucy rips it off slowly and puts up a new one.

INT. HOME - DAY

A darkened bedroom. Daylight tries to creep in through the cracks of a drawn curtain.

A DIGITAL ALARM clock that displays "10:32".

Carmen (47) lies on her bed, she stares blankly at the ceiling as she hugs a pillow. THIS IS LUCY'S MOTHER. She turns her head and looks at the sunlight around the edges of the curtain.

Carmen opens the curtain. Daylight fills the room.

We begin to hear a voice from a SELF-HELP AUDIOBOOK:

AUDIOBOOK (V.O.)
*...as we heal, we learn who we are
and who our loved one was in life.
Healing brings us closer to the
person we loved...*

INT. HOME - MOMENT LATER

As the Audiobook continues in the background...

Pieces of a broken glass on the kitchen floor. A pile of dirty dishes in the sink.

A small worn out KITCHEN in a small worn out FLAT -- part of a HOUSING ESTATE built in the 70's.

Carmen stands in the kitchen looking at the mess. Carmen sweeps the broken glass onto a dustpan. She puts the broken glass in a bin.

AT THE SINK, Carmen slowly washes a dirty plate. She rinses it and puts it on the dishrack.

Carmen pauses, she looks at the LONE PLATE on the dishrack. She turns and looks at the PILE OF PLATES in the sink.

She shuts off the water, reaches for her phone and stops the SELF-HELP AUDIOBOOK.

Carmen stands in SILENCE. She leaves the kitchen.

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENT LATER

Carmen sits on an old sofa in the middle of the living room. She smokes a cigarette as she looks at a large city map on the wall.

The map has pictures, notes on small pieces of paper, newspaper clippings of missing persons cases.

We see arrows pointing at several locations, places marked with a circle and places crossed off.

Carmen stares blankly at the map.

EXT. ROADSIDE RESTAURANT - LATER

Lucy's car drives up and parks at a roadside restaurant. A trailer passes by on the road.

INT. ROADSIDE RESTAURANT - MOMENT LATER

Lucy enters the restaurant. The place is empty except for two LORRY DRIVERS eating at separate tables. She walks up to who seems to be the OWNER.

LUCY
Hello. Good morning.

OWNER
Good morning.

LUCY
My name is Lucía Martínez. My
brother went missing a year ago.
His name is Oscar.

Lucy hands him one of the flyers with Oscar's picture. The owner takes a look.

LUCY
He was last seen heading to Loma
Verde. So we're asking around for
any possible information. I know a
year is a long time ago but do you
happen to remember having seen
him?

OWNER
Uh... no sorry.

His answer does not upset Lucy, she signals again at the flyer.

LUCY
This is the car he was driving, a
white chevy. A 2003 white chevy...
the hatchback type. It had a
smiley sticker on the rear
windshield.

The owner looks attentively at the flyer.

LUCY
You happen to remember seeing this
car around?
(MORE)

LUCY (CONT'D)
Or somebody mentioning something
about an abandoned car somewhere?

OWNER
No.

Lucy seems to have done this many times before.

LUCY
Could I put this by the entrance?

Owner thinks for a moment.

OWNER
Why don't you give me one and I'll
put it up later.

Lucy insists.

LUCY
I can put it up, no problem.

OWNER
I'll put it up later.

An uncomfortable pause.

LUCY
Okay...
(opens her rucksack)
Can I give you some extra flyers?
Just in case.

OWNER
Yes.

Lucy hands him some extra flyers.

LUCY
Well, if you have any information,
call this number. Please...

OWNER
Ahh... sure.

LUCY
Thank you.

Lucy walks away. Owner looks at Lucy as she leaves. He then
looks down at the flyers.

WE SEE the flyers in his hand.

INT. CAR - MOMENT LATER

Lucy gets in her car. She puts her rucksack on the passenger's seat.

She takes out a map of the city. WE SEE several circled locations. She crosses out one of them.

She takes the bottle of orange juice and vodka from under the seat and takes a drink.

She starts the car. The RATTLING and SQUEALING of the engine. She shifts into first gear.

INT. HOME - CARMEN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Carmen sits on the edge of her bed. She looks down: WE SEE that she is wearing worn out TRAINERS.

Salsa Music builds up...

INT. DANCE STUDIO - LATER

CLOSE ON CARMEN'S WORN OUT TRAINERS AS SHE DANCES.

We're in a rustic dance studio. Several middle-aged women and a young couple listen to the teacher as they learn to dance SALSA. They practice in a line in front of a large mirror.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER
one, two, three -- watch your
arms! -- and to the right -- left!

CARMEN is a bad dancer. She is having difficulty with some of the dance steps but she does her best.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER
...and five, six, seven -- turn!

MOMENT LATER--

Now they are practising in pairs. There are more women than men, so women practice with each other. MRS. DANCE TEACHER takes turns dancing with them.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

Switch!

They switch to another dancing partner. Teacher holds Carmen.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

...and one, two, three...

Carmen dances as she looks down at her feet. Teacher lifts Carmen's chin.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

Look at your partner.

Carmen looks at her teacher for a moment and then looks back down at her feet..

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

Don't look at your feet, look up.
If you don't want to look at your
partner you can look slightly to
the side of his or her face.

Carmen now looks awkwardly into space.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

Watch your left foot. Let it come
together in five, six and seven.
Got it?

CARMEN

(nods)
Got it.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

Good.
(calling out)
Switch!

The dance teacher goes to another student. Another middle aged woman arrives with Carmen, they hold each other in dance positions.

MOMENT LATER--

The class is over. The teacher is in front of the group giving final instructions.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

...be careful with the double
turn, watch the heel -- If not,
you will lose your balance.

(MORE)

MRS. DANCE TEACHER (CONT'D)

Okay so -- next week we'll have our final class. We'll have our final dance routine. It's gonna be the full routine.

Nervous excitement comes out of the group.

MRS. DANCE TEACHER

I recommend you practice at home. Don't worry. You already know it. You guys are gonna do great!

Teacher CLAPS as she ends the class. All the students CLAP enthusiastically but Carmen only claps once.

EXT. CITY - AFTERNOON

Carmen is standing on one side of a pedestrian crossing. The pedestrian traffic light becomes green. Carmen doesn't notice, she is deep in thought while other people cross the street.

After a moment, Carmen realises she can cross the street. She takes a step forward--

A CAR HONKS as a car drives dangerously close in front of her. Carmen is startled and quickly takes a step back.

She takes a deep breath and waits for the next green light.

INT. QUICKMART STORE - AFTERNOON

Carmen walks slowly through a convenience store. She takes four packs of instant noodles from a shelf.

Carmen then approaches the cash register with several items.

CASHIER begins to scan Carmen's merchandise. CASHIER: young woman, 25, wearing all black except for her Quickmart orange vest.

CARMEN

...and a pack of Marlboro please.

The cashier turns towards the cigarette stand and reaches for the Red Marlboro.

CARMEN

The white ones, please.

CASHIER
Anything else?

CARMEN
No thanks.

Cashier passes it through the scanner. BEEP!

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - AFTERNOON

Lucy's car arrives and parks outside a luxury car dealership.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - MOMENT LATER

Lucy is looking around the car dealership.

A SALESMAN looks over... Lucy clearly looks out of place. The Salesman walks over to Lucy.

SALESMAN
Hi. Looking for anything in particular?

LUCY
No... just looking around.

Lucy looks around.

SALESMAN
Well if you have any questions, just let me know.

LUCY
Okay.

SALESMAN cautiously walks away. Lucy keeps looking at him.

MOMENT LATER--

Lucy gets in a LUXURY SUV. Closes the door.

CLOSE ON several details of the car.

Lucy's hand glides across the dashboard, the steering wheel, the seats. Feeling the leather. She inhales, getting that *new car smell*. No outside noise.

Lucy adjusts the *backrest*. She leans back, takes a deep breath. Relaxed.

EXT. CITY CENTRE - ROUNDABOUT OF THE MISSING - NIGHT

A BANNER with a picture of a person, a name and the date they went missing.

WE SEE protest signs that read: WE DEMAND JUSTICE!, WHERE ARE THEY?, THE SEARCH CONTINUES.

Carmen OPENS THE PACK OF CIGARETTES, TAKES ONE OUT, and lights it. She sits in front of a ROUNDABOUT.

(The roundabout is a monument that commemorates historical Mexican heroes. In 2018, it was appropriated by the families of missing persons and the general public in protest against the government's lack of action regarding the disappearances.)

The monument is a 164 ft tall column surrounded by a 6 ft high wall, 240 ft in diameter. Families and friends of the victims place banners and pictures of their missing loved ones on the wall, together with flowers, candles, urban art and graffiti. It's now popularly known as the 'Roundabout of The Missing'.

While Carmen is smoking, she looks down at the cigarette pack and sees the anti-smoking image of a DISEASED FOOT. Underneath it reads: "SMOKING CLOGS YOUR ARTERIES".

Carmen looks over at a YOUNG COUPLE sitting at a nearby bench who are talking and being affectionate. Carmen casually observes them.

The SOUND of an arriving Whatsapp from Carmen's PHONE.

Carmen takes out her phone. Someone has sent her a video of a cat "playing" the piano. She doesn't react but still answers with TWO EMOTICONS OF LAUGHTER WITH TEARS.

Carmen puts aside her phone and continues to smoke. She looks over at the COUPLE, they are now kissing.

On Carmen's impassive face.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

Lucy drives in the city as she stares into the distance. She sees red blinking lights in her rearview mirror, and she changes over to the right lane.

A police car passes by with its lights flashing.

EXT. INTERSECTION - AFTERNOON

A traffic light turns red. Pedestrians cross the street.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Lucy waits in her car for the green light. She looks over at a street corner in the distance.

HER POINT OF VIEW: Some MALE PROSTITUTES stand by the sidewalk. Tight fitting shirts. The majority of them are dressed in form-fitting shirts. They are mostly in their early twenties. They keep to themselves as they smoke and wait.

She gazes at them for a moment... The light turns GREEN. Lucy puts the car in gear and drives off.

INT. CAR - LATER

Lucy is driving and enters a traffic tunnel. She slows down as she reaches slow moving traffic.

WIDE SHOT of Lucy's car stuck in traffic in the middle of the tunnel.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Carmen opens the grocery bag and takes out the instant noodles she bought at the convenience store.

CLOSE ON a hand that flips the switch on a KETTLE. Instant noodles are dropped on two bowls. The automatic switch from the teapot turns off. Hot water is poured over the noodles.

Carmen watches the steam as it rises from the bowls.

HARD CUT TO:

Carmen and Lucy are now sitting at the kitchen table facing each other. They eat their instant noodles.

A prolonged moment of silence. Then...

LUCY
How was your day?

CARMEN
Good.

LUCY
You go to the dance class?

CARMEN
I did.

LUCY
How was it?

CARMEN
Good.

A long pause.

LUCY
I checked that thing on Oscar's
car.

CARMEN
Yeah?

LUCY
Yes.

CARMEN
And?

LUCY
And there was nothing there...

Lucy takes out her mobile and shows Carmen the video she took of the empty field.

Carmen watches the video on Lucy's phone. The video ends and Lucy puts down the phone on the table.

CARMEN
Okay... You sure it's where they
said?

Lucy is bothered by what her mother is passively implying.

LUCY
Yes.

They continue eating the instant noodles in silence.

INT. CARMEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Generic Salsa music is playing from Carmen's phone. She rehearses the dance steps in the middle of the room.

Over the music there is a voice that COUNTS THE BEATS:

VOICE
One... Two... Three... and...
One... Two...

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lucy approaches her mother's bedroom door. She hears the music from inside and steps away.

Lucy walks towards another closed door. WEE SEE the door has stickers from several sports teams.

She pauses and thinks for a moment before putting her hand on the door knob, she opens the door and walks in.

INT. OSCAR'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room looks like it has been rummaged through: Clothes on the floor, drawers turned upside down, books and papers thrown about.

Lucy looks around the room. She walks toward a dresser, opens one of the drawers, it's EMPTY. She sees a BOTTLE OF COLOGNE on the dresser.

She opens the bottle and smells it... we perceive a SUBTLE MELANCHOLY on her face.

Then, she notices something by the base of the dresser. She leans down for a closer look and picks it up.

It's an OLD PICTURE. In the photo we see a young man, a little boy and girl, and what seems to be a twenty-something year old Carmen. They are smiling and leaning casually on a RED 1982 Datsun. Lucy smiles slightly and puts the picture in her jacket.

She exits the room with the bottle of cologne in her hand.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - FOLLOWING DAY

Two half-empty coffee cups on a table. Carmen and a FRIEND sit across from each other in the outside area of a local coffee shop. They're both smoking cigarettes, FRIEND is doing all the talking.

FRIEND

...then she said "and what you owe me from last month" and the guy says: "I thought it was already resolved with the previous payment." And she had to explain everything she had already explained last week...

Carmen is not following the conversation. However, she sits and nods her head once in a while to give the impression that she is listening.

Carmen looks over to a nearby table. There is an OLD MAN. In front of him: a coffee and biscuit. The OLD MAN holds a cane and is trying -- and failing -- to stay awake.

Carmen looks back at her friend who is still talking away. Carmen takes a drag off her cigarette. She pauses and stares at the cigarette locked between her fingers.

CUT TO:

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A CIGARETTE PACK AND A LIGHTER as they are placed inside a drawer. The drawer is CLOSED.

Carmen stares at the drawer, doubting her decision.

Salsa Music fades in....

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Again, generic salsa music is playing from Carmen's PHONE.

Carmen rehearses her dance steps, now with GREATER INTENSITY.

She's looking down at her feet but remembers to look up and RAISES her head.

She moves around the room. Feeling confident. Then... she accidentally hits her foot against the base of the bed.

CARMEN

Aah!!

She stops and sits on the bed and holds her foot in pain.

She gets back up and starts to dance again but now with shorter steps and protecting her injured foot.

VOICE

One... Two... Three... and...

One... Two...

INT. PRINT SHOP - DAY

Lucy enters a small local print shop and approaches PRINTER LADY who is folding banners and putting them on a shelf.

LUCY

Hi. I'm here to pick up a banner.

PRINTER LADY

Do you have your order number?

LUCY

Sorry, no.

PRINTER LADY

That's okay. Who's it for?

LUCY

Lucía Martínez.

Printer Lady checks on an old computer.

PRINTER LADY

Uh... We don't have it yet. We had a problem with the printer.

LUCY

You think you could have it by Thursday? We would like it by Thursday.

PRINTER LADY

By Thursday? Yeah, we'll have it by Thursday.

LUCY

What time?

PRINTER LADY

Like around six.

LUCY

Are you sure? Cuz you guys said today.

PRINTER LADY

Yeah, I'm sorry. We just got the printer fixed this morning.

(a beat)

We'll have it. We have a backlog but I'll put it at the front of the queue.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lucy comes out of the printer shop, she notices something. At a distance there is a RED CAR. It's similar to the red car she saw in the OLD PHOTO. She walks up and takes a picture of the rear of the car. She walks to the front of the car and takes another picture.

She walks away.

EXT. ROAD - CITY LIMITS - DAY

CLOSE ON A GLOVED HAND searching through some weeds.

Carmen is crouched down by the ground. She searches here and there. She finds a candy wrapper and puts it in a plastic 'tupperware' container.

Inside the container there are other items: A soda can, a sandal, and a piece of a broken dish.

She is looking for "clues". She keeps searching through the weeds.

Lucy is smoking as she waits by the car. Carmen walks up to Lucy while carrying the container.

CARMEN

You shouldn't smoke.

LUCY

(dismissive)

Mm-hmm.

Carmen puts the container on the hood of the car and takes out something.

CARMEN

Look...

Carmen holds up a cheap golden ring and she shows it to Lucy.

Lucy nods, annoyed and unenthusiastic.

LUCY

Yeah, that's... a ring.

THE SOUND OF A CAR ENGINE RISES. Lucy and Carmen turn.

A BLACK TRUCK drives up the road. Carmen and Lucy watch the truck cautiously.

The truck slows down and stops up the road, fifty yards away. Lucy and Carmen look at each other.

LUCY

Let's go.

Lucy calmly drops her cigarette. Carmen puts the container inside the car. They slowly get in the car as they keep an eye on the truck.

They start the car and drive off at a normal speed in the opposite direction from the truck.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Lucy gets on the main road. She looks in the rear view mirror.

LUCY

Is it following us?

Carmen turns and looks out the back of the car.

CARMEN

No.

Lucy looks straight ahead. They ride in silence.

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lucy sits on the sofa by the window as she smokes a cigarette. She looks out at the APARTMENT BUILDING across the street. On one of the balconies, A MAN is talking on his mobile phone. Lucy watches him for a moment.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy calmly gets up and turns off the living room lights. She walks back and sits on the sofa. She observes the MAN.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - MOMENT LATER

Lucy lies on her bed as she stares at the ceiling. Lucy is looking at the PICTURE she found in Oscar's bedroom. She focuses on her FATHER.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - NEXT DAY

Lucy lays out several bills on the kitchen table. She puts different denominations in her jacket and several others in her pants pockets.

Lucy opens a kitchen drawer. She pauses for a moment and looks at the FLATWARE. She reaches in and takes out a SHARP STEAK KNIFE.

INT. CAR - LATER

Lucy steps inside the driver's seat of her car. She puts a CANISTER of PEPPER SPRAY inside the left breast pocket of her jacket. She takes a moment and breathes.

She quickly pulls out the canister of pepper spray from her jacket and points it at the passenger seat. She does it again as if she's practising.

Then, she puts the STEAK KNIFE above the SUN VISOR.

She pulls the knife from the visor and points it towards the passenger seat.

She does it again. This time the knife spins out of her hand and into the air, it graces her hand and falls on the car floor.

She picks up the knife from the floor, looks at her hand and notices a small cut. She kisses the wound.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Several MALE PROSTITUTES are waiting on a street corner.

Lucy is in her car, parked nearby. She watches the group of men and focuses on one of them: He is thin, muscular and appears to be in his early TWENTIES. He calls himself DEREK.

INT. LUCY'S CAR - MOMENT LATER

DEREK is sitting in the passenger's seat of Lucy's car.

DEREK
You have a nice car.

LUCY
Thanks.

DEREK
Smells nice.

DEREK is nervous. Lucy is a bit less nervous.

LUCY
What music do you like?

DEREK
I don't know. All music.
(shrugs)
Any music.

A beat. Lucy takes a look at DEREK.

LUCY
You're very handsome.

DEREK
Yeah?

LUCY
Yeah. I like your arms.

DEREK
(proud of himself)
Thanks.

Derek pauses.

DEREK
So... what do you want to do?

LUCY
Uhh... What do you usually do?

DEREK
Well... usually I hang out with
guys... so usually it's like...
blow jobs... or hand jobs.

LUCY
How much for that?

DEREK
500 for *blow job*. 200 for *hand
job*.

Lucy thinks for a moment.

LUCY
How old are you?

DEREK
Twenty two.

LUCY
Where you from?

DEREK
(evasive)
Around...

A pause.

Lucy reaches for her pockets. She thinks for a moment-- *Which pocket was it?* Lucy takes out 500 pesos from one of her pants pockets.

LUCY
(handing the money)
Here. That's all I have.

Derek takes the money and looks at it.

LUCY
Is it okay if we hug?

DEREK
(puzzled)
Hug?

LUCY
Yeah.

DEREK
Uh... sure.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy is relieved that he accepted her offer. She goes through her rucksack and takes out the BOTTLE OF COLOGNE she took from Oscar's room.

LUCY

Could you... spray some of this on you?

Derek takes the bottle. Puzzled.

DEREK

(looking at the bottle)
I don't like this brand. This is like... cheap.

Lucy looks at him.

LUCY

Just put it on.

Derek is reluctant. He looks at the bottle.

DEREK

I got real *Tommy Boy* on. This is going to fuck it up.

LUCY

I'm paying you. Just put it on.

Derek sprays the cologne on his chest and neck. He coughs a bit.

Lucy gets near Derek and hugs him. She closes her eyes and inhales. She has a moment. Lucy then breaks the hug.

They both sit in silence.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a hand that flips the switch on an ELECTRIC TEAPOT. Instant noodles are dropped on two bowls. The automatic switch from the teapot turns off. Hot water is poured over the noodles.

Lucy and Carmen sit across from each other eating noodles. The CLANGING OF THE SPOONS against the bowls fills the kitchen.

A LONG BEAT. Then...

CARMEN

How was your day?

LUCY

Good.

Lucy thinks for a moment.

LUCY

I'm picking up Oscar's banner on
Thursday.

Carmen pauses for a moment, then continues to eat.

LUCY

When do you want to put it up?

Carmen doesn't answer. Lucy looks up.

CARMEN

I don't know.

Lucy puts her fork down.

LUCY

You said you wanted the banner.
You said you wanted to put it up.

CARMEN

I did... I do. But later...

LUCY

When?

CARMEN

Later.

Lucy gets up.

LUCY

You wash the dishes.

Lucy walks out of the kitchen. Carmen looks down at the two
plates on the kitchen table.

INT. HOME - DAY

BATHROOM--

Lucy brushes her teeth in front of the bathroom mirror.

CARMEN'S BEDROOM--

Carmen sits on her bed looking out the window. She is dressed
better than usual.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Lucy drives. Carmen sits in the passenger seat. They don't speak. Silence.

INT. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - WAITING AREA - DAY

Lucy is texting on her phone and Carmen watches a SOAP OPERA on the TELEVISION mounted on the wall.

At a distance, a group of people are talking to a social worker. Carmen looks over, she can't hear what they are saying but they seem very upset.

Carmen returns her gaze to the TV.

INT. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - OFFICE - MOMENT LATER

A stack of file boxes in the corner.

Across from a desk Lucy and Carmen sit side by side as we hear a SOCIAL WORKER reading a report:

SOCIAL WORKER (O.S.)
...height: 1.75, weight:
approximately 72 kilograms, eye
colour: light brown, facial hair:
none, hair colour: dark brown,
scars: 2 inch scar beneath the
right knee, marks: half inch
birthmark on right shoulder,
tattoos: none. Last seen: at gas
station Pemex with address at Road
to Loma Verde 2302, Nextipac,
Zapopan, Jalisco...

We now see the SOCIAL WORKER, a forty-something woman, sitting behind a desk. She looks tired and overworked. On the desk there is a five year old computer and several piles of folders and papers.

SOCIAL WORKER
...the missing persons report was
filed in the Ministry of Justice
by Carmen Arreola Solis on April
25, 2017.

The Social Worker looks over at Carmen.

SOCIAL WORKER
Is this information correct?

CARMEN
Yes.

SOCIAL WORKER
We will submit the request to the
Metropolitan Police and the
Criminal Records Office before the
end of the month.

The Social Worker turns the document around and slides it
towards Lucy and Carmen.

SOCIAL WORKER
Sign here, please.

Carmen leans forward -- CLOSE SHOT OF THE PEN as Carmen signs
the missing persons report.

Carmen hands the PEN over to Lucy. Lucy leans in and signs
above the line that reads, "AUTHORISED WITNESS".

The Social Worker takes the document and puts it in a manila
folder. She then takes the folder and places it on top of a
stack of many other folders.

Lucy and Carmen watch in silence.

INT. TRAFFIC TUNNEL - DAY

WIDE SHOT of bumper to bumper traffic inside the tunnel. At a
distance we see LUCY'S CAR.

INT. CAR (INSIDE THE TUNNEL)- CONTINUOUS

ON LUCY with her hand over the steering wheel. Carmen sits in
the passenger seat looking out the window. The car moves
slowly.

Carmen begins to HUM softly.

CARMEN
Da-di-di-da. Di-da... How did it
go?

LUCY
What?

CARMEN
The song... The song he liked...
Da-di-di...

Lucy realises she's talking about Oscar.

LUCY
I don't know. *Da-da-di?*

Carmen looks out the window.

CARMEN
No. Da-di-di-da. Di-da...
Something like that.

LUCY
You want me to look for it?

A BEAT.

CARMEN
No...
(looking out the window)
Da-di-di-da...

A moment of silence. The car advances slowly.

WIDE SHOT of Lucy's car in the middle of traffic in the tunnel.

EXT. CITY - SHOE SHOP - NEXT DAY

Carmen approaches the DISPLAY WINDOW of a shoe store. Her eyes focus on SOMETHING...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROUNDABOUT OF THE MISSING - LATER

Carmen is sitting on a bench in front of the roundabout of the missing. She is admiring the NEW TRAINERS on her feet. She looks up and sees the banners and pictures of the missing.

In that moment, WE HEAR:

VOICE (O.S.)
Those are nice.

Carmen turns and sees the convenience store CASHIER sitting on the next bench: Her name is NINA. Carmen is pleasantly surprised.

NINA
New?

CARMEN
Ehh... yes. Thank you.

Nina is smoking a cigarette. Fingernails painted BLACK, wearing BLACK clothes under her ORANGE Quickmart work vest.

CARMEN
Yes... I go to a salsa class
and... we have our final
presentation. It's next week.

NINA
Salsa... that's cool. I like
salsa-- more dancing it than
listening to it.

Nina holds up her cigarette pack.

NINA
Want one?

CARMEN
No thank you. I don't smoke. I
mean... I'm trying to quit.

NINA
That's good. I'm also gonna
quit... later.

They exchange a kind look.

WE HEAR the arrival of a WHATSAPP message. Carmen takes a look at the message on her phone. It's a video of a CAT chasing a laser beam on the carpet with UPBEAT MUSIC playing in the background.

NINA
What is it?

CARMEN
Look...

Carmen shows her the video on the phone.

CARMEN
...a friend sends them.

Nina gets up and sits next to Carmen to get a better look at the video. Carmen seems pleased with this unexpected company.

NINA watches the video and smiles. She takes her phone out of her pocket.

NINA
(searching on her phone)
I have some too.
(showing Carmen)
Look.

Carmen sees a video of a CAT "driving" a car.

CARMEN
That's nice.

NINA
Yeah...

Nina looks over at the roundabout and the pictures of the missing.

NINA
It's sad. Isn't it? All the
people.

Carmen decides not to mention Oscar to Nina.

CARMEN
Yeah...

A beat. Nina pockets her phone.

NINA
I have to get back to work.

Nina puts out her cigarette on the bench.

CARMEN
Can I ask you something?

NINA
Yeah.

CARMEN
Do you... do you talk to your
mother?

Nina is puzzled by the question.

NINA
Hmm... yes.

CARMEN
About what?

NINA
Well... not much. I tell her how
I'm doing and... stuff like that.

A beat.

CARMEN
Does she talk to you?

NINA
Oh yeah... all the time. She
rambles on. I have to remind her
to get to the point.

Carmen thinks for a moment.

CARMEN
That's good. Thanks.

NINA
You're welcome... good luck with
your dance class.

Carmen watches the cashier as she walks away.

After a beat, she looks down at her phone and answers the CAT
VIDEO message with TWO EMOTICONS OF LAUGHTER WITH TEARS.

Carmen looks up at the roundabout then down at her new
trainers.

EXT. PETROL STATION - DAY

At a petrol station next to a convenience store, WE SEE Lucy's
car with the hood up. She fills the radiator with water.

She puts the cap back on the radiator and looks up. She sees a
vintage RED CAR parked outside the convenience store. She
closes the hood of the car.

NEAR THE RED CAR--

Lucy walks up to the RED CAR and takes pictures.

A man carrying a grocery bag approaches the RED CAR.

REDCAR OWNER
Hello... Can I help you??

LUCY
No... I'm good.

REDCAR OWNER
Why are you taking pictures?

LUCY
It's okay.

REDCAR OWNER
This is my car. Why are you taking pictures of my car?

LUCY
Well, it's a public place. So I can take pictures.

REDCAR OWNER
What's your name?

LUCY
What's your name?

Redcar Owner takes out his phone and starts recording Lucy.

REDCAR OWNER
(narrating for the video)
This person is taking pictures of my car.
(to Lucy)
What's your name!?

Lucy lowers her phone and walks away.

REDCAR OWNER
(calling out)
Hey... I got you on video...
Evidence!

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Lucy opens the car door and steps inside. She is upset.

A pause. She starts the engine.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Lucy drives with a blank look on her face. She enters the same traffic tunnel as before...

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Strangely, the tunnel is now EMPTY. Lucy looks ahead at the never ending tunnel and starts to ACCELERATE. The car picks up speed and goes FASTER AND FASTER.

The tunnel lights flash over Lucy's face.

Lucy then has a moment of *What am I doing?*-- Lucy loses control of the car, it SWERVES slightly to the side. Lucy brakes. The car skids, bounces off the tunnel wall and spins around.

WIDE SHOT of the car as it spins and screeches to a halt, facing the wrong way.

INSIDE THE CAR--

Lucy's HANDS are firmly gripping the steering wheel. She is startled, breathing heavily.

She turns on the HAZARD LIGHTS and steps out of the car.

THE TUNNEL--

Lucy walks to the front of the car. She sees a big dent on the bumper and a smashed front headlight. She stands and looks at the damage.

The hazard light next to the smashed headlight still works. It blinks: ON... OFF... ON... OFF.

Lucy is transfixed by the blinking light, almost hypnotised.

A DISTANT SOUND breaks the stillness of the moment.

Lucy sees a RED CAR driving down the tunnel. The RED CAR's hazard lights begin to flash.

The RED CAR slows down as it approaches Lucy's car. She can't see the driver through the TINTED WINDOWS.

The RED CAR drives by without stopping. Lucy sees the car as it drives away.

She looks back at her damaged car and exhales. Lucy looks around and notices a *certain beauty* in this tableau. She's never seen the tunnel empty like this.

Lucy Drives a Car

She takes out her phone and TAKES A PICTURE of her CAR with the tunnel in the background.

She pauses... and decides to take a SELFIE. She points the camera at herself with the car and the tunnel in the background. She takes a picture of herself, not smiling.

INSIDE THE CAR--

Lucy gets back in her car. She starts the engine and puts the car in gear. She slowly turns the car trying to get it to face the right way but it makes a SCREECHING NOISE so she stops.

THE TUNNEL--

Lucy steps out and walks to the front of the car. She sees that the front bumper is stuck against the tire.

She pulls the bumper but it stays stuck. She pulls again and again and-- SNAP! It comes loose. The tire and the bumper are no longer stuck.

She gets back in the car.

A WIDE SHOT of Lucy's car as it exits the tunnel.

WE HOLD ON THE EMPTY TUNNEL... another car passes by.

EXT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

With Lucy out of the house, Carmen is practising in the middle of the living room. An incoming call on Carmen's phone CUTS OFF the salsa music.

Carmen stops dancing, picks up the phone and answers.

CARMEN
(out of breath)
Hello... Yes... yes...
(stops and listens)
A white chevy?... Really? Ahh...
yeah.

Carmen looks around for something to write with. She finds a pen and writes on her forearm.

CARMEN
...next to the factory? Yeah,
yeah... Thank you. Is this your
number? -- just in case... Could
you give me your number? Hello?
Hello?

She looks at her phone, the call has ended.

Carmen finds a piece of paper and copies the information from her forearm.

Carmen walks up to the map of clues and pins the note on the map. She steps back and looks up at the map.

A BEAT. Silence fills the flat. Carmen thinks...

Carmen opens a drawer and stares into it. WE see the pack of CIGARETTES and the LIGHTER inside the drawer.

Carmen thinks for a moment... and then shuts the drawer.

CLOSE ON Carmen's house keys as she picks them up. She exits the flat and shuts the door behind her.

INT. QUICKMART - LATER

Nina is behind the counter trying to set up a mini cardboard stand for 'Rojo Loco' energy drink. The stand is too flimsy and flops over. After a couple of tries, she gives up.

The store is empty except for Nina and two customers. Carmen enters the store and approaches the counter.

CARMEN

Hi.

NINA

Hey, how are you?

CARMEN

Good.

NINA

How are the dance lessons going?

CARMEN

I just came from there.

NINA

Cool.

CARMEN

I'm really thirsty, so I'm gonna get a Gatorade.

NINA

Yeah, that helps.

Carmen walks towards the refrigerators in the back...

A customer walks up to the cash register and puts a milk carton on the counter. He is thirty-something and has BLONDE HIGHLIGHTS in his hair.

NINA
Anything else?

HIGHLIGHT
No.

Nina scans the milk carton.

HIGHLIGHT
Everything is going to be okay.
Just relax.

Nina is *pleasantly confused* by what HIGHLIGHT said. She then looks down: HIGHLIGHT IS POINTING A GUN AT HER.

HIGHLIGHT
Relax. Just do what I say.

Nina looks over at the entrance. The other man in the store is now on look-out at the entrance door.

HIGHLIGHT
Put all the money on the counter.

Carmen notices what's going on.

HIGHLIGHT
(to Carmen)
You... move over here.

Carmen walks over from behind the shelf.

HIGHLIGHT
Stand there, don't move.

Highlight points the gun back at Nina.

HIGHLIGHT
No alarms!! Don't call the police.

Nina's hands shake as she puts the money on the counter.

HIGHLIGHT
You're doing a good job. Put all the money. No alarms. If you activate some alarm, I'll fucking kill you!... You're doing a good job. Relax.

Nina finishes putting the money on the counter and puts her hands back up, shaking.

HIGHLIGHT
That's it?!!

NINA
That's all the money we have.

HIGHLIGHT
Shit!!

Nina focuses on the gun that's pointing at her face.

OTHER THIEF
(looking outside)
Let's go.

Highlight gets the money and puts it in a bag.

HIGHLIGHT
Okay...
(to Nina)
Get over here next to her.

Nina comes out from behind the cash register and stands next to Carmen.

HIGHLIGHT
Get on the floor-- both of ya!!

They both sit on the floor while keeping their hands up.

HIGHLIGHT
Not sitting! On your stomachs-- on
the floor-- on your stomach!!

Carmen and Nina lay flat on their stomachs with their heads to the side, FACING EACH OTHER.

HIGHLIGHT
Ok... stay there and don't move
for two minutes. We're counting
the time... NO COPS!!

We hear the SOUND of the store door opening and then closing.

A dead silence fills the store.

CLOSE UP ON CARMEN LOOKING AT NINA AND NINA LOOKING AT CARMEN.

Carmen and Nina remain frozen as they lie on the floor. Then...
Nina slowly gets up, she moves slowly to the entrance door...

Lucy Drives a Car

Carmen slowly sits on the floor. Nina is scanning the outside.
Another ten seconds of silence.

Both of them are not sure what to do. Nina gets closer and closer to the door.

NINA
I think they're gone.

Nina walks up to the exit and looks outside.

NINA
They're gone.

Nina turns to Carmen.

NINA
You okay?

Carmen nods. Nina turns to the exit door.

NINA
(as if the thieves are still there)
You piece of shit... PIECE OF SHIT!! Fuck you! Fuck you! You want a piece of me?! Let's go! Piece of shit.

Nina wavers from almost crying to angry swearing.

NINA
Yeah you assholes!

Nina's hands begin to shake. Carmen slowly approaches Nina.

CARMEN
Are you okay?

Nina breathes heavily as she stares to the ground. She seems to be going into shock.

Carmen gets closer.

CARMEN
Look at me... Look at me. Breathe.

Carmen holds Nina's hands.

CARMEN
Breathe...

Carmen inhales and exhales, Nina does the same. They breathe in unison.

CARMEN

You have to call the police. Do
you have a phone?

Nina nods and walks up to the COUNTER. She picks up the STORE
PHONE and dials 999 as her hands shake.

NINA

(into the phone)

Umm... uhh... I... we... umm...

Carmen walks up and takes the phone out of Nina's hands.

CARMEN

(into phone)

Hello umm... we're at Quickmart...
we just got robbed. Yes... We're
at... Cárdenas Avenue and...
Federalismo. Yes we're okay.
Please hurry.

Carmen ends the phone call.

CARMEN

They're coming.

Nina's hands keep shaking. She takes a cigarette pack from the
display. She sloppily removes the cellophane wrapper and puts a
cigarette in her mouth.

She offers Carmen a cigarette, Carmen shakes her head-- *no
thanks.*

Nina grabs one of the lighters for sale and lights her
cigarette. She takes a drag and then exhales with a sigh of
relief.

Carmen looks at Nina for a moment and then grabs the cigarette
pack, takes out a cigarette and puts it in her mouth. Nina
lights the cigarette for her.

They both lean against the counter as they smoke.

NINA

(unemotional)

I hate this job.

They each take another drag from their cigarettes.

EXT. FIELD - AFTERNOON

In the same open field as before, Carmen walks slowly as she looks down on the ground.

Lucy waits in the car as she smokes a cigarette and listens to NINETIES ROCK MUSIC. She looks over at Carmen.

Carmen stops, she crouches down and picks up something. Lucy sees this and slowly shakes her head in disapproval. She takes another drag from the cigarette.

BY CARMEN--

Carmen notices something shiny half buried in the ground. She pulls it out, it's an OLD SPOON. She puts it in the plastic container.

Carmen stands up, takes off her gloves and puts her hands inside her jacket. She seems to have found something... she takes out a cigarette. She looks at it, puts it up to her nose, and subtly smells it.

She looks at it for a moment. Then, she throws the cigarette to the ground and steps on it.

Carmen takes in the BEAUTIFUL SKY as she watches Lucy from a distance. The music from Lucy's stereo continues.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - LATER

Lucy and Carmen are heading home. Carmen looks out the window in thought...

CARMEN
What was the last thing you said
to Oscar?

A pause.

LUCY
I don't know...

Lucy thinks for a moment.

LUCY
We argued.

Carmen turns and looks at Lucy.

LUCY

It's stupid... He told me to buy milk. I told him it was his turn. He said he bought it last time. He said he wasn't gonna buy the milk. I told him I wasn't either. Then he left.

Lucy turns to Carmen.

LUCY

What was the last thing you said to him?

Carmen doesn't answer.

LUCY

Umm... you don't remember or you don't want to say?... Huh?

EXT. PETROL STATION - LATER

Lucy fills her car radiator with water. Carmen sits inside the car eating crisps.

A BLACK TRUCK with tinted windows parks several feet away from Lucy's car.

Lucy looks over.

She finishes filling up the radiator, puts on the radiator cap, closes the hood and gets inside the car.

She adjusts her rearview mirror.

LUCY

It's the same truck as before.

CARMEN

What?

LUCY

That truck. It's the same truck we saw in the field the other day.

Carmen turns and sees the black truck.

CARMEN

You sure?

A pause.

LUCY
Maybe we should report it to the
police?

CARMEN
They probably are the police.
Either they're criminals, drug
traffickers or police. Just ignore
them.

Carmen keeps eating. Lucy looks at the truck through the rear
view mirror.

LUCY
No... I'm gonna do something.

Lucy gets out of the car.

CARMEN
Where you going?

With a DETERMINED look, Lucy walks towards the BLACK TRUCK.
Carmen steps out of the car and looks on.

CARMEN
(calling out)
Lucy!

Lucy keeps walking. We HEAR the TRUCK'S ENGINE START.

Lucy keeps on walking towards the truck as it REVS UP its
engine. Lucy is unafraid and keeps walking. Carmen looks on.

The truck then backs up, makes a half a turn, and gets back on
the road.

Lucy watches as the truck drives away. Carmen stands by the car
as Lucy walks back. They say nothing to each other. They both
get in the car.

INT. HOME - LUCY'S ROOM - DAY

Lucy lays on her bed as she looks straight up. She notices the
chipping paint on the ceiling.

MOMENT LATER--

Lucy packs a duffle bag with some of her clothes and
toiletries.

INT. CAR - LATER (SAME DAY)

Lucy drives for a couple of blocks of an upscale part of the city. She slows down and stops at what seems to be a hotel entrance.

A VALET approaches the car by the driver's side window.

VALET
Good evening.

LUCY
Hi... I'm getting a room.

VALET
Very well. Would you like for me
to park your car?

Lucy thinks for a moment.

LUCY
Yes... yes please.

Lucy grabs her duffle bag and rucksack from the passenger's seat and steps out. She hands her keys to the VALET.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - AFTERNOON

Lucy walks across the lobby of a nice hotel. She approaches the front desk. The hotel clerk greets her with a smile.

INT. HOTEL - LIFT - MOMENT LATER

CLOSE ON the lift numbers counting up. Lucy rides the lift as she looks up at the numbers.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MOMENT LATER

WE SEE the room door open. Lucy enters and looks around the room-- it's clean and modern. She puts her rucksack and duffle bag on the bed.

Lucy approaches the window. She takes a look at the city from above.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy takes off her shoes and gets inside the bed. She enjoys the clean sheets and fluffy pillows.

Lucy enters the bathroom. She smells the TINY SOAPS and the TINY LOTIONS.

Lucy is now taking a shower. She closes her eyes as the water pours over her face. The steam rises from her body.

Now out of the shower, she combs her hair in front of the bathroom mirror.

Lucy is wearing a hotel robe as she sits on the bed and watches television. She changes channels with the remote control. Nothing peaks her interest.

She turns off the television and tosses the remote on the bed.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

From the perspective of a moving car, we follow the WHITE LINE MARKINGS on the road. It alternates from continuous to broken lines.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

As Lucy drives, she reaches over to the passenger seat, grabs several items and throws them to the back seat: empty crisp bags, candy wrappers, an empty orange juice bottle and some of Oscar's flyers.

EXT. STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Derek is waiting on a street corner. Lucy's car drives up next to Derek, he gets in.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Lucy stops her car on a street near the HOTEL while Derek sits in the passenger seat. Lucy reaches to the back seat and grabs a SWEATER.

LUCY
Here, put this on.

Derek puts on the sweater.

LUCY

That's the hotel over there. You are going to get out here, wait twenty minutes, then enter the hotel.

She hands him the room card.

LUCY

This is the card for the room. But you also need it for the lift. Just walk straight through the lobby, the lifts are in the back. Get in the lift and put the card in the slot. Go to the 12th floor. Then go to room 1214 and knock on the door. I'll be there.

Derek looks at the room card.

DEREK

Okay... What's the room number?

LUCY

Here...

She reaches for the room card.

LUCY

It's on the card. 1214. See?

DEREK

1214, got it... What floor?

Lucy politely explains.

LUCY

Twelve. The room is 1214... it starts with 12 because it's on the twelfth floor.

Derek thinks for a moment and then is pleased by the logic.

DEREK

Okay.

Derek steps out of the car.

INT. HOTEL PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Lucy parks her car in the hotel parking garage. She takes her rucksack from the backseat and steps out of the car.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MOMENT LATER

Lucy brushes her teeth in front of the bathroom mirror. She sips some mouthwash and gargles.

There is a KNOCK on the room door. She spits the mouthwash into the basin and rinses it.

Lucy walks up to the room door. She looks through the peephole and opens the door.

Derek enters. He looks around the room.

BY THE WINDOW--

Derek slowly approaches the window and pulls open the curtains. He takes in the panoramic view of the city from this height, he then looks down at the street below.

Lucy walks up next to Derek and also looks down at the street.

LUCY
(looking down)
The cars look like toys. The
people look like ants.
(a pause)
Have you ever been in a building
this tall?

DEREK
(looking down)
Yes.

Derek steps away from the window and sits on the bed. Lucy sits on a chair in front of Derek. They look at each other.

LUCY
Would you like some water?

CUT TO: Derek is doing several push-ups with his shirt off in the middle of the room. Lucy watches him as she takes a couple of drinks from the hotel's BOTTLED WATER.

Derek is taking a shower while Lucy watches him through the glass door.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy watches Derek as he gets dressed, she takes out the same BOTTLE OF COLOGNE from before. Derek puts it on.

Lucy and Derek lie on their side on the bed. Lucy hugs Derek from behind.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Lucy pays Derek with cash. He puts the money in his pocket.

Lucy opens the room door.

LUCY
Twenty minutes.

DEREK
Yeah.

Derek exits the room. Lucy closes the door.

Lucy lies down on the bed. She SMELLS THE PILLOW.

INT. PRINTER SHOP - ANOTHER DAY

Lucy arrives at the same printer shop from before but another person is behind the counter.

LUCY
Hi.

PRINTER GUY
Hello.

LUCY
I'm here to pick up a banner for
Lucía Martínez.

Printer Guy types her name into the old computer. He then looks around the shelves and lifts up several banners searching for Lucy's banner.

PRINTER GUY
Emm... one moment please.

Printer Guy goes to a backroom. Lucy is worried -- *Isn't it ready??* She waits.

Printer Guy comes back carrying a folded banner and puts it on the counter.

PRINTER GUY
Here it is...

Lucy exhales in relief and frustration.

PRINTER GUY
You wanna see it?

LUCY
Yes.

Printer Guy steps out from behind the counter. They unfold the banner and lay it on the floor. It's about a square metre in size.

We see a picture of Oscar, it is different from the one we've seen on the *missing flyers*. In this picture OSCAR IS SMILING.

Lucy looks down at the banner... a wave of emotion goes through her.

Below Oscar's picture it reads: "MISSING SINCE APRIL 18 2017. BELOVED SON AND BROTHER"

PRINTER GUY glances at Lucy, he is quietly sympathetic.

PRINTER GUY
Is it okay?

LUCY
(recovers)
Yes... Thank you.

They start folding the banner up again.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS CITY - LATER

Lucy's car is seen from a distance going through an industrial area of the city. OLD ABANDONED FACTORIES can be seen in the background.

The car slows down and then stops.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Lucy drives, she and Carmen look around the area in all directions.

Lucy Drives a Car

CARMEN

You see it?

LUCY

No...

(looking around)

He said by the factory... Maybe
it's on the other side.

CUT TO:

Lucy's car goes down another road on the opposite side of the factory.

The car slows down and stops. There's a WHITE CAR several yards by the side of the road.

Lucy and Carmen step out of the car. They look around making sure there is no one nearby. They walk towards the WHITE CAR.

CARMEN

It's not his car.

Lucy looks over at her mother as they continue walking towards the car. She notices that the LICENCE PLATES are missing. Lucy approaches the car from the passenger's side.

The car has been ransacked: The front lights, the steering wheel and the passenger's seat are missing. Inside there are some branches and dry leaves.

Lucy peers inside... SUDDENLY A SMALL BIRD FLIES OUT FROM THE BRANCHES -- Lucy and Carmen jump back.

The bird desperately flutters its wings inside the car, collides several times against the windows, and finally escapes through an open window. Carmen watches the bird as it flies away.

Lucy continues inspecting the car.

LUCY

It doesn't have the "smiley"
sticker.

Carmen approaches the front of the car and peers through the windshield at the car's serial number.

CARMEN

(to Lucy)

You have the number?

Lucy takes out her phone, searches and reads:

LUCY
X-3-W-3...

Carmen reads the serial number on the dashboard.

LUCY
...4-2-D--

CARMEN
It's not the same serial number.

Lucy lowers her phone and looks at Carmen.

CARMEN
We should report it though...
right?

LUCY
Yes.

Carmen looks down and reads the serial number.

CARMEN
X-4-7-B-D...

Lucy writes it down on her phone.

CARMEN
...D-Z-3-1-S-7-7.

Lucy reads the number back to Carmen.

LUCY
X-4-7-B-D-9-2-9-D-Z-3-1-S-7-7.

Carmen looks up and stares out at the field.

A beat.

LUCY
I'll take some pictures anyway...

Carmen takes a few steps away from the car and looks at some birds perched on a nearby tree.

Lucy takes several pictures of the car with her phone.

WE HEAR THE SOUND of an incoming message. Lucy checks her phone. She reads and starts texting on her phone.

Carmen keeps looking at the birds on the tree.

EXT. CITY CENTRE - COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CLOSE ON coffee inside a paper cup, MILK SWIRLS on the surface.

We hear Derek's voice.

DEREK (O.S.)
Yesterday they took my money and
my shoes...

WE NOW SEE DEREK. He has a light bruise on his left cheek. He
smokes a cigarette as he explains what happened to him. Lucy is
OUT OF FRAME.

LUCY (O.S.)
The same guys who robbed you
before, robbed you last night?

Derek nods.

DEREK
I've tried going by different
streets but...

A beat.

LUCY (O.S.)
We're going to report this to the
police. They could send a patrol
car through the neighbourhood.

DEREK
I already did that the first
time... they weren't very
helpful... they seemed like...
angry.

LUCY (O.S.)
Angry?

DEREK
Yeah, the cops were like I was
wasting their time or something...
I'm afraid of going back.

LUCY (O.S.)
Do you have any place you can
stay? With a friend?

He shakes his head and exhales.

DEREK
I don't know anybody here...

LUCY (O.S.)
Any relatives?

Derek shakes his head.

DEREK
Umm... yesterday I think they had
a knife or something sharp... They
stabbed me a little bit... or
something.

LUCY (O.S.)
Stabbed? Where?

Derek points under his rib cage on the left side.

DEREK
Like here.

LUCY (O.S.)
Can I see?

Derek nods and lifts up his shirt. We see a small cut below his ribs.

DEREK
I've been putting on some *Icy-Hot*.
It's okay.

WE NOW SEE LUCY sitting across the table from Derek. She is concerned.

She looks down: WE SEE Derek's coffee, the MILK SWIRL is now barely moving.

INT. CAR - NIGHT (SAME DAY)

Lucy drives. We see DEREK through the windshield. He stares out the window like a zombie. The city is reflected on the windshield.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Lucy smokes a cigarette as she waits by her car in a run-down neighbourhood. She looks up at an apartment window on the second floor. The light in the room is TURNED ON.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy looks around. It's a dimly lit street. At a distance she sees THREE YOUNG MEN walking towards her by the same side of the sidewalk.

She thinks for a moment... *No need to worry.* But she changes her mind. She quickly drops her cigarette on the ground.

INSIDE THE CAR--

Lucy unlocks her car and gets in the driver's seat. She locks the door. She waits and watches the three men in the side mirror. The men walk by the car. Lucy watches them as they walk away.

After a moment she unlocks the door and steps out of the car.

OUTSIDE THE CAR--

Lucy takes out another cigarette and lights it up. She looks up at the same window as before. The light in the room is TURNED OFF.

She takes another drag of the cigarette, throws it on the sidewalk and steps on it.

DEREK comes out of the building with a rucksack and a rubbish bag with his personal belongings.

DEREK

Ready.

They both get in the car and drive away.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Lucy opens the door to her flat.

LUCY

Come in.

Derek walks in carrying his rucksack and rubbish bag.

Lucy closes the door.

INT. HOME - MOMENT LATER

Derek is looking around the living room. Lucy comes in with a set of bed sheets.

LUCY
Is it okay if you sleep on the
sofa?

DEREK
Yeah... Thanks.

They unfold the bed sheets and cover the sofa.

Lucy and Derek now stand in front of the WATER HEATER:

LUCY
Like twenty minutes before you
take a shower you have to turn on
the heater... here.

Lucy demonstrates on the heater.

LUCY
You have to turn this knob.

DEREK
Okay.

LUCY
Turn it back off once you come out
of the shower.

DEREK
Okay.

Derek hears music coming from Carmen's room.

LUCY
My mother is taking a dance class.
She's practising.

AT THE WINDOW--

Derek approaches the living room window. He looks out at the APARTMENT BUILDING across the street, he sees the same MAN Lucy saw before. The MAN is talking on the phone.

INT. HOME - NEXT MORNING

Carmen is looking at Derek while he sleeps on the sofa. Derek wakes up and looks at Carmen.

CARMEN
Who are you?

DEREK
I'm... Lucy's friend.

Carmen ponders.

CARMEN
Do you like eggs with chorizo?

DEREK
Yes.

Carmen heads into the kitchen. Derek sits on the sofa and yawns.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENT LATER

Derek eats eggs with chorizo as Carmen watches him eat with fervour.

CARMEN
So you went to the *UNI* with Lucy?

DEREK
(eating)
Yeah...

CARMEN
Interior design?

DEREK
(thinking)
No...
(with conviction)
I am studying to be an actor.

CARMEN
Yeah? Like theatre?

DEREK
No, like movies.

A beat. Derek wants to say more.

DEREK

Like Robert Pattinson. That's my style. You know Robert Pattinson?

CARMEN

No.

DEREK

Robert Pattinson... He was in the *Twilight* movies. He's the new *Batman*.

Carmen shakes her head.

DEREK

He's a very good actor... he's very handsome.

CARMEN

You've been in any movies?

DEREK

No. Not yet... I gotta go to Mexico City. That's where the film industry is.

CARMEN

Why don't you go to Hollywood?

Derek looks down at his plate.

DEREK

I don't speak English.

A pause, then they both turn to Lucy who is standing OUT OF FRAME.

CARMEN

Good morning. I made breakfast... eggs with chorizo.

DEREK

It's very good.

Lucy walks in and sits at the table. She looks down and looks at the plate.

CARMEN

(to Lucy)
Orange juice?

Lucy nods. Carmen pours orange juice into Lucy's glass.

Lucy has not seen this friendly attitude from Carmen for a long time.

CARMEN
(to Derek)
More juice?

DEREK
Yes please.

Carmen pours orange juice into Derek's glass.

The three of them sitting at the kitchen table. An odd moment.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

CLOSE ON: Derek unfolds a sheet of paper with some handwritten text on it.

Derek sits on the passenger's seat as Lucy drives.

DEREK
(reading)
*Hello, this is my brother Oscar,
he went missing a year ago...*

LUCY
You show the flyer.

DEREK
Oh yeah...

Derek lifts up one of Oscar's flyers. Derek continues to read in a monotone manner.

DEREK
*He was last seen heading to Loma
Verde.
Derek puts down the piece of paper
and tries to repeat the speech
from memory.*

DEREK
*We're asking around for any
possible information... This is
the car he was driving... it was
a...*

LUCY
A white chevy.

DEREK
*A white chevy. A 2003 white chevy.
It had a smiley sticker--*

LUCY
*It was a five door-- hatchback
type.*

Derek takes a breath.

DEREK
*A white chevy. It was a five
door...*

LUCY
Hatchback.

Derek looks down at the speech written on the piece of paper.

DEREK
*A white chevy. It was a five door.
A hatchback type.*

Derek puts down the piece of paper, and exhales.

DEREK
How was that?

LUCY
(lying)
Good.

EXT. CITY CENTRE - ESPLANADE - DAY

Lucy sits at a bench beneath the shade of a tree in the middle of an esplanade. She eats crisps as she observes.

AT A DISTANCE we see Derek inside a store talking to a store clerk.

Lucy attentively observes as she tries to make out how Oscar is delivering the monologue. Derek now walks up to the store window and begins to tape one of Oscar's flyers.

Lucy sees this, looks down and crosses out a location on a map.

Derek comes out of the store, crosses the street and walks up to Lucy.

DEREK
Hey...

LUCY
Hey. How was it?

DEREK
Good. He was nice.

Lucy looks down at her map.

LUCY
Good... three more to go.

Derek takes a bottle of water from under the bench and takes a drink.

DEREK
You think we could eat something?

LUCY
Yeah... when we finish.

Lucy then looks in her rucksack.

LUCY
I got half a *Snickers*. You want it?

Derek nods. Lucy hands him the half eaten candy. Derek unfolds the wrapper and starts to eat the chocolate bar.

A BEAT, then Derek turns to Lucy.

DEREK
I'm gonna try something different with the next one... I'm gonna play it like I'm sad first and then I get angry and then sad again but almost crying. So: SAD, ANGRY, SAD ALMOST CRYING...
(turns to Lucy)
Whatcha think?

LUCY
What have you been doing?

DEREK
Just SAD with a little bit of crying. Like...

Derek acts out the emotion. He's a BAD ACTOR but he does the best he can.

We see Lucy's DEADPAN reaction.

DEREK
So I wanna try something different.

Lucy Drives a Car

Lucy goes back to the map. Derek looks at the people passing by as he eats his *Snickers* bar.

A SLOW-PACED MONTAGE BEGINS:

SEVERAL SHOTS of Lucy and Derek putting up flyers in several locations around the city.

Derek is handing out flyers to pedestrians. Some accept the flyer but most people refuse to take it.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

POINT OF VIEW MOBILE CAMERA: We see the ground. The mobile camera moves, we now see Derek standing in a public park. He is looking down, getting ready for something.

LUCY (O.S.)
Okay. Ready?

DEREK
Wait.

Derek takes a deep breath.

DEREK
Okay. Go.

HIP HOP MUSIC begins to play. Derek begins a hip hop dance routine.

We now see Lucy holding her mobile as she records Derek. After several moves, Derek stops dancing.

DEREK
Okay... stop.

Lucy stops the music on her mobile.

DEREK
That's all I have so far.

LUCY
It's pretty cool. I like it.

DEREK
You like this move?

Derek does a dance step.

DEREK
I invented that.

Lucy nods. Derek walks up to Lucy and grabs her phone.

LUCY
What are you doing?

DEREK
Your turn.

Derek starts recording Lucy, she is playfully annoyed.

LUCY
Give me back my phone.

DEREK
Come on... dance.

Lucy stiffly moves her legs.

LUCY
There... I danced. I don't dance.

Derek keeps on recording.

DEREK
Okay, then pose.

LUCY
No.

DEREK
Come on... like in a photoshoot.

LUCY
Go away.

Lucy then mockingly pouts to the camera. She then does a couple of exaggerated fashion model poses.

WE JUMP CUT through several moments of them recording themselves as they fool around.

POINT OF VIEW from the MOBILE CAMERA: Derek is recording the sunset. He pans the camera and we see Lucy absorbed by the golden light bouncing off the clouds.

Derek captures an image of a sad Lucy amidst the beautiful sunset.

INT. CARMEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Carmen looks at herself in the mirror. She fixes her makeup and puts on light-colored lipstick.

SALSA MUSIC FADES IN...

INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Loud Salsa music. CLOSE ON CARMEN'S NEW TRAINERS as she dances.

CARMEN and the other students carry out their FINAL DANCE ROUTINE.

Derek and Lucy sit in the back of the room.

LATER: The students are lined up in front of MRS. DANCE TEACHER while she reads aloud the names on the DIPLOMAS. She calls Carmen's name.

Carmen walks forward. The teacher gives Carmen her DIPLOMA. They shake hands and hug.

Lucy and Derek politely applaud.

Carmen returns to the row of students as the teacher calls out other names.

Carmen seems moderately pleased.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

SEVERAL DETAILS of luxury cars. We are at the same car dealership as before.

Lucy, Carmen and Derek sit inside a luxury SUV. Carmen sits in the back seat with a blank look on her face.

DEREK
This is nice...
(inhales)
Smells nice.

Derek touches the leather seats.

The obnoxious SALESMAN from before walks in front of the car with his hands clasped behind him. He gives them a suspicious glance as he slowly walks away.

DEREK

So... Are you going to buy it?

LUCY

No, not now.

(a beat)

One day, one day I'm gonna buy a car like this one... All you have to do is visualise it... visualise it and it will happen.

A long pause.

Then... Carmen begins to QUIETLY CRY. Lucy notices her mother crying. Then... TEARS BEGIN TO ROLL down Lucy's face.

Lucy takes some tissue from her rucksack and hands one over to her mother.

Carmen wipes her tears and steps out of the car.

Lucy wipes her tears and tries to stop crying.

DEREK

You okay?

LUCY

Yeah.

Lucy wipes more tears and blows her nose.

INT. HOME - LATER

UP CLOSE: Carmen places her diploma on the kitchen table -- she takes off her new trainers -- she opens the drawer and takes out the LIGHTER and CIGARETTE PACK.

EXT. HOME - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

The fifth floor of the housing estate building. Carmen goes out to her balcony and sits on an old chair beside a small worn out patio table.

She calmly takes out her cigarette and lights it.

WE HEAR THE SOUND of an incoming WHATSAPP message. Carmen checks her phone. It's another funny video of a CAT. Carmen SMILES SLIGHTLY but this time, she does not answer.

Lucy Drives a Car

She puts the phone on the table. Carmen continues to smoke as she watches the sunset over the city.

Lucy opens the sliding door and sits next to Carmen. She casually takes a cigarette from the package sitting on the patio table.

She then looks at the anti-smoking image on the pack: it's a man breathing through an oxygen mask. Underneath it reads: "SMOKING CAUSES LUNG CANCER".

Lucy lights her cigarette and smokes next to Carmen. Lucy flicks some ash over the railing.

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENT LATER

Carmen and Lucy stand in front of the wall of *clues*.

CLOSE ON their HANDS as they take down the maps, pictures and notes. They put them in a cardboard box.

Derek sits in the back of the living room, quietly observing.

Without saying a word, Lucy and Carmen keep on taking down the items from the wall.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. BUS STATION - AFTERNOON

Derek stands at a bus station with a travel bag over his shoulder. Carmen stands next to him with a tote bag over her shoulder.

CARMEN
You got a sweater?

DEREK
Yeah.

CARMEN
Sometimes they put on the air conditioning really cold in the bus.

Carmen reaches into her tote bag.

CARMEN

I made you a sandwich in case you
get hungry.

Carmen takes out a small paper bag and hands it over to Derek.

DEREK

Thanks.

CARMEN

It has the pickles you like.

DEREK

Thanks.

Derek takes the paper bag and puts it in his rucksack.

Lucy arrives and hands Derek a bus ticket.

LUCY

It leaves in 10 minutes. Gate 4.

The three look at each other not knowing what to do next.

Derek takes a step forward and hugs Carmen. Carmen hugs Derek.
Derek then reaches with his other arm and brings Lucy in for
the involuntary *group hug*.

Lucy closes her eyes for a moment. Carmen pats Derek on the
back.

Derek breaks the hug and picks up his travel bag.

LUCY

Call when you get a part in a
movie.

Derek walks away. Lucy and Carmen watch as he walks OUT OF
FRAME.

They wait... they wave goodbye.

Another PAUSE... then Lucy and Carmen walk away, leaving the
FRAME empty.

The SOUND FADES and MUSIC RISES.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Lucy drives as Carmen looks out the window. The city is
reflected on the windshield.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

As the MUSIC continues, Lucy's car enters the TRAFFIC TUNNEL. ONCE AGAIN, the tunnel is EMPTY.

INSIDE THE CAR--

The lights in the tunnel create a SLOW STROBOSCOPIC EFFECT over their faces. Carmen is captivated by the glow of the tunnel lights.

Carmen then lowers the car window and slightly takes out her hand. She enjoys the air going through her fingers.

Lucy notices this but says nothing, she keeps driving.

Carmen turns to Lucy.

CARMEN
This feels nice.

Lucy thinks for a moment, then slowly rolls down the window by her side. She takes out her hand and feels the air going through her fingers.

They share a moment... WIDE SHOT as the car heads down the empty tunnel.

EXT. ROUNDABOUT OF THE MISSING - DUSK (SAME DAY)

CLOSE ON banners, pictures and letters for the missing. A few raindrops begin to fall.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The MUSIC FADES OUT... Lucy parks her car near the roundabout. Carmen and Lucy sit inside. Lucy looks through the windshield up at the sky.

LUCY
It's just some light rain... it
shouldn't be long...

A pause. Carmen looks at the RAINDROPS that are sliding down the windshield.

CARMEN

That last time I saw Oscar he told
me he wanted to go back to
school...

Lucy turns to Carmen, unblinking.

CARMEN

...I told him that that would be
good...

(a beat)

I know we said other stuff that
day but that's all I remember.

A moment, then...

Carmen steps out of the car and opens the rear door. She takes
a folded up banner from the back seat and shuts the door.

Lucy ponders, then... she opens the door, gets out of the car
and grabs her rucksack. She heads toward the roundabout.

EXT. ROUNDABOUT OF THE MISSING - CONTINUOUS

As the light RAIN continues, Carmen walks towards the
roundabout while carrying the banner. She puts it on the floor
and begins to unfold it.

Lucy arrives and they unfold it together. The banner flaps in
the wind.

Lucy takes nylon rope and scissors from her rucksack. She cuts
several pieces of rope.

They both tie the banner to the wall that surrounds the
monument.

They step back: Oscar's banner now hangs alongside many other
banners and pictures of the missing.

They contemplate for a moment... Carmen and Lucy exchange
glances. They walk away.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Carmen sits at a table, she is dripping wet.

Lucy Drives a Car

She takes a napkin from the dispenser and dries her arms with it. She crumples the napkin and places it on the table next to other crumpled napkins.

In the background we can see the ROUNDABOUT. It continues to RAIN outside.

Lucy arrives at the table with two cups of coffee. Her clothes are also wet. Carmen stops drying herself with the napkins and takes her cup of coffee.

Lucy sits down across the table. They drink quietly. They sip as they ponder.

We HOLD on the moment.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END

Introduction

'What kind of movie am I going to write?'

The purpose of this practice-based research is to bring forth and comprehend the intricacies of art cinema and dramedy within the writing process for the original screenplay titled *Lucy Drives a Car*, a 65 page script developed between 2019 and 2021. To this end, I analysed selected films, alongside the development of the script, as a means of discussing the research questions and enabling me to reflect upon the creative development of the screenplay.

The fundamental ideas framed in this research are the detailed analysis of selected screenplay texts. This analysis, performed at a granular level, is not common in screenplay studies although it aids the comprehension of the narrative strategies found within specific scenes. The thesis also delves into seemingly uneventful story situations as a means of developing deeper meaning within the mundane. Furthermore, it shows how art cinema places the focus on character development while avoiding narrative structures that only advance the plot. Another noteworthy idea is that humour can expound on a film's themes, and at the same time, accentuate the dramatic elements in a story. Surrealism is discussed as a complementary topic and is used to externalise Lucy's emotional state in the *Lucy Drives a Car* screenplay. These findings may be salient to screenwriters that develop scripts in the art cinema or dramedy style and widens the debate around its creative process.

The script deals with Lucy, a twenty-three-year-old college dropout, and her mother, Carmen, who are coping with the aftermath of the disappearance of Oscar, their brother and son, respectively. Both women strive to get on with their lives while struggling with their loss: Lucy befriends a male prostitute while Carmen enrolls in dance classes and tries to give up smoking. Lucy makes her weekly rounds of putting up flyers of her missing brother in businesses and neighbourhoods across the city. Lucy and Carmen decide to place a missing person's banner of Oscar, along with many others, in a memorial located in the city of Guadalajara, hoping that this will bring some sort of closure to their lives¹. The film's style is akin to that of art cinema with some moments of humour. With this in mind, I scrutinised several films to examine their narrative characteristics; I decided on two objects of study, a film and a television series. The film *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay, 1999), and the series *Atlanta* (FX, 2016-18) were chosen because they share the style and cinematic qualities that I seek to emulate in my script. The interest of this thesis arises from my practice as a professor at the

¹ Summary and outline of the screenplay can be found in Chapter 3.

University of Guadalajara, México, and my experience as a film editor² and scriptwriter, as well as director of several short films³. With this essay I hope to bridge a connection between practice and theory that may help my future writing endeavours, as well as guide my students' development as they embark on their own screenwriting processes.

This being a thesis for a practice-based PhD in Creative Writing with a focus on screenwriting, I concentrate my analysis on original screenplays and their correlation with the finished film. The attention centres on storytelling patterns of selected moments within the script, which could be categorised as a formalist approach emphasising 'structures and patterns of meaning-making over the meanings themselves' (Mittell, 2017: 4). Therefore, my objective is to understand how the screenplay for art cinema functions at a creative, formal and practical level. Studies on film narrative typically address its overall structure, dividing the film into acts and identifying the so-called plot points⁴. Conversely, this research concentrates on the film's smaller components and how they are used to convey emotion within the story. To this end, I selected scenes from *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta*, and examined their corresponding scripts to discern the strategy the screenwriters used to portray emotion on the page, and ultimately on the screen. My goal is to understand the narrative qualities of these two modes of film narrative, art cinema and dramedy, and to integrate them in my own original screenplay.

As mentioned before, *Lucy Drives a Car* is written considering an art cinema approach. Art cinema is often defined as a film that features unconventional or highly symbolic content aimed at a specialised, rather than a broad audience. It can also be considered an independent film with elements that distinguish it from the prevailing Hollywood films. Though occasionally referred to as art film, art-house film, or independent film, I shall adopt the term *art cinema* as proposed by film theorist David Bordwell for the purposes of this thesis. Some of art cinema's noticeable features are: a feeling of social authenticity, the director's creative expressiveness, a particular vision, and an emphasis on character development instead of a goal oriented story. Although the expressive manner and the topics vary from filmmaker to filmmaker, 'the overall functions of style and theme remain remarkably constant in the art cinema as a whole' (Bordwell, 2008: 152). In other words, the film's artistic ideas and narrative create a consistent and logical method of cinematic communication.

² *Somos Mariposa* (Kishi, 2013), *Los Años Azules* (Gómez-Córdova, 2017), *Los Lobos* (Kishi, 2019)

³ *Firmes* (Capó, 2009) available at vimeo.com/86238273, *Nosotros y Ellos* (Capó, 2017) available at vimeo.com/230281942

⁴ Defined as 'any incident, episode, or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction' (Field, 2005: 143).

Traditional narrative cinema is based on specific ideas regarding narrative patterns, cinematic design, and the spectator's reaction to the film. In the classical film mindset, cinematic representation is encouraged by a cause-effect rationale generated by space-time logic and 'psychologically defined, goal oriented characters' (Bordwell, 2008: 152). Art cinema, instead, does not follow the traditional narrative, especially when it comes to the cause and effect logic. Characters that are significantly dependent on psychological causality are fundamental in art cinema. They do not have distinct ambitions or aims, they may act for incongruent reasons, doubt their motivations, and do not come to a 'moment of truth' where they make a profoundly consequential decision. This approach differs from traditional narrative where the protagonists boast clear cut values and purposes, and seem to rush straight toward a definite objective. Art cinema's narrative, on the other hand, has a 'drifting episodic quality', some plotlines may not arrive to closure and characters may appear once and never return or they move aimlessly from one circumstance to the next (ibid.: 153). Both James and Earn, protagonists of *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta*, respectively, share this character quality: they live their lives without the story stating their goals.

Atlanta displays an intersection between art cinema and humour that I wish to expound in my screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car*. The series has been described as a hybrid genre known as dramedy, which is a distinct blend of drama and comedy. It is the combination of what can be seen as intensively emotional moments and inconsequential experiences. Unlike a drama, it does not tell the viewers when to consider an event as a serious one, and contrary to a comedy, it does not signal the audience when to laugh, therefore, the sequence of events contain light amusing moments mixed with melancholic or appalling ones. A delicate balance is established between drama and humour; if the creators of dramedy, for example, insist on portraying what is to be perceived as a serious situation, laughter may be produced instead of sadness (Moss-Wellington, 2021). According to Neil Landau, dramedy can be 'expansive and cinematic, often featuring multiple locations and fragmented plotlines; [it has] an indie movie sensibility and avoid[s] mainstream, obvious/manipulative music choices; the visuals tell the story more than expositional dialogue' (2018: 7).

Atlanta accomplishes the drama-comedy combination by expertly mixing humorous and tragic circumstances; it aptly glides from amusing moments toward serious ones and vice versa. The show contrasts funny with sometimes frightening societal circumstances, and presents them not as separate scenes, but as a moment where both happen simultaneously. This is due, in part, to the series' ability to manage social criticism alongside humorous subtleties, that is, it balances terrible events with funny moments without one

overshadowing the other. Furthermore, its dramatic events are not entirely depressing, nor is its humour excessive.

Objects of study: *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta*

Lynne Ramsay's first feature film, *Ratcatcher*, premiered at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival and opened the Edinburgh International Film Festival. It earned Ramsay the Guardian New Directors Award, the Carl Foreman Award for British Film Newcomer in 2000, the Sutherland Trophy at the London Film Festival, and the Silver Hugo for Best Director at the Chicago International Film Festival. Ramsay, who was born in Glasgow in 1969, studied photography at Edinburgh's Napier College, and cinematography and film direction at England's National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield. She was the recipient of the 1996 Cannes Prix de Jury for her graduation short film, *Small Deaths*, on which she worked as writer, director, and cinematographer.

Ratcatcher takes place in Glasgow in the summer of 1973, during a nationwide garbage strike. A twelve-year-old boy, Ryan, drowns while playing with his adolescent friend and neighbour James (William Eadie). James runs home to his flat, where he lives with his frequently-drunk father (Tommy Flanagan), mother (Mandy Matthews), and sisters, all of whom wish to move into newly-built government houses. The coming of age story follows James as he hangs out with older boys from the neighbourhood, spends time with Kenny (John Miller), and develops a friendship with a slightly older girl, Margaret Anne (Leanne Mullen). The film delves into James' experience as he tries to cope with guilt and remorse within his impoverished surroundings (IMDb, 2021a).

The other object of study in this project, *Atlanta*, was created by Donald Glover, an American comedian, actor, producer, writer, and director, as well as a singer/rapper, better known by his stage name 'Childish Gambino'. He wrote for the NBC sitcom *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006-13) and played Troy Barnes in the series *Community* (NBC) from 2009 to 2014. Glover has been starring on *Atlanta*, which he developed and occasionally directs, since 2016. *Atlanta* debuted on FX on September 6, 2016, and has since been renewed for a third and fourth season, with the third expected to premiere in 2022. The series received many awards, including two Golden Globe Awards for Best Television Series, and Best Actor Television Series in a Musical or Comedy for Glover. He also received a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing in a Comedy Series, which was the first ever given to an African-American.

The series follows Earnest 'Earn' Marks (Donald Glover), a college dropout and music manager, and his cousin Alfred (Brian Tyree Henry), also known as the rapper Paperboi. When Earn finds out that his cousin is on the edge of success, he reconnects with him, becomes his manager, and does everything he can to help Paperboi advance his music career, and hopefully profit from it. Alfred's crew also includes Darius (Lakeith Stanfield), the rapper's right-hand man and the show's enlightened mystic. Earn has little money and no place to live, so he alternates between sleeping in a self-storage unit and staying with Van (Zazie Beetz), his ex-girlfriend and mother of his daughter. The four encounter social and economic difficulties as they navigate the music scene in the city of Atlanta, while the show comments on 'race, relationships, poverty, status, and parenthood' (IMDb, 2021b).

Aims and Research Methodology

To define the project's methodological approach, I will first outline the research questions and the technical process that were implemented. This practice based research aims to raise questions in relation to screenwriting in the art cinema and dramedy genres. My key research question, *how to write a screenplay that integrates both art cinema and dramedy elements*, is broken down into the following key aims:

1. To distinguish and examine the general characteristics of art cinema and dramedy.
2. To identify the art cinema characteristics in *Ratcatcher* and the dramedy attributes in *Atlanta*.
3. To incorporate art cinema and dramedy characteristics in the original screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car*.
4. To articulate the contributions to knowledge attained in this research.

Key Aim One - To distinguish and examine the general characteristics of art cinema and dramedy.

The first of these key aims was undertaken by researching the principles of art cinema and dramedy. Much of the narrative theory utilised in this thesis is based on the work of film scholar David Bordwell, particularly his art cinema research found in *Poetics of Cinema* (2008) in which he argues that art cinema is a 'distinct mode of film practice' with a set of formal rules, and implicit viewing methods. He asserts that art cinema openly defines itself in opposition to the 'classical narrative mode, and especially against the cause-effect linkage of events' (ibid.: 152).

The blend of drama and comedy that make up the dramedy hybrid is explored in the works of Neil Landau, Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush. They comment on how this genre developed over time, and offer examples of current television programs that juxtapose comedy and drama. Noël Carroll's work provides a background on comedy theory, particularly the social role of humour and how it plays an important part in the formation of communities (2014: 76). Another perspective on comedy is provided by Simon Critchley who states that humour arises from the disjunction between expectation and actuality. He explains that in order for a joke to work, there has to be a correlation between the incongruity of the joke and the implied social norm that it is trying to undermine (2002: 3).

With regard to screenwriting, the anthology *Analysing the Screenplay* (ed. Nelmes, 2011), offers several studies on film scripts that move away from the traditional theoretical approach. The articles written by contributing authors, such as Jill Nelmes and Adam Ganz, helped lay the foundation of the screenplay theories used in this thesis. Practical insights on script writing come from the works penned by authors: Craig Batty, Robert McKee, Syd Field, Karl Iglesias, and Greg Loftin, among others. Greg Loftin's *Writing for The Cut*, aims to give writers a better understanding of the connection between what is written on the page and what consequently ends up on the screen. He states that, from the onset of the writing process, the screenwriter should be aware of the visual and aural techniques of the cinematic medium, as well as the rhythm and pacing possibilities of film editing. Other texts focus specifically on screenplay format, as is the case with Christopher Riley's *The Hollywood Standard* (2009), and David Trottier's *The Screenwriter's Bible* (2014); both works emphasise that how things are described and phrased in the script can have an impact on the reader's perception of the story. The comprehensive comments and meticulous inspection of screenplay texts by the authors mentioned in this section, inspired my own detailed analysis of selected script fragments found in this research.

Key Aim Two - To identify the art cinema characteristics in *Ratcatcher* and the dramedy attributes in *Atlanta*.

The research described above allowed me to clarify the principles pertaining to art cinema and dramedy which then established the bases for the second key aim: 'To identify the art cinema characteristics in *Ratcatcher* and the dramedy attributes in *Atlanta*'. To attain a deeper understanding of their creative processes, I researched interviews with Lynne Ramsay, Donald Glover, and the rest of *Atlanta*'s creative team. I based my analysis of *Ratcatcher*, in part, on Annette Kuhn's study in which she offers an in-depth and illuminating review of the film's style and the aesthetics of 'a child's world through a highly distinctive organisation of cinematic space' (Bloomsbury Collections, 2021).

In the process of selecting *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta* as objects of study, I examined several films, and when available, read their respective screenplays to attain insights of film narrative and to understand the intricacies of the screenwriting format. These films helped form and reshape my view of art cinema, its narrative and expressive possibilities. Some of the films are *Stranger Than Paradise* (Jarmusch, 1984), *A White, White Day* (Pálmason, 2019), *Ida* (Pawlikowski, 2013), *The Lighthouse* (Eggers, 2019), *First Reformed* (Schrader, 2017), *The Rider* (Zhao, 2017), and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (Ceylan, 2011), as well as the films of Yorgos Lanthimos and the Dardenne brothers. Although these films contained the art cinema qualities I was seeking, several of them portrayed an excessively dramatic tone that I was trying to avoid. On the other hand, I found films that explored a contemporary social reality, but did not implement precise cinematic moments, that is, the purposeful use of visual and auditory cues. Therefore, when it came to choosing the objects of study for my research, I preferred *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta* because they provided the right combination of realism, cinematic intention, social commentary and subtle humour that would help narrate the *Lucy Drives a Car* story.

Key Aim Three - To incorporate art cinema and dramedy characteristics in the original screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car*.

The analysis of the art cinema qualities found in *Ratcatcher* and the dramedy elements that characterise *Atlanta* gave me an overview of the type of screenplay I wanted to write. There is an initial inclination in the early stages of the writing process to build obvious and logical links between the narrative elements, that is, connections between the film's events, what the characters say, and how they feel. In this same venue, writers strive to identify the logical roots of emotions and their logical outcomes. Art cinema, however, usually avoids these rational cause and effect storylines, and accepts and promotes disconnected moments that do not have a clear function in the narrative, at least in the traditional sense. Consequently, I searched for narrative threads that, although logically disconnected, could potentially lead to interesting narrative links. In addition, I was conscious of avoiding over-sentimentality in each scene and moment in the screenplay, and I was open to the notion of adding a humorous tone to each situation.

Key Aim Four - To articulate the contributions to knowledge attained in this research.

Several essential insights are obtained through this research project. It shows how film, particularly art cinema, can articulate tangible story moments from mundane, everyday situations. It also comments on the use of comedy as a means to counterbalance sombre story ideas, which is the basic element of dramedy. The research also offers the possibility of placing the dramatic intention outside the scene. This is to say, instead of using explicit drama within the scene, it is perceived through the context found in other parts of the story. It also probes into the intentional omission of story information and narrative gaps to engage the audience, inviting them to fill in the missing pieces.

The research scrutinises screenplay examples to analyse how the text describes visual cues, character intention and scene direction within specific cinematic moments. This helps understand how screenplays function at a detailed level. In addition, surrealism is discussed as a means of expressing the character's inner feelings.

Why was *Ratcatcher* selected?

The film *Ratcatcher*, and Lynne Ramsay's original screenplay were analysed in search of scenes that illustrated or emphasised the elements that characterise art cinema. This provided me with information to design a general outline of the story, and to identify several narrative threads from which I selected representative script segments. I further examined the segments and compared them with the finished film to explore similarities, differences, and modifications. I reinforced this stage of the project with Lynne Ramsay interviews, and selected readings that focus on film narrative and stylistic qualities.

With *Ratcatcher*, Ramsay establishes her 'emotion and image' approach in the screenplay and implements it in the completed picture. The evaluation of the script's structure and some of its unique narrative strands provided a deeper grasp of how they could be integrated in my screenplay. The film revolves around James Gillespie, a twelve-year-old boy, who feels remorse over the death of his friend Ryan Quinn, whom he accidentally pushed into a canal at the start of the film. In traditional narrative, the beginning of a film 'establishes the necessary information so the reader knows what's happening and the story can unfold clearly'; afterwards, a transformational event of some kind must occur. This event, known as the inciting incident, 'sets the story in motion' (Field, 2005: 129). However, *Ratcatcher* goes against the typical narrative canon; it presents Ryan's drowning,

which is the plot's inciting incident, within the first five minutes of the film. Thus, the film introduces the transformational event well before the audience can understand the characters and their life circumstances. Furthermore, the story is conveyed mostly through James, and is not driven by something the characters want or seek to accomplish. This is one of art cinema's features: the protagonists do not articulate their ambitions and have no defined objectives.

Plotlines and scenes from *Ratcatcher* were selected and explored to distinguish the film's structure, narrative scheme and stylistic qualities. The film's narrative can be grouped into six distinct substories, one of them is the 'James and Margaret Anne' plotline. This substory was selected to better understand how Ramsay builds the film's narrative in service of emotion, why she withholds plot information, and how she presents the passing of time in an ambiguous manner. Withholding plot information, known as an ellipsis or a narrative gap, is used by Ramsay to compel the audience to fill in the missing pieces and participate in the character's emotional development. Two moments in the film exemplify this method: James is taking things out of the kitchen cupboard but the scene does not convey his purpose; and another moment where the family is dressing up and getting ready for an event that has not been previously announced. In both examples, the motive behind the actions are not revealed, which invites the audience to speculate upon the story and engage in its outcome. With regard to the handling of time, Ramsay, in some cases, does not clearly define the connection between events in the film, for example, James sits next to Margaret Anne on a sofa, the script then describes James at home watching television with his family: is it the same day? There is nothing linking these two events to each other that help the viewer establish the passing of time. This creates an opaque sense of story-time that opens the film's chronology to interpretation. The film's aesthetic features are analysed through small, everyday situations, which storywise could be considered irrelevant to the film. Ramsay presents these moments in a manner that they acquire a deeper significance, and bring forth the film's underlying themes and concepts. Her directing and screenwriting style relies on powerful visuals, giving *Ratcatcher* a beautiful, almost ethereal look that communicates what the characters are feeling and thinking.

Although many story elements are bound to change between the final draft of the script and the finished film throughout the various stages of film production (e.g. pre-production, filming, editing), it is important to point out how Ramsay considers and describes these cinematic techniques from within the screenplay. Visual motifs that could be discovered during the filming stage are already specified in the script: a haunting moment of static on the television, reflections in the water, a finger playing with spilled salt, a boy spinning himself inside a curtain, and so forth. Likewise, rhythmic considerations are

taken into account early in the writing phase, and not left to chance incorporation in the editing process. Ramsay's screenplay for *Ratcatcher* displays a high level of cinematic awareness and narrative subtlety that are exceptional for a first time feature film director. I aspire to incorporate this level of narrative description and cinematic nuance in my *Lucy Drives a Car* screenplay.

Why was *Atlanta* selected?

As was the case with *Ratcatcher*, *Atlanta* was also researched to determine the main characteristics of its narrative structure. The short duration of its episodes allowed me to explore one of them in its entirety, scene by scene, in order to distinguish its narrative mechanisms. Of special interest was the analysis of how the writers handle dramedy imbued with social commentary, and how they fuse a realistic style with surrealist moments. Furthermore, I researched articles about the series written by critics and journalists, and studied interviews with Donald Glover, and with other members of the cast and the creative team.

Atlanta deals with the relationship and tribulations of Earn, a music manager, and his rapper cousin Paperboi, as they manoeuvre through the music scene in the city of Atlanta. They, and the rest of the cast, find themselves immersed in different situations involving race, poverty, relationships, and social identity. Earn assumes the role of the 'underdog' or 'the unlikely hero' that works hard to overcome his dilemmas (Iglesias, 2005: 50). He and the other characters are not special; their storylines are not based around their progress, but rather their cultivated stagnation.

The show balances and presents drama and comedy in a way that dramatic events are not overly bleak and humour is not exaggerated. It navigates the amusing moments while still being grounded in serious, yet unobtrusive, societal criticism. The series' so-called bizarre or fantastical moments are further scrutinised to discuss the use of surrealist themes within hyper realistic environments. With this in mind, two of the show's episodes were chosen: *Streets on Lock*, from season one, and *Alligator Man*, from season two. In *Streets on Lock* (Episode 2), Earn and Paperboi are arrested for their role in a gun shooting; Earn experiences several situations in the county jail, and Paperboi, out on bail, deals with the perks and awkward moments derived from his newfound fame. The scenes exemplify the successful integration of socioeconomic themes within humorous situations. The other episode, *Alligator Man* (Episode 11), demonstrates how the series balances realism with surrealism.

Certain surrealist elements can be found in *Ratcatcher* and *Atlanta*. Even if the purpose of this critical document is not to analyse surrealism, it may be helpful to contextualise this concept because it is an important component of the narrative within *Lucy Drives a Car*.

Surrealism evolved in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century as a cultural movement in which artists developed the use of non sequitur logic to allow the unconscious mind to express itself. One of the core ideas behind surrealism was the use of dreams as a means to obtain a deeper understanding of reality. André Breton, the movement's co-founder and leader, stated: 'I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality' (1924). Surrealists were drawn to film early on because it can link the experience of cinema with that of the dream, and consequently reveal what is hidden within the psyche. Nevertheless, Michael Richardson points out that surrealism is not intended to create strange or fantastical worlds, but rather to 'explore the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence' (2006: 3).

The objects of study in this thesis contain some of these surrealist characteristics. In *Ratcatcher*, Ramsay seeks to express the protagonist's drowning as a surrealist moment in the film. She declares that: 'It was meant to be a dream, well, not a dream it's surrealistic. For me it was always that he's going down in the water and what is projected for him is like his fantasy' (in Kuhn, 2008: 86). Producer and film critic Lizzie Francke comments that *Ratcatcher* eloquently binds social realism with a dreamlike atmosphere: 'With her debut feature *Ratcatcher* Ramsay continues her artistic project to create a cinema that brings together both the social and the surreal to profound effect' (Francke in Ramsay, 1999: vii). In the series *Atlanta*, surrealism emphasises its social criticism through unpredictable real-life drama and absurdist humour. Lena Dunham, star and creator of *Girls* (HBO, 2012-17) describes it as 'a show that toggles between painful drama and super-surrealist David Lynch moments to take on race in America' (in Friend, 2018). Surrealism is used in *Lucy Drives a Car* in an effort to externalise Lucy's emotional state. Within the screenplay, the surrealist intention is felt more clearly in scenes that take place as Lucy drives through a traffic tunnel. At the beginning of the film, the tunnel is depicted as having heavy traffic, later on, the tunnel is eerily devoid of vehicles. This surrealist approach within the traffic tunnel scenes is further analysed in Chapter 3.

General description of each Chapter

Chapter One, '*Ratcatcher*: narrative in service of emotion', outlines the film's plot line structure by describing several scenes in the 'James and Margaret Anne' story. This allows the analysis of Ramsay's narrative construction as she deals with seemingly unimportant events and gives them emotional significance. Specific words and phrases from the screenplay are studied to resolve how they transmit a melancholic atmosphere, and how the script's phraseology communicates the character's feelings with minimal use of dialogue. Other strategies, such as the implementation of ellipsis and narrative omissions, are analysed to understand how they are used to prompt the viewer's engagement with the story. The film's stylistic qualities, such as the use of close ups, both of the characters and of inanimate objects, are explored as a means to convey the characters' inner turmoil and sense of isolation. A similar study is carried out to appraise how *Ratcatcher* conveys an open narrative, and a subjective sense of time between the film's events.

The purpose of Chapter Two, '*Atlanta*: not quite laughing, not quite crying', is to derive the narrative qualities of the series' comedy and drama approach, and to detect how the show comments upon social themes without being pretentious or overbearing. It analyses how *Atlanta* avoids dramatic plot developments, narrative twists and unexpected reveals; in addition, it clarifies how each episode functions as an autonomous story detached from other narratives in the season. The chapter also discusses the show's handling of surrealist elements within apparently normal circumstances. It focuses on two episodes and their corresponding screenplays: *Streets on Lock*, to explore the dramedy component of the series, and *Alligator Man*, to describe its surrealist style.

The creative writing process of the screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car* is examined in Chapter Three. The script explores the emotional consequences of a family trying to continue with their everyday lives after the disappearance of a loved one. The Chapter reviews the initial story ideas, and their evolution from plot driven narratives to a style more akin to the qualities found in art cinema. It discusses the use of a free writing approach that centres on character development, and emphasises a visual and auditory experience within the screenplay. The section analyses how the narrative qualities found in the script bring forth its underlying emotional themes, offer a space for symbolic interpretation, and make social commentaries without imposing an ideological viewpoint on the audience.

Focus on the screenplay text

An essential component of this research found throughout all the chapters is the analysis and breakdown of the screenplay text. I found that studies on film narrative generally focus on the overall plot and how it conforms to narrative paradigms such as the *Three-act structure* and the *Hero's Journey*. However, the smaller components of the cinematic storytelling are seldom discussed. Many screenplay manuals rarely delve into the intricacies of the narrative mechanisms found within a scene. With this in mind, I wanted to concentrate on specific descriptions in the script and how they translate to what is viewed on the final film.

This interest in the inner workings of screenplay texts stems from my experience as a film editor. In film editing, the scene is built moment by moment, beat by beat, from one character's reaction to the next. I wanted to comprehend how those small components are described on the page. What words best convey a character's anxiety as she looks out a window? How is the awkward but humorous moment described? How does the written word evoke the finished film? The breakdown of these specific instances in the screenplay was something that appealed to me and which I wanted to scrutinise.

Notes on screenplay examples

For the sake of readability and space, the script excerpts examined and presented in this essay are not in a standard screenplay format. Whenever possible, I try not to fragment or alter the original text, although in some cases, I join two separate sections from the screenplay; this combination is signalled with an ellipsis glyph inside brackets [...]. Brackets containing a number [1] in the screenplay example, indicate that the corresponding commentary is found below. In order to visualise the analysis of the screenplay examples, I incorporate still frames from their respective scenes. The examples from the script of *Lucy Drives a Car*, discussed in Chapter Three, are accompanied by still frames generated in a storyboarding program⁵.

⁵ Previs Pro, www.previspro.com

Chapter One

Ratcatcher: narrative in service of emotion

This chapter aims to understand how Lynne Ramsay sets up her 'emotion and image' style within *Ratcatcher's* screenplay and how it is conveyed in the finished film. This is accomplished by examining the film's overall structure and some of its specific narrative threads, which allows a clearer understanding of how these traits are implemented in the *Lucy Drives a Car* original screenplay. A film's narrative generally transitions from one plot point to the next in a focused effort to convey the story. However, Ramsay is mainly interested in exploring the characters' emotions by creating a melancholic ambiance in her film and therefore dismisses unnecessary events or superfluous plot points. She explains what the character is experiencing through subtle yet powerful images. The film is able to find emotional significance in minor details, allowing its structure to work in favour of the film's themes rather than the other way around. Furthermore, Ramsay is intensely aware of how film editing influences the cinematic moment and, as a result, incorporates clear descriptions of pace and rhythm into *Ratcatcher's* screenplay.

It is worth mentioning that Lynne Ramsay is both the writer and director of her film *Ratcatcher*. Although there are several variations between the film and screenplay (some sequences vary in order and a few scenes are omitted), all in all, the script is a true reflection of Ramsay's artistic vision. Therefore, in *Ratcatcher's* screenplay, we find nuance and visual precision that may be lacking in a script not penned by the film's director. In other words, Ramsey was able to be considerably more visually exact in her descriptions because of her writer-director role. The dual function also aided this study in establishing a link between a director's aesthetic vision, the words on the page, and the final film.

Ratcatcher is set in Glasgow, Scotland, during a garbage strike in the mid 1970s. It centres on James Gillespie, a twelve-year-old boy, and his family who hope to be relocated from their rundown flat to a new house. James feels guilty for his friend Ryan Quinn's death whom he accidentally pushed into a canal. He withdraws and only relates with a young girl, Margaret Anne, who is being sexually abused by older boys. He also befriends a boy named Kenny who has a mouse for a pet. On a certain occasion, James takes the bus to follow his older sister, Ellen, and discovers some unfinished houses on the outskirts of town. Later on, Kenny falls into the canal and is rescued by James' father, George Gillespie, who is then honoured as a town hero, however he gets drunk and is assaulted by local hoodlums. George arrives home beaten and bleeding, picks on James and strikes his

mother. An anguished James flees from the house and looks for comfort with Margaret Anne. Finally, James throws himself into the canal and, in what can be viewed as a poetic, postmortem ending to the film, is seen walking with his family through a field of wheat towards their new home.

Screenplay conventions follow certain structural templates for the construction of a film's plot. These templates usually divide the story into three large sections or acts. The first act introduces a world where the protagonist lives a seemingly balanced existence and has everything under control, later on, 'an event occurs that radically upsets its balance' (McKee, 1997). This crisis, referred to as the 'inciting incident', is the significant moment in the story that establishes all that is to follow. *Ratcatcher's* inciting incident, Ryan's drowning, happens within the first five minutes of the film, before any setup has been adequately established. Though viewed as an unassuming moment, Ryan's death is the event that drives the psychological drama of the protagonist, it establishes the underlying dilemma and emotional impetus carried out through the rest of the story. The inciting incident proposes the question: How will James handle Ryan's death? By the end of the film, it appears that the question has been answered: James returns to the place where Ryan drowned and jumps into the canal. This unexpected suicide can be interpreted as an act of contrition since James has always felt remorse for Ryan's death. James' apparent suicide is not explicitly confirmed, instead, Ramsay opts for an ambiguous image of him falling deep underwater. The scene is immediately followed by a surrealist-fantasy moment of James and his family walking through a wheat field carrying their belongings as they head to their new home.

Ratcatcher tells its story mostly through the actions and experiences of James' character. The film is 'not dominated by any forward narrative movement' (Kuhn, 2008: 19) since the protagonists do not state their goals and have no clear objectives. This is typical of art cinema characters that do not define their ambitions or question their actions, they unwillingly drift from one event to the next, and their '[c]hoices are vague or nonexistent. Hence a certain drifting episodic quality' (Bordwell, 2008: 153). These properties are in stark contrast with classical narrative where the characters clearly establish their desires and intentions:

The choices a character makes are the mark by which the audience charts the progression and change in both character and story, and so it is crucial to witness not only the result of a decision (an action) but also the emotional and mental struggle that created it (the motivation of the action) (Batty and Waldeback, 2019: 52).

The emotional journey of *Ratcatcher's* protagonists reflects the art cinema approach. For example, James is a passive character that spends a lot of time with his friends and does things children typically do. Margaret Anne is involved in an unhealthy dynamic with the older boys yet she does not reflect upon her situation or cannot find a way out. Da is seen mostly sleeping, drinking and watching TV, except for a moment when he rescues Kenny from drowning and receives a medal for his deed; he then goes back to his mind numbing routine. Although most of the protagonists lack clear objectives, James' family hopes to be granted a new house for which they have applied, but beyond this desire, the film does not develop further goals that would actively engage them. In this sense, Ramsay utilises *Ratcatcher's* characters to communicate emotion rather than action. The story's general characteristics discussed above will facilitate the comprehension of *Ratcatcher's* thematic plot line structure.

Ratcatcher's plotline structure

The narrative or plot of a film generally refers to a series of events where one influences the next through the principle of cause-and-effect; the arrangement and presentation of such events contribute to the film's overall impact. A film narrative is typically examined by observing its macrostructure, that is, the story in terms of the overall design of its scenes. A closer examination of *Ratcatcher's* structure reveals that it can be thematically grouped into several distinct plotlines or narrative threads. Plotlines can be defined as story events with a common theme that are set up and developed throughout the film. Kuhn's analysis (2008: 20) identifies the following plotlines in *Ratcatcher*:

- Ryan's drowning
- The bin strike
- Housing needs
- Da (James' father)
- James and Margaret Anne
- James' home life

These thematic plotlines are interwoven throughout the film. For example, a scene with James and his new friend, Margaret Anne; James' family eats breakfast; neighbourhood kids play amongst the rubbish bags; then a moment with James' father at home or James and Margaret Anne's next encounter, and so on. *Ratcatcher's* thematic plotlines have, what may seem, unclear narrative objectives, however, its narrative threads do come to some kind of closure. This is achieved not through explicit closing arguments or overly dramatic

events but through more subtle means. Kuhn states that this is achieved ‘implicitly, through the film’s images and background sounds, rather than explicitly, through dialogue and action’ (2008: 20). A discussion of the ‘James and Margaret Anne’ plotline will allow a deeper understanding of how these narrative threads work and a better grasp of the story mechanisms at play in *Ratcatcher*.

The ‘James and Margaret Anne’ plotline

The ‘James and Margaret Anne’ plotline is, perhaps, the most emotionally consequential story in *Ratcatcher*. It goes from James and Margaret Anne meeting for the first time, when she takes his hand and places it on her lap, to his heartbreak when he sees her ‘playing’ once again with the older boys. In essence, this plotline is made up of six crucial narrative events that are found in the following scenes:



Fig. 1.1: ‘They sit in silence for a moment’.



Fig. 1.2: ‘James’s head rests like a baby’s on Margaret Anne’s breast’.



Fig. 1.3: ‘Margaret Anne sits cross-legged in the middle of the floor’.



Fig. 1.4: ‘Peels of childish laughter echo off the tiled walls’.

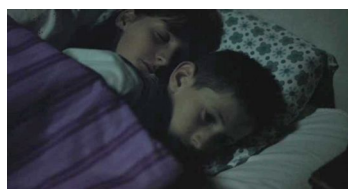


Fig. 1.5: ‘They both close their eyes’.



Fig. 1.6: ‘Margaret Anne complainly follows Billy into the toilet’.

1. James first sees Margaret Anne as a gang of older boys are teasing her and they throw her glasses into the canal. Margaret Anne asks James for his name. James touches her leg (Figure 1.1).
2. James and the older boys visit Margaret Anne’s flat when her mother is not there. The scene suggests that the older boys abuse Margaret Anne; they invite James to ‘play’ with her. James decides to lie on top of Margaret Anne (Figure 1.2).
3. James combs Margaret Anne’s hair as he checks for lice (Figure 1.3).
4. James and Margaret Anne take a bath together, then they watch TV with towels wrapped around their heads (Figure 1.4).
5. James sleeps in Margaret Anne’s bed (Figure 1.5).
6. James sees Margaret Anne once again ‘playing’ with the older boys. Margaret Anne seems ashamed and James is disappointed (Figure 1.6).

These are the main interactions that take place between James and Margaret Anne. Although they are clear and simple moments, they represent emotionally charged incidents told by Ramsay with minimal amount of expository dialogue. Throughout the film, Ramsay avoids overly dramatic moments, and prefers an understated approach to show the development of the story. Just as *Ratcatcher's* plot does not have a clear, goal driven narrative, Ramsay's dialogue follows suit, this is to say, it does not have an expository nature: what the characters talk about does not advance the story, the dialogue centres on their everyday life. James' character never has an overtly stated objective, but he pursues a universally understood longing: happiness and a sense of belonging, both of which he finds in Margaret Anne. The connection between James and Margaret Anne develops and grows with each interaction. It starts with a simple encounter and conversation by the canal, then James is actively caring for Margaret Anne when he searches and obtains a lice remedy and gently applies it to her hair. James and Margaret Anne never announce what they feel for each other, yet their emotional state is implied by the actions between them.

James and Margaret Anne's friendship contains two narrative turning points: James 'protects' Margaret Anne instead of taking advantage of her, and later on in the film, he is disappointed by her willingness to continually be abused by the older boys. Both turning points contain the conflict required for the plotline's dramatic drive; without these opposing forces, the narrative line would lack emotional impact. Although these junctures could imply the end of James and Margaret Anne's friendship, their consequences are felt at the end of the film when we witness James' apparent suicide. This 'James and Margaret Anne' plotline does not exist in isolation because it is influenced by what happens in other narrative lines throughout the film. Therefore, each time we come back to this plotline, we arrive with additional information taken from other events, and with further knowledge of James' internal dilemmas. For example, when James' father arrives home drunk and becomes violent, James flees from the house and finds refuge at Margaret Anne's home. James does not mention what happened with his father, but the viewer knows and understands the boy's anguish and his need for comfort.

After having explored the overall function of the 'James and Margaret Anne' plotline, analysis can now be focused on one of the six scenes that make up the plotline. This will give a clearer understanding of how Ramsay integrates the film's narrative objectives and distils them into specific actions within the scene.

'His arms kept stiffly at his sides': scene analysis

James and Margaret Anne's second scene is the interaction that occurs in her flat. James arrives with the older boys who assign him to stand by the kitchen window and lookout for Margaret Anne's mother (Figure 1.7). As he waits by the window, the older boys are 'playing' with Margaret Anne (Figure 1.8). James seems concerned and curious about the goings-on in the other room. The older boys invite James to come and 'play' with Margaret Anne; he enters the living room and sees them smoking, laughing and joking while Margaret Anne is lying on the sofa with her blouse unbuttoned. James is confused about what to do and '[i]n a gesture that is protective rather than sexual, he lies on top of her, covering her body with his' (Kuhn, 2008: 48) (Figure 1.12).



Fig. 1.7: 'He leads James to the window and ducks out of the room'.



Fig. 1.8: 'James turns back to the window.'

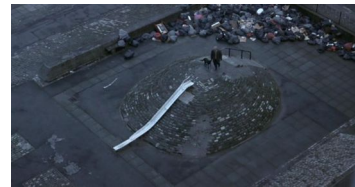


Fig. 1.9: 'He concentrates on the figure of a man and his dog'.



Fig. 1.10: 'Hi, Jamie. It's your turn'.



Fig. 1.11: 'James turns to face him.'



Fig. 1.12: 'James slowly and quietly walks over to the sofa and awkwardly lies on top of her'.

The scene from the screenplay is presented here in its entirety (Ramsay, 1999):

INT. KITCHEN, MARGARET ANNE'S HIGH-RISE FLAT. EARLY EVENING

A small kitchen leading on to the living room. A cheesy romantic record plays in the background. **[1]** Matt Munroe stands in the doorway.

MATT Keep the edgy fae that window in case her ma comes back.

He leads James to the window and ducks out of the room. Tommy assumes a slouched position against the door frame, looking into the living room.

TOMMY Awright, Margaret Anne. Guess who?

MARGARET ANNE (off-screen) Billy? **[2]**

Off-screen laughter from all the boys.

BILLY (off-screen) Try harder... Who is it, Margaret Anne?

MARGARET ANNE (off-screen) Steven?

Off-screen laughter.

MARGARET ANNE (off-screen) Och, Ah don't know. You better get ma glasses back, ya prick.

TOMMY (mock terror) Whooaaaa.

Unable to see into the room, James is watching Tommy.

TOMMY (to James) Awright ther, wee man?

James turns back to the window. There is a good view of the snaking canal. [3] He concentrates on the figure of a man and his dog walking along the canal bank. [4]

Behind James, Billy (doing up his fly) [5] swaps position at the door with Tommy. James continues to stare out of the window.

MATT (off-screen) Who is it, Margaret Anne?

MARGARET ANNE (off-screen) Tommy?

MATT (off-screen) Not bad,hen. One out of four.

Off-screen laughter.

The canal towpath is deserted.

BILLY (off-screen) Hi, Jamie. It's your turn.

James turns to face him.

BILLY No want a shot?

Billy beckons James into the room with a motion of his head.

INT. LIVING ROOM, MARGARET ANNE'S HIGH-RISE FLAT. EARLY EVENING

Billy and Steven sit in two armchairs facing the sofa. Tommy hangs back at the kitchen doorway. Matt leans against the wall smoking a cigarette.

Margaret Anne lies passively on the sofa. Her skirt is hitched up to her thighs, her blouse open, exposing one of her breasts. Her eyes stare upwards, unfocused, as she unconsciously works her fingernails over her scalp.

James slowly and quietly walks over to the sofa and awkwardly lies on top of her, his arms kept stiffly at his sides. [6]

Off-screen sniggers.

TOMMY Shhhhh! [7]

James's head rests like a baby's on Margaret Anne's breast. He closes his eyes. [8]

INT. LIVING ROOM, MARGARET ANNE'S HIGH-RISE FLAT. EVENING

Later: we see Margaret Anne and James on the sofa from above.

The gang are gone.

The scene's objective is to strengthen the emotional bond between James and Margaret Anne and to create a turning point in their relationship. A deeper analysis of the scene can be itemised as follows:

[1] 'A cheesy romantic record plays in the background.' Though music is not heard in the scene, Ramsay establishes the sonic mood from the start.

[2] *'MARGARET ANNE (off-screen): Billy?'* By hearing and not seeing what goes on in the other room with Margaret Anne, the script averts the explicit nature of the scene (Figure 1.11). This allows the perspective of the event to be sustained through James' point of view. Characters speaking 'off-screen' are indicated several times in the script.

[3] *'James turns back to the window. There is a good view of the snaking canal.'* The screenplay indicates that James can see the canal from the window. In the film, this location is changed to a playground where James sees a man playing on a slide after he throws a rubbish bag onto a mound of garbage (Figure 1.9). Though the location is different, playground instead of canal, the cinematic moment remains the same.

[4] *'He concentrates on the figure of a man and his dog walking along the canal bank.'* This focus on an everyday moment as seen by James from the window restates the film's intention to narrate the story from a child's perspective. The word 'concentrate' adequately describes James' desire to block out what is happening in the other room.

[5] *'Billy (doing up his fly)'* This quick but important detail asserts that Margaret Anne's interaction with the older boys is of a sexual nature.

[6] *'...awkwardly lies on top of her, his arms kept stiffly at his sides.'* Even though James' inner thoughts and feelings are not explicitly written in the screenplay, the description of his physical demeanour is enough to infer his emotional state.

[7] *'Off-screen sniggers. TOMMY: Shhhhh!'* This line of dialogue is not in the film, but it denotes the sound shift that does take place in the scene. The boys' chatter and the ambient sound quickly fade out and non-diegetic music builds up.

[8] *'James' head rests like a baby's on Margaret Anne's breast. He closes his eyes.'* This line describes the event that attains the scene's objective: to strengthen the bond between James and Margaret Anne and to establish a turning point in their relationship (Figure 1.12).

The purpose of this scene and the overall objective of the 'James and Margaret Anne' plotline are the same: to show the evolution of the emotional bond between them. To this regard, McKee expresses that a scene should never be solely about exposition, but rather, it should strive to 'create a story design in which every scene is a minor, moderate, or major *Turning Point*' (1997: 233; emphasis in original). This scene is not an overblown dramatic moment but rather a subtle turning point that, according to Field, moves 'the story

forward' and 'reveal[s] information about the character' (2005: 165). James makes an important emotional decision when it's his 'turn' with Margaret Anne and he sees her stretched out motionless on the sofa; he decides to lie on top of her and cover her body in a protective non sexual manner. Although James and Margaret Anne's objectives are not overtly stated, a strong emotional moment between them is clearly detected.

Narrative Qualities

The previous section analysed the narrative techniques found in *Ratcatcher's* overall plot structure and its use in specific thematic plotlines. This segment seeks to go beyond the macrostructure and delve into the narrative techniques found within the scenes. The intention is to explore how Ramsay uses narrative to serve the emotion, why she omits plot information to engage the viewer and how she presents story-time in a flexible and ambiguous fashion.

Ramsay avoids going into detail in unnecessary events or superfluous plots in her narrative, instead, she communicates the character's emotions through her script. She is aware of the importance of clearly describing the events during the screenplay writing process so that they may be correctly interpreted in the film. Furthermore, she leaves narrative gaps, that is, she omits certain pieces of information so that the viewer can imagine the story and fill in the unseen moments of the film. This has the intent of engaging the viewer with the characters emotional development. Finally, Ramsay presents a flexible and ambiguous sense of the passing of time by not specifying the moment in which one event takes place with regard to another.

Narrative in service of emotion

In certain films, scenes are written to push the narrative along, to go from plot point to plot point of the story. However, Ramsay uses the narrative to get to the core of the character's sentiments, unnecessary events or superfluous plot points are dismissed. She comments on *Ratcatcher*: 'I wanted to make a film that was driven by emotion and images rather than narrative' (in Spencer, 1999: 17). *Ratcatcher* centres on the emotional moment: the plot serves the emotion and not the other way around.

An example of how Ramsay structures the film to communicate emotion can be found in the final moment of the previously analysed sequence (Figure 1.13) when James is

lying on top of Margaret Anne and there's a 'jump-cut'⁶ to both of them sitting on the same couch in awkward silence (Figure 1.14).



Fig. 1.13: 'James's head rests like a baby's on Margaret Anne's breast'.



Fig. 1.14: 'We see Margaret Anne and James on the sofa from above'.

One could assume that this shot was improvised and added while filming on set or proposed by the editor in post-production. Actually, this isolated shot is specified in the screenplay:

[...] James slowly and quietly walks over to the sofa and awkwardly lies on top of her, **his arms kept stiffly at his sides**. [1] (figure 1.13)

Off-screen sniggers.

TOMMY Shhhhh!

James's head rests like a baby's on Margaret Anne's breast. He closes his eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM, MARGARET ANNE'S HIGH-RISE FLAT. EVENING [2]

Later: We see Margaret Anne and James on the sofa from above. The gang are gone. (figure 1.14)

Strictly speaking, this additional moment (consisting of one shot in the film) could be perceived as unnecessary because it serves no narrative purpose, it does not tell us anything new. However, Ramsay foresees, even as she is writing the screenplay, the need for the film to show and expand on this sensitive moment: the camera tilts up, the music builds and James and Margaret Anne glance at each other. There is a 'cut' from one moment to the next both in the script and in the film [2] without the need to justify or set up this time shift. Furthermore, Ramsay's ability to accurately portray the tension between these two characters through their physical demeanour is apparent in the lines '*his arms kept stiffly at his sides*' and '*James' head rests like a baby's*' [1].

⁶ A cut where objects or characters appear to jump because the shots are so similar. Technically, this is due to the camera angles of the two shots being less than 30° apart (Chandler, 2009: loc. 850)

Narrative gaps

Greg Loftin states that ‘story is how we make sense of the world; if there’s no evident story, we look for a pattern and supply a story of our own’ (2019: 41). Ganz broadens this concept by adding that in a film, the patterns can be ‘a series of observed behaviours about which the audience speculates’ (2011: 127). However, some screenwriters leave out certain patterns because they consider that their task is not to announce and explain every single event in the story, but to allow the audience to construct their own theories and contrast them to the film’s narrative. One way of doing this is to exclude certain information in what Loftin calls narrative ‘gaps’ (2019: 41). One example of ‘narrative gaps’ in *Ratcatcher* can be seen when James is rummaging through the cupboard⁷.



Fig. 1.15: ‘James is crouched, rummaging in the cupboard’.



Fig. 1.16: ‘James removes the bottle of Prioderm’.



Fig. 1.17: ‘He smears a tiny black louse off the comb and shows it to her’.

James is taking things out of the kitchen cupboard, but it is not explained why (Figure 1.15). A close-up reveals that one of the items is a bottle of Prioderm, a lice remedy (Figure 1.16), yet it is not clear what he’ll use it for; later on James applies the remedy on Margaret Anne’s hair (Figure 1.17). This moment invites the audience to fill in the missing pieces of the storyline that could be: ‘Margaret Anne complaining to James about her hair lice’, ‘James offering to use his mother’s remedy’, ‘Both agreeing to meet at Margaret’s house’, and so on. The inferences allow the viewer to fill in the narrative gaps that will help understand how the characters arrive at this moment in the story. However, Loftin explains that ‘much of this kind of inductive processing goes on at a subliminal level’ (2019: 41).

The imaginary story the spectators create as they are watching a film is what Bordwell calls the *Fabula*. In essence, the *Fabula* is the story they mentally construct based on what they see in the film alongside their beliefs and life experiences. It is an imagined narrative created by the viewer where ‘an event will be assumed to be a consequence of another event, of a character trait, or of some general law’ (1985: 51). According to Chatman, when viewers encounter narrative gaps, they always rely on their *Fabula* to help fill in the missing pieces because they ‘cannot avoid participating in the transaction’ (1978: 28). It is important to point out that a film can facilitate this process by helping the viewer

⁷ page 65 of the screenplay (Ramsay, 1999). Minute 53 of *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay, 1999)

make the narrative connections, however, it can also interfere with the understanding of the causal relations (Bordwell, 1985: 51).

Another example of narrative gaps is found in Da's plotline: Da rescues Kenny from drowning (Figure 1.18), followed by the family dressing up (Figure 1.19), and finally Da receiving a medal (Figure 1.20).



Fig. 1.18: Da rescues Kenny from drowning.



Fig. 1.19: The Gillespies are dressing up.



Fig. 1.20: Da receives a medal.

It is never announced that Da will receive a medal. When the family is dressing up (several scenes after Kenny's rescue), the audience is left to wonder: Are they going out to dinner? To a wedding? In the next scene there is a ceremony in the Town Hall presided by the civic head of Glasgow, in which he talks about 'acts of bravery'. In a brief encounter, Kenny thanks Da for saving his life. Although it is never explicitly said that Da is obtaining the medal for rescuing Kenny, the confluence of events and the information given makes this conclusion inevitable. The screenwriter supplies enough information so that the spectator may deduce how the story develops, and also be 'actively engaging with the stories that might develop' (Ganz, 2011: 127). Thus, Ramsay avoids a spoon-fed narrative and allows the audience to actively participate by giving them the opportunity to add the missing or unseen moments of the story. These missing moments or '[g]aps in the story can be strangely effective. If the audience engages emotionally with the character then the gaps are easy to fill.' (Gunning in Loftin, 2019: 42).

The narrative gap approach can be seen not only in the macro structure level of the story but also within Ramsay's construction of scenes. There is a moment in *Ratcatcher* where 'Insurance Man' goes to the Gillespies' home to collect the overdue rent. Anne Marie lies by telling him that her mother has gone out and takes the business card that Insurance Man hands her. She then goes back to her mother who is hiding under the kitchen table (Figures 1.21 to 1.24).

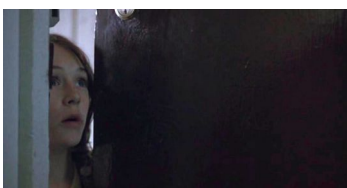


Fig. 1.21: 'Anne Marie opens the front door'.



Fig. 1.22: 'Is yer mammy ther, hen?'.



Fig. 1.23: 'Kin ye make sure yer ma gets this?'.



Fig. 1.24: 'Ma is crouched with her hands over her ears'.



Fig. 1.25: 'Ma makes Anne Marie a 'piece and jam' and hands it to her'.



Fig. 1.26: 'Anne Marie turns on the spot, eating her sandwich.'

The screenplay describes the moment as follows:

INT. HALLWAY/CLOSE, KINTRA STREET. DAY

Anne Marie opens the front door. [1] She looks up at the besuited man.

INSURANCE MAN Is yer mammy ther, hen? [2]

Anne Marie pauses to think of her answer. She shakes her head.

INSURANCE MAN (sighs) But Ah saw her oan her way hame from work.

ANNE MARIE She hid tae go oot.

She closes the door so just one eye peeps through.

ANNE MARIE (distraught) My auntie's... (she pauses to think) no well. (her voice drops to an almost imperceptible whispers, her eyes drop to her feet) Hospital.

INSURANCE MAN Ah'm sorry, hen.

Anne Marie goes to close the door.

INSURANCE MAN Hang oan a wee minute, hen. Kin ye make sure yer ma gets this?

He hands her a card: 'Providence Insurance'. [3]

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

Da lies asleep on top of the big bed. Ma is crouched with her hands over her ears.

Anne Marie enters the room.

MA (whispered) Has he gone yet?

Anne Marie nods.

Ma makes Anne Marie a 'piece and jam' and hands it to her. [4]

EXT. KINTRA BACKYARDS. DAY

Anne Marie turns on the spot, eating her sandwich. [5]

Two men scavenge through the rubbish a few backs further along, separating items of interest or a little value.

One pulls a black dead dog from inside a bag. He holds it up by the leg to inspect it.

[END OF SCENE]

[1] '*Anne Marie opens the front door.*' The scene begins directly with Anne Marie opening the front door though we don't hear or see anyone knocking or the Insurance Man walking up to the door (Figure 1.21).

[2] '*She looks up at the besuited man.*' Not only has Insurance Man not been mentioned before, but Ramsay does not even describe this person in the script. This character does not appear later in the film (Figure 1.22).

[3] In the film, Insurance Man says '*Tell her the rent is due*'. This is not in the script but the addition of this piece of information makes it clear why he is there.

[4] '*Ma makes Anne Marie a piece and jam and hands it to her.*' The script does not give a detailed description of what happens in the film: Ma goes out of frame and comes back with the bread and jam. Anne Marie's enthusiastic reaction is also not described (Figure 1.25).

[5] '*Anne Marie turns on the spot, eating her sandwich.*' There is a cut in the film from Ma preparing the sandwich to Anne Marie eating it while sitting on top of rubbish bags (Figure 1.26). This is the worst logical place to eat, and it is difficult to imagine her not eating the sandwich immediately in her flat. In this case, the film forgoes logic to arrive at the powerful visual of a little girl excitedly eating and enjoying a sandwich in such dismal conditions. The film signals a not so subtle metaphor: a small piece of happiness within depressing surroundings.

The excerpt shows Ramsay's focus on the emotional moment as she structures the story. How the film arrives at this scene is secondary, in fact, there is no prior knowledge of several elements: Insurance Man is never mentioned before in the script nor is he seen before or after this moment. Furthermore, Ma is not shown telling Anne Marie that she will get a reward (a jam sandwich) if she lies. All these events are presented in the film without prior notice, but an attentive viewer can easily infer the narrative gaps. Contrary to this type of narrative approach, Loftin explains that early on in the writing process, some screenwriters tend to over-explain and 'include a great deal of exposition', in an attempt to give the reader sufficient information so that they may understand the story (2019: 37). Thus, Ramsay views film moments not as mechanisms that deliver plot information, but

rather as opportunities for emotional exploration. *Ratcatcher* describes the emotional state of its characters without the need of ‘cumbersome backstory or exposition’ (Batty and Waldeback, 2019: 52).

Undefined time

Ratcatcher showcases Ramsay’s handling of time in several instances. She does not clearly establish the passing of time between events as hours, days, or months, but rather leaves it as a malleable and ambiguous element that coincides with James’ lack of emotional direction. An example of this can be seen early in the film: Ma hugs James tightly when she realises that her son is not the boy that drowned. The script describes a ‘FADE TO BLACK’ from this scene (Figure 1.27) and transitions to the beginning of ‘DAY 2’ with the funeral hearse going down a street (Figure 1.28). We assume that the hearse is for the dead child.



Fig. 1.27: ‘FADE TO BLACK’.



Fig. 1.28: ‘DAY 2’.

The screenplay describes the moment as follows:

[...] She pulls him to her and holds him tight, rocking him slightly, crying. We hold on his expression.

We move round, giving the first clear impression of the space and decor: the fireplace, the big marital bed which is set back in a recess.

FADE TO BLACK.

DAY 2

EXT. KINTRA STREET. DAY

A hearse moves sluggishly up the street, passing families who stand grouped together against the entrances of their respective closes. A few people are leaning out of open windows. [...]

A fade to black between these two scenes, indicated in the screenplay, would have provided the viewer with a commonly used cinematic device to indicate the passing of time. However, the film avoids this ellipsis with a ‘straight cut’, which challenges the spectator to

interpret where we are in the storyline and what possible events have occurred. At first, it could be assumed that it's the following day, nevertheless, the idea quickly dissipates and the film urges us to readjust our position in the timeline. It is highly unlikely that 24 hours have transpired between the boy's drowning and the actual burial, since a funeral in the United Kingdom is typically held several days after death (Dignity Funerals, 2021). Furthermore, the dead boy's mother and father are relatively calm given the circumstances, which may indicate that several days have transpired between the line '*Ma holds him tight*' and the line '*a hearse moves sluggishly up the street*'. This 'straight cut' establishes what will be a constant throughout the film: a flexible and ambiguous sense of the passing of time. How many days have passed? Is it the following day? It's not exactly stated and it does not really matter. The ambiguity in relation to time is observed throughout the screenplay. As discussed above, the script separates the story into '*DAY 1, DAY 2, DAY 3*', etc. Ramsay does not specify how many days have gone by, or whether or not they are consecutive, which contributes to the film's subjective relationship with time.

So far, some of the film's narrative characteristics have been analysed. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will look into film's stylistic qualities and how they are described in the screenplay.

Stylistic Qualities

The interaction between a film's plot and the cinematic tools or devices that are implemented to convey the story constitute its stylistic qualities. Although stylistic choices can occur in the many stages of the filmmaking process (pre-production, filming, editing, etc.), this segment will discuss those that are indicated in the screenplay. Ramsay's screenplay explores tiny everyday details, and creates visual and thematic analogies to express her narrative interests.

'Tiny moments': Emotion in the details

Cinema usually contains an image system where each object or image relates to another throughout the film. McKee describes it as a series of themes and visual motifs that extend from the beginning to the end that works as a 'subliminal communication to increase the depth and complexity of aesthetic emotion' (1997: 401). Ramsay's awareness of the expressive possibilities of the cinematic image can be seen in *Ratcatcher* in what she refers to as 'tiny moments': 'I was more interested in how you touch people. I think my short stories had things in them that people recognised – tiny moments, even the most banal things, but recognisable' (in Weidmann, 2020). She uses these everyday banal moments in such a way that they reach a deeper meaning and, therefore, bring forth the underlying themes and ideas of the film. Her 'tiny moments' may include close-ups and mundane activities discussed further on in this section.

In his analysis of the cinematic image, silent film screenwriter and theorist Bela Balázs states that a close-up can bring out the hidden life of small features and 'teaches us to see the intricate visual details of life' (1992: 261). Ramsay takes advantage of the emotional qualities found in close-ups to bring the spectator nearer to a child's perspective. She describes the world as seen from James' point of view, 'effectively recreating the spaces of a childhood world as James inhabits and relates to them – with familiarity, fascination or uncertainty' (Kuhn, 2008: 23). The 'child perspective' is emphasised by focusing on the small details, both literally, with the use of the close-up, and metaphorically, through the story events. Balázs also emphasises that by using the close-up, the camera can 'show us the very instant in which the general is transformed into the particular' (1992: 260). Usually close-ups are dramatic moments that surmise what is happening in a particular moment in the film. Such a moment can be seen when James sits at the kitchen table as the family goes about their daily chores (Figure 1.29), and the film focuses on him as he plays with salt as described in the script:

James sits at the kitchen table, bored. He pours the Saxa salt on the table and makes criss-crossing roads in it with his forefinger.

The 'salt moment' has no obvious narrative function in the classical sense but it does serve an emotional purpose. It conveys James' isolation and his desire to evade his surroundings and daily routines by focusing on tangible sensations that he can control. This 'tactile escapism' motif can be seen several times throughout the film.

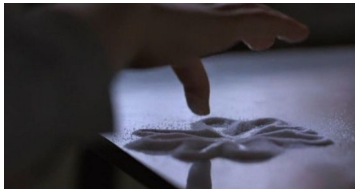


Fig. 1.29: 'makes criss-crossing roads'.



Fig. 1.30: 'hacking at his sandals'.



Fig. 1.31: James covers his mother's toe with the stocking.



Fig. 1.32: 'He spins round and round, cocooning himself in it'.



Fig. 1.33: 'TV static flickers and dances on James's sleeping face'.



Fig. 1.34: 'James stands awed by the open landscape'.

Deleuze describes a close-up as being not only the enlargement of an object but also the reduction of the scene 'to the scale of a child' (1986: 80). An example of this concept occurs when James aggressively damages the shoes that Ryan's mother gave him shortly after her son died (Figure 1.30):

James is sat there, hacking at his sandals with a piece of broken glass.

This 'tiny moment' manifests the character's state of mind, that is, James' guilt and frustration because the shoes remind him of his possible involvement in Ryan's death. Another scene where the character's intentions can be externalised through small actions is when James tries to mend a hole in his mother's stocking (Figure 1.31). Ramsay explains this moment as 'an expression of his love for her boiled down to one gesture. I loved the economy of finding that emotion in something seemingly so mundane' (in Weidmann, 2020). To help attain this effect, she draws on her early training as a still photographer that taught her that small details, such as a person's eyes, hands and mannerisms, can be used to communicate feelings. She also explains that framing can show emotions by including

certain aspects and eliminating others, a technique she uses because she is 'constantly trying to think cinematically. What can be shown instead of said' (in Kuhn, 2008: 84). The focus on the small intricacies of James' world can be decided on the set while filming, however, Ramsay chooses to integrate them early on during the writing process.

'Tiny moments' can also be achieved by emphasising everyday mundane activities. One such example is the first frame of the film that shows Ryan before his death, entangling himself in a curtain, his face is barely visible underneath the fabric (Figure 1.32):

Ryan (eleven years old) stands at the window. He has pulled the yellowing net curtain **over his head like a shroud. He spins round and round, cocooning himself in it.**

Even at the beginning of the film, Ramsay takes advantage of Ryan's mundane playfulness to introduce the sombre themes of drowning, asphyxiation and emotional isolation explored throughout the rest of the story. Another instance where everyday 'tiny moments' express a character's state of mind, happens when James falls asleep as he watches television and the static fills the room (Figure 1.33). The pulsating light on James' face externalises the emotional distress he is experiencing:

Post-transmission TV static flickers and dances on James's sleeping face.

The screenplay's use of seemingly prosaic activities to express the character's emotions also occurs when James comes to a housing project still under construction. As he walks through one of the unfinished homes, he encounters a window that opens onto a field of wheat. Ramsay describes the scene with the following lines (Figure 1.34):

Outside, a **golden wheat field bathed in sunlight** sways in a light breeze. James stands awed by the open landscape **framed like a painting** by the rectangular window. [1]

He climbs on to the sill and **sits in silhouette** against the bright vista. [2]

He abruptly jumps down to the outside of the building out of view. A moment passes.

He reappears in the distance, running through the field. [3]

In this screenplay fragment, Ramsay generates visual poetry by emphasising the small and mundane through her simple but eloquent descriptions:

[1] ‘a golden wheat field bathed in sunlight [...] framed like a painting’, emphasises the dreamlike quality of what James sees.

[2] ‘sits in silhouette against the bright vista’ aptly represents the contrast between James’ unhappiness and the bright future he longs for.

[3] ‘...out of view. A moment passes. He reappears in the distance...’ showcases a sense of scene direction or *mise-en-scène*⁸ already determined in the screenplay. It establishes the internal rhythms within the frame through the timing of the actor's movements.

As described above, Ramsay uses close-ups and mundane activities to communicate the underlying themes and ideas of the film. She implements commonplace events or ‘tiny moments’ to reveal the character’s innermost feelings, that is, she extracts the poetic moment from the mundane moment. This strategy is typically used in art cinema to signal the audience to ‘interpret motifs thematically, and thereby to discern a level of commentary beyond the straightforward action’ (Thompson, 1999: 179). These stylistic decisions are inextricably woven with great detail into the screenplay.

Visual Analogy

Another stylistic quality found in *Ratcatcher* is the use of visual analogies, defined as a ‘cut in which the image in the first shot either visually or thematically matches the image in the following shot’ (Riley, 2009: 81). An example of this attribute is when James sees Ryan’s hearse drive by in front of him; he ponders (Figure 1.35), then there is a cut to James’ reflection in the water (Figure 1.36).



Fig. 1.35: James is lost in thought after Ryan’s hearse passes by.



Fig. 1.36: ‘James’s blank face is a pale reflection’.

The screenplay differs from the film as follows:

EXT. ANOTHER STREET. DAY

⁸ The arrangement of actors and scenery on a stage for a theatrical production; the physical setting of an action (as of a narrative or a motion picture) (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Moving clouds reflect off an **abstraction** of shiny **black metal**. [1] We pull out to reveal the bonnet of the hearse viewed from above, it's **wheels spinning hypnotically** [2] over tarmac with a repetitive rumble.

EXT. DUKE STREET CANAL. DAY

James's blank face is a pale reflection in the **black water**. [3]

The canal bank is deserted apart from James's stick-like figure standing in the shallows at the scene of Ryan's death.

He tentatively takes a few steps forward into the mud. [...]

By linking the 'abstraction of shiny black metal' [1] to James' 'pale reflection in the black water' [3], Ramsay literally uses abstract imagery to convey James' distorted feelings. Describing the wheels of the hearse as 'spinning hypnotically' [2] shows Ramsay's intention to imbue the moment with a poetic, almost ethereal quality. Although the scene in the film differs from the script, the film does follow the script's suggestion and 'translates' the visual analogy with two shots of James, one after the other. Both use the same frame size and angle, but the second shot is now distorted and upside down, suggesting James' inner struggle.

Ramsay also uses visual analogy in a scene within the aforementioned 'James and Margaret Anne' plotline. After James combs Margaret Anne's hair, they take a bath together in a non-sexual, playful, childlike manner (Figure 1.4). Margaret Anne submerges herself faceup in the bathtub (Figure 1.37), in the next shot Da rescues Kenny from drowning (Figure 1.38), then it cuts back to Margaret Anne face down in the bathtub (Figure 1.39). By placing these three shots together, Ramsay creates a symbolic link between Kenny being rescued from drowning and Margaret Anne's symbolic drowning.



Fig. 1.37: '...slides under the clear surface of the water, her eyes shut tight'.



Fig. 1.38: '...emerges at the water's edge with the small boy on his back'.



Fig. 1.39: 'A moment passes. She rolls over on her stomach'.

The juxtaposition of these three shots as seen in the film, is not written in the original screenplay:

[...] Margaret Anne holds her nose and **slides under the clear surface of the water, her eyes shut tight**. James stares down at her complete nudity.

A moment passes. **She rolls over on her stomach**. Her body visibly

relaxes, her back bobbing up and breaking the surface of the water, her arms drifting limply away from her sides. From buried deep behind the tiled wall the tapping of water clearing in a pipe.

An unnatural amount of time elapses. James's breathing rises. Margaret Anne sits up, exhaling a lungful of air. Her hair is sleeked back from her glowing face. [...]

However, the symbolic link between Margaret Anne and Ryan's drowning is described in the screenplay: '*An unnatural amount of time elapses. James' breathing rises*'. Margaret Anne's lengthy time underwater, which can be interpreted as her own drowning, triggers James' feelings of guilt as he recalls Ryan's death in the canal. A visual analogy is also seen when James goes to Margaret Anne's flat. As they hug each other (Figure 1.40), the scene cuts to a shot of Ma and Da hugging and slow dancing at another location (Figure 1.41). This creates the thematic connection between the four characters as each pair seeks emotional refuge. James has his eyes open as he hugs Margaret Anne, as does Ma when she hugs Da, suggesting that they are not totally engaged in the embrace.



Fig. 1.40: 'They both close their eyes.'



Fig. 1.41: '...then closes her eyes'.

INT. MARGARET ANNE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

[...] James gets in beside her. **She cuddles him.**

MARGARET ANNE: Dae ye love me?

JAMES: Aye.

They both close their eyes.

INT. GILLESPIES' LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

'Something Stupid', by Frank and Nancy Sinatra, plays in the background. Ma and Da dance close, **holding each other tight**. They slowly spin. Da's scar is butterfly-stitched. He mumbles apologies into Ma's ear and strokes her hair. Ma looks into the distance, **then closes her eyes**.

The visual and symbolic links are reinforced by the mirroring of the line '*they close their eyes*' coupled with '*...then closes her eyes*', and '*She cuddles him*' coupled with '*holding each other tight*.'

'Ma is transfixed': Tension through visuals

The above discussion of some of Ramsay's stylistic qualities, such as 'tiny moments', close-ups, mundane activities and visual analogies, sets the basis for this section's analysis of how these elements are integrated to build a complete sequence. At the beginning of the film, James' mother sees from afar several men pulling out a drowned boy from the river; she dreads it could be her son. This moment unfolds in six shots:



Fig. 1.42: 'She stands, statue-like'.



Fig. 1.43: 'Ma is transfixed'.



Fig. 1.44: 'The small crowd stands in an impotent circle'.



Fig. 1.45: Unscripted Close-Up



Fig. 1.46: 'Ma's arms are straining'.



Fig. 1.47: 'A puddle of wetness seeps from the limp, waterlogged body'.

The sequence is written in the screenplay as follows:

INT. SECOND LANDING, THE CLOSE, KINTRA STREET. DAY

Ma slowly reaches the top of the second flight of stairs. She stands, statue-like, on the landing, staring out of the window. [1]

Ma's head is framed by the clear blue sky and perfect white clouds outside the window.

The squeals of playing children echo in the close. [2]

INT./EXT. CLOSE/DUKE STREET CANAL. DAY (HIGH POV) [3]

Ma is transfixed by the serene image of a man stretched the whole length of a dinghy, floating in the middle of the canal. Face down, head bowed over the edge, his long hair trails in the black water. [...] [4] The small crowd stands in an impotent circle around the prostrate boy. [5]

INT. THE CLOSE, KINTRA STREET. DAY [6]

Ma's arms are straining at the weight of her heavy shopping bags but she does not put them down. [7]

EXT. DUKE STREET CANAL BANK. DAY [8]

Muddy water pours from two wellington boots.

A puddle of wetness seeps from the limp, waterlogged body.

Ryan's white face is clearly visible in the relentless sun.

A closer analysis of the sequence reveals:

[1] *'She stands, statue-like, on the landing, staring out of the window.'* This moment is summarised in the film with one shot (Figure 1.42). We only see Ma's back, we don't know why she's there or what she's looking at but the *'statue-like'* presence described in the script conveys a heavy mood.

[2] Ramsay describes sounds, such as *'The squeals of playing children echo in the close'* as a means to place the viewer inside the character's state of mind.

[3] The use of *'HIGH POV'* (high point of view) in the scene header shows Ramsay's intent to keep the image of the drowned boy at a distance from Ma's sight. This telescopic point of view adds to the uncertainty of the moment (Figure 1.43 - 1.44).

[4] The boy's rescue from the water is described in detail in the screenplay: *'his arms are submerged up to the shoulders', 'he pulls at something beneath the surface', 'more people come into view and crowd towards the bank'*. However, in the film we only see the boy's body out of the water. The omission of Ryan's turbulent rescue strengthens the stillness of the sequence (Figure 1.44).

[5] Ramsay could have simply written: *'The small crowd stands in a circle around the boy'*, but the use of the adjectives *'impotent'* and *'prostrate'*, add a sense of weight and helplessness to the description on the page and ultimately to the moment in the film.

[6] The edit in the film from the small crowd to the close up of Ma's eyes (Figures 1.44 - 1.45) occurs as the dead boy is turned over. The transition is made before the boy's face is revealed and coincides with the moment when Ma blinks. This specific cut is not written in the screenplay.

[7] Instead of resorting to Ma's face to show concern, Ramsay prefers to be indirect and subtle. She describes her *'straining arms'* in the script and, therefore, generates anxiety with the image of the hand clutching the shopping bag (Figure 1.46).

[8] *'Muddy water pours from two wellington boots. A puddle of wetness seeps from the limp,*

waterlogged body. Ryan's white face is clearly visible in the relentless sun.' The three lines that describe the stillness of the body are reduced to a shot of the dead boy's hand. This also creates a powerful moment of visual symmetry by cutting from Ma's tensed hand to the boy's *'limp'* hand in the next shot (Figures 1.46 - 1.47).

This sequence shows Ramsay's approach to screenwriting as she relies on strong visual cues to describe what the character is feeling and thinking without the use of dialogue. Furthermore, she is acutely aware of how film editing shapes the cinematic moment and, therefore, infuses *Ratcatcher's* screenplay with explicit indications of pacing and rhythm. This is represented in the script with the structure of the phrases, the choice of words, and what the characters do, as well as what we see and when we see it. She also uses sound to shape the scene, not as an afterthought, but as an important element of the film. She obviously takes into consideration all these audiovisual components and their interactions to enhance the moment. In another director's hands, this sequence could have been a loud, 'in your face' dramatic instance. However, Ramsay avoids manipulating the audience through overt melodrama and instead chooses to observe from afar and convey tension without dialogue.

Conclusion

Ratcatcher's structure incorporates thematic plotlines with seemingly ambiguous narrative aims, nonetheless, its narrative strands come to a conclusion. This is accomplished by Ramsay's use of subtle techniques, rather than obvious, dramatic closing arguments, as evidenced in the 'James and Margaret Anne' subplot, which develops within ordinary, daily events that indirectly convey the character's emotional situation. Since *Ratcatcher's* plot avoids a goal-driven narrative, its dialogue does not have an explanatory nature, in other words, what the characters talk about does not progress the plot, instead, the dialogue indirectly depicts who the characters are.

Ramsay reveals the character's soul without superfluous plot elements. She anticipates throughout the writing process how the protagonists' emotional state can be exteriorized by their physical actions. She also takes advantage of 'narrative gaps,' or missing plot information with the intention of motivating the viewers to construct their own interpretation of the story's events. This bypasses the spoon-fed story and invites the audience to combine what they see in the film with their own views and life experiences in order to fill in the missing pieces. Another *Ratcatcher* trait is its handling of narrative time; it does not specify the time elapsed between incidents, making the plot pliable and uncertain.

This method, once again, challenges the viewer to deduce the probable events that occur throughout the story's timeline. Ramsay also uses 'tiny moments', that is, mundane everyday instances to tell the film's story. The moments are presented in such a manner that they take on a deeper significance, and reveal the character's emotions as well as the film's underlying themes, such as guilt, isolation, and childlike wonder within disheartening circumstances.

The cinematic tools commented above are implemented by Ramsay to convey what the characters are thinking and feeling. Furthermore, she understands how film editing influences the pace and rhythm of the cinematic moment. All of these aspects enhance the film's narrative flow, and are resolved in the writing phase of the screenplay, and not as an afterthought amid the filming or editing stages. The topics discussed so far can be infused with social commentary and a humorous tone, which is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Two

Atlanta: not quite laughing, not quite crying

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the narrative qualities of the American television series *Atlanta* (FX, 2016-18) and to describe how they were incorporated in my own script. In this context, some of the show's attributes, such as its mix of drama and comedy, its handling of the surrealist elements within a hyper realistic setting, and its unimposing social commentary, were analysed. One of the strategies used to achieve this goal was to examine a selected group of episodes and their corresponding screenplays. The scripts available at the time this doctoral thesis was written were, from season one: *The Big Bang*, *Streets on Lock* and *B.A.N.*; and from season two: *Alligator Man* and *Barbershop*. The focus is on the *Streets on Lock* and *Alligator Man* (Episodes 2 and 11) because they reflect the tone that I sought to embody in my original screenplay.

Traditionally, television's narrative qualities have been dismissed because its storytelling has been considered simplistic and has relied on 'genre formulas, repetitive situations, redundant exposition' (Mittell, 2015: 4). Nonetheless, during the last 20 years, television's storytelling capacities and practices have changed dramatically. Today's television series are typically at the forefront of story development. Narrative complexity in modern television demonstrates that a new paradigm has emerged offering alternatives to stock characters, overused themes and tired storytelling strategies. *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), which debuted on HBO in 1999, set a new standard for what episodic television can achieve. According to screenwriter Matthew Weiner, *The Sopranos* demonstrated that 'a serial can leave plot points, characters, and relationships unstated' (in Mittell, 2015: 164). Thus the storytelling strategies found in many television series have proven to be 'similar to formal dimensions of art cinema' (ibid.: 50).

As mentioned before, *Atlanta* is acknowledged as having 'the marvel and depth of an art-house indie film' (Parham, 2018). However, *Atlanta* differs in duration from *Lucy Drives a Car*. Still, by purposely choosing it as one of the objects of study, I seek to establish that the cinematic qualities of art cinema can be found in a feature film as well as a half-hour television dramedy. Selecting an object of study with a duration that varies significantly from that of *Lucy Drives a Car* allows us to isolate and scrutinise the art cinema strategies that are comparable in both time scales. *Atlanta's Streets On Lock* episode, with a running time of 23 minutes, demonstrates that a fully realised story can be told regardless of the length of the narrative.

In 2018 the series received 16 Emmy⁹ nominations, including outstanding writing for a comedy series, outstanding comedy series and outstanding director. Following *Atlanta*'s first episode, *The Guardian* called the show 'the highest-rated premiere of any basic-cable primetime scripted debut in more than three years' (Bakare, 2016). Hank Stuever, of *The Washington Post*, lauded its narrative: 'The half-hour cable dramedy has become television's most consistent expression of experimental film techniques, its own little exercise in 21st-century new-wave cinema' and 'an excellent and deceptively precise show about the human condition' (Stuever, 2018). Its absurdist-realistic qualities were pointed out by *Variety* magazine: '[*Atlanta*] married seductive surrealism with a lovely, oblique portrait of black creative aspiration in the South' (Saraiya, 2018) and *Rolling Stone* magazine called *Atlanta* simply 'the best show on TV' (Sheffield, 2018).

A distinguishing characteristic of *Atlanta* is its relaxed atmosphere due, in part, to the attitude of one of the main protagonists, Earn (Donald Glover). He has a laid back approach to life; he does not actively or passively intervene in the everyday events that surround him, he just tries to get by as best he can. Although the series deals with incidents that occur to 'sensitive, eccentric, poor black characters' (Press, 2018), it portrays a state of mind where 'poverty and oppression become not just a trial to endure but a lived state of being' (Saraiya, 2018). This is achieved by telling the stories without much fanfare, treating the characters with empathy, and including the right amount of sociopolitical input.

Laughing and Crying: The art of Dramedy

Dramedy, or drama-comedy, may be defined as a genre that combines drama with comedy, skillfully transitioning from one category to the other. This unique quality stems from the emotional clash between moments that may be perceived both as profound and trivial. Dramedy is not a comedy or a drama *per se* because, unlike a comedy, it does not signal the audience when it should laugh, and contrary to a drama, it does not push the spectators to take an event too seriously: 'if the makers are straining too hard to tell us that their narrative is serious – it might produce unintended laughter' (Moss-Wellington, 2021). In other words, the emotional scene is laced with a sense of levity, and the comedic moments are anchored within a tragic (or at least melancholic) situation. Dramedy uses a flexible narrative, and a particular tone to drive drama to comedy and vice versa. Bill Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960) is an example of drama-comedy in which serious events, such as suicide

⁹ Award given by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATAS), the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS), and the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (IATAS).

and infidelity, are mixed with light hearted situations, shifting from dramatic moments to the comedic ones (Dancyger and Rush, 2013: 169).

The drama-comedy combination has been used since the early days of cinema. It can be seen in Charlie Chaplin's films which portray a mixture of slapstick comedy and tear jerking melodrama, such as *The Kid* (1921) and *City Lights* (1931). It can be a difficult task to successfully merge the drama-filled, emotional moments with the humorous, lighter ones. Recent examples of dramedy in film include *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Sideways*, *Punch-Drunk Love*, *Birdman*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and *Lady Bird*, while in television it can be found in such series as *Shameless*, *Orange is the New Black*, *M*A*S*H*, *Girls*, and *Better Call Saul*.

Dramedy is in a constant state of balance, as evidenced in *Atlanta*, where dramatic events are not dismal, and the comedy is never gratuitous. The series navigates comedy while at the same time being rooted in serious, and perhaps disturbing social situations, such as:



Figure 2.1: Earn discovers the restaurant is very expensive.



Figure 2.2: 'Do you have soup?'



Figure 2.3: 'Can you check his jacket?'



Figure 2.4: The police search for Earn's key inside the dead man's jacket.

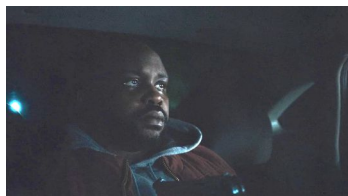


Figure 2.5: Paperboi can't open the door because it has the child lock.



Figure 2.6: 'My bad, bro'.

- Earn invites his girlfriend to dinner on a tight budget (Figures 2.1-2.2).
- Paperboi gets into his dealer's car to buy drugs, instead, the dealer robs him at gunpoint and orders him out. He tries to get out but can't because the child lock is on the door. This creates a comedic mix up when the dealer tries to unlock the door, but instead activates the window switch making it go up while Paperboi is reaching for the door handle out the window (Figures 2.5-2.6).
- Earn approaches police officers as they check the dead body of a man wearing his lost jacket. He asks them to look inside the jacket pockets for his key (Figures 2.3-2.4).

Atlanta attempts 'to create spaces in which comedic and dramatic modes become proximate and indistinguishable' (Moss-Wellington, 2021), that is, the incidents are not strictly separated but integrated one with the other, thus, drama becomes linked with comedy. The show's capacity of displaying a problem without dwelling too much on it, allows abrupt changes in the scene's mood, shifting from social commentary to absurdism, or from a sombre moment to something lighthearted.

Atlanta's dramedy highlights the void in its characters' lives, and points out the difference between the characters' idealised notion of how things should be and their reality. This creates a rapport with the audience because it is reassuring to find fictional individuals that are as uniquely flawed as the spectators but who, at the same time, are trying to improve their lives. *Atlanta* eventually comes down on the side of humanity, the side of good, where 'forgiveness and love are still the currency required to solve a dilemma', yet it avoids sappy sentimentalism or happy endings: 'dramedies don't offer up easy answers' (Landau, 2018: 7).

Atlanta's realism

Although *Atlanta* explores everyday life, it does so without exaggerations, presenting its themes within the framework of a more relatable reality. The series depends more on the scene's mood than surprising reveals. The pilot episode suggested that *Atlanta* might be following a set narrative, featuring Earn's efforts to make Paperboi a well-known rap star. However, this narrative was quickly abandoned, and the series instead concentrated on using Paperboi's 'B-level' notoriety to examine day-to-day situations with a socially conscious mind set, thus staying grounded in regular, daily issues.

Earn as the Underdog

Much of *Atlanta's* comedic moments arise from Earn's character as an 'underdog' which, according to the author and script consultant Karl Iglesias, is 'the unlikely hero. The odds are against them. They're outmatched by antagonistic forces and overwhelmed by them' (2005: 50). The author further explains that the role of the underdog elicits three important emotions in the viewers: compassion, because he lacks the skills required to resolve a difficult situation; admiration, for his perseverance to overcome the obstacles, and suspense, in anticipation of his probable success or failure. Earn strives to get through his everyday misfortunes: he doesn't have enough money to invite his girlfriend to dinner, he loses his

jacket that contains an important key, he tries several times to pay with a 100 dollar bill but he cannot spend the money because he is considered a 'suspicious individual', a club manager does not want to pay for Paperboi's performance, and so on. The struggle to overcome these and other circumstances evoke in the audience the desire to 'protect, help, or console them as the story progresses' (ibid.). Earn and the rest of the main characters in *Atlanta* are not extraordinary, their stories 'are not built around their growth, but rather their practiced stasis'. The series 'carefully backgrounds its own characters' to let their surroundings take centre stage (Saraiya, 2018).

Some authors may relate the concept of underdog to the 'comic-hero', however, Steven Kaplan prefers the word 'non-hero' to describe a character like Earn. A non-hero differs from the comic-hero because the former is not doing something foolish or funny just 'for the sake of doing something silly or funny'. The sole purpose of the non-hero is not the amusing things he or she does, but the fact that the character attempts to prevail over the challenges he or she encounters, that is, '[c]omedy is the by-product of the character's actions' (2013, 84). Thus, it may be *Atlanta's* intention to be funny, but it is not Earn's primary goal.

Streets on Lock: An Atlanta episode analysis

The first season's second episode, titled *Streets on Lock*, was written by Stephen Glover and nominated in 2017 for an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series. The episode begins with Earn and Paperboi being arrested for their involvement in a gun shooting depicted in the previous episode. Paperboi is released on bail, but Earn has to wait at the detention centre as he is processed through the system. The episode consists of 12 scenes that alternate from Earn at the county jail to Paperboi's first experience as a presumed celebrity:

1. Earn and Paperboi wait at the county jail (Earn and Paperboi)
2. Policeman takes pictures with Paperboi (Paperboi)
3. Earn calls Van from jail (Earn)
4. 'Locked me up for public intoxication' (Earn)
5. Threats and Treats at the Restaurant (Paperboi)
6. At the Gasoline Station (Paperboi)
7. Toilet Water (Earn)
8. Paperboi and Darius check social media (Paperboi)
9. 'Family' picture (Paperboi)
10. Gay confusion (Earn)
11. 'Paperboi live here?' (Paperboi)
12. Earn leaves the detention centre (Earn)

The stories about Earn and Paperboi develop independently one from the other, that is, what happens in one plotline does not affect another plotline within the same episode. We see Paperboi managing his newfound popularity and Earn encountering and witnessing a diverse range of personalities and circumstances within the county jail. The purpose of this section is to examine how each scene effectively blends societal observations with comedic moments that can be both subtle and bombastic.

Earn and Paperboi wait at the county jail



Fig. 2.7: 'I've never been arrested'.



Fig. 2.8: 'That's Gina Simms from that T-Pain video'.



Fig. 2.9: 'You think he's dead?'.

The scene begins in the middle of a conversation between Earn and Paperboi as they wait at the county jail's detention centre (Figure 2.7). They are discussing how the police officers tried to get them to turn on each other after the shooting. The dialogue then transitions to Earn expressing that he has never been arrested (Glover, 2016):

EARN: I've never been arrested.

ALFRED: Yeah. You should've ditched that weed though.

EARN: I forgot. There was a lot happening [...]

The conversation continues with a humorous remark about a woman they recognize from a music video who is also under arrest (Figure 2.8), and is followed by them wondering if the person that was shot actually died (Figure 2.9).

EARN: You think he's dead?

ALFRED: I have no idea what you're talking about. And if I did, now wouldn't be the time.

Although the scene assumes that nothing major occurred during the shooting, it leaves things a bit vague as to what really happened. Nevertheless, it provides enough information so the audience can infer the missing pieces and speculate about the event's outcome. As discussed in the previous chapter, these narrative gaps are filled in with an imaginary story, or Fabula, that the viewers construct based on what they see in the film coupled with their own life experiences and beliefs (Bordwell, 1985: 51).

Even though the conversation in the scene is casual, light and amusing, it does convey two pertinent clues: Earn and Paperboi are not being charged for a major crime since there is no apparent victim, and Earn has never been arrested. The latter clue is essential because it informs the viewer that he has no previous prison experience, and therefore, it helps understand the rest of the episode. This type of story information is

commonly referred to as exposition. In film narrative, exposition is the presentation of facts, such as the setting, the emotional situation of the characters, and other elements that the audience must know to understand the story. It is generally conveyed through dialogue, and in this case, it is cleverly interspersed throughout the conversation between Earn and Paperboi without the viewers becoming aware that they are being given story information. McKee suggests that it is important to show real, honest scenes where human beings behave and talk naturally 'yet at the same time indirectly pass along the necessary facts' (McKee, 1997: 334). In this scene, screenwriter Stephen Glover knows how to 'hide' plot information in the character's conversation, as a result, only seven out of 44 lines of dialogue serve as exposition. This constitutes what Iglesias refers to as 'invisible, or subtle exposition—feeding information while distracting the reader emotionally' (2005: 205).

Policeman takes pictures with Paperboi



Fig. 2.10: 'Hey now you're that paper man right?'



Fig. 2.11: 'They told me a rapper was in here so I had to come snap a pic'.



Fig. 2.12: 'Also I was thinking could you come and bail me out?'

As Paperboi walks out from the county jail, a police officer wants to take pictures with him to post on social media. The officer doesn't even know who Paperboi is: 'You Paper Man?' (Figure 2.10); he heard that there was a rapper in the police station and wants proof that he met a 'celebrity' (Figure 2.11). The officer insists on taking pictures in poses as if they were great friends 'Back to back!'; this makes Paperboi uncomfortable because he feels objectified. His uneasiness also stems from the fact that he is forced to interact with a police officer that brags about having arrested another rapper; this is celebrity for celebrity's sake, it does not matter what Paperboi is famous for. The humour surges from Paperboi's discomfort and the officer's disregard towards his reaction; Paperboi's deadpan response emphasises the comedic situation. The scene displays the contradicting sentiments that arise in dramedy, it is 'the struggle between the repression and expression of emotions that pulls us in and keeps us invested in the outcome' (Landau, 2018). In this case, Paperboi is offended by the officer's attitude, considering him a phototrophy, yet he is helpless to deny the phoney adulation.

Earn calls Van from jail

Earn calls Van, the mother of his daughter, from a payphone inside the county jail (Figure 2.12). He leaves a voice message, asking her to post bail for him. As he is pleading, he also apologises for not having paid the rent and rambles on about his future plans. This scene exemplifies *Atlanta's* style, in which every moment has a combination of drama and comedy. The drama is represented by Earn's arrest, and the fact that he has not fulfilled his obligations to his daughter and his partner Van. The subtle humour is found in his pleading with Van, who is probably quite angry, to help him in this difficult situation. A guard standing behind Earn overhears the phone call, shakes his head and chuckles. Earn notices the guard mocking him and sheepishly continues talking. The guard's mocking and Earn's self awareness also contribute to the scene's comedic significance:

[...] The camera pans and reveals a cop watching Earn from close by. He's been listening to Earn's phone call and begins to shake his head. Earn becomes self conscious.

EARN: Um yeah, I guess I'll just see you later. Bye. Love You.

Earn hangs up the phone, he knows it wasn't a good message.

Much of the comedic effects depend not only on the writer's wit but also on the actor's 'delivery' of the dialogue: 'a mastery of comic forms involves a careful control of pauses, hesitations and silences, of knowing exactly when to detonate the little dynamite of the joke' (Critchley, 2002: 6). Donald Glover and the rest of the cast use these techniques to create *Atlanta's* subdued humorous tone.

'Locked me up for public intoxication'



Fig. 2.13: Buck notices Earn and begins talking to him.



Fig. 2.14: 'They saw the cans and locked me up for public intoxication'.



Fig. 2.15: 'Damn man, I said I was sorry'.

Earn's first interaction with other inmates occurs when:

Buck notices Earn and begins talking to him. Buck seems drunk but it's hard to tell at first. He a very animated story teller.

BUCK: Man, what you in here for?

EARN: Me? Uh, I-

BUCK: (interrupting) Damn I shoulda just went home. Instead I'm in here locked up [...]

This moment uses a familiar comedic trope: someone asks another person a question but interrupts before they can answer. In this case, Earn is about to answer but Buck interrupts him and rambles on, almost unintelligibly, about how he encountered a friend he had not seen in eleven years, they had drinks and were arrested for public intoxication (Figure 2.13-14). Buck finishes recounting his ordeal:

BUCK: I shoulda gone home.

A man sitting in the row in front of Earn turns around, GRADY (44). He's also drunk.

GRADY: (to Buck) Damn man, I said I was sorry.

A man sitting in front of Buck turns around and tells him that he is sorry they got arrested (Figure 2.15). The man in question is Grady, the person Buck was talking about throughout the story. This unexpected reveal is amusing because Grady was always sitting there while Buck talked about him as if he was not in the room. The comedic aspect abides with the theory of incongruity in which a 'key to comic amusement is a deviation from some presupposed norm' (Carroll, 2014: 17). In this case, Buck's description of the events may lead viewers to believe that Grady was absent, then they suddenly become aware of his presence; it is the anomaly between what is expected, and what is presented, that generates the joke (Critchley, 2002: 1).

Buck's character also says:

BUCK [...] I was like "I don't know, A.P.D. be riding around." Now you know he talked me into it. Man, A.P.D. pulled up on us sho 'nuff. They saw the cans and locked me up for public intoxication. Damn!

He mentions APD several times, which is an acronym for Atlanta Police Department. The screenwriter, Stephen Glover, could have identified the patrol car more clearly, but the context invites the viewer to infer what Buck is talking about when he says APD. This is an example of how dialogue can be more about delineating the character than about understanding what is being said. Although there is a risk that some spectators may not completely comprehend what is being referenced, the authenticity and emotion in the dialogue is worth it, that is, it is better to understand half a conversation that feels true,

honest and emotional than to fully comprehend a dialogue that is perceived as dull and tedious. A way to achieve this authenticity is by using colloquialisms, defined as ‘a word or phrase that is not formal or literary, typically one used in ordinary or familiar conversation’ (Lexico, 2021). In *Atlanta* we find several instances of this type of vernacular: *snap a pic*, *sho ‘nuff*, *nah it’s all good fam*, *I’m an old school cat*, *ya dig?*, *yo my boy hooked you up*, *you’ve got the juice*, etcetera.

Threats and Treats at the Restaurant



Fig. 2.16: ‘He made you the lemon pepper joints but these got the sauce on em’.



Fig. 2.17: ‘DARIUS: (amazed) Oh my god.’.



Fig. 2.18: ‘If you let me down, I don’t know what I’d do’.

PJ, the waiter, brings Paperboi and Darius their take out order at a restaurant (Figure 2.16-18). He congratulates Paperboi for being ‘*one of the last real rappers*’, but seems more impressed by the fact that he allegedly shot someone than by his music. The waiter gives them their meal, which has been specially prepared for Paperboi:

PJ: Yo my boy hooked you up. He made you the lemon pepper joints but these got the sauce on em.

PJ opens a box of wings and displays them to Alfred. They are wet lemon pepper wings.

ALFRED: Oh snap. Lemon pepper wet?!?

DARIUS: (amazed) Oh my god.

Paperboi seems excited and grateful until the waiter stares at him intensely and tells him, in an aggressive tone: ‘*If you let me down, I don’t know what I’d do*’. This moment represents the perks and pitfalls of fame, the benefits and the dangers that may now come into Paperboi’s life. The scene’s amusement is based on the exaggerated value the customised meal receives. It is elevated to an almost holy offering, comically expressed by the golden glow that emanates from the box of food (Figure 2.17). Everyone involved in this interaction tacitly equates the chicken wings with honour and respect. The waiter and the cook give it to Paperboi to show their admiration and reverence, and Darius thanks the cook with a military salute.

It is interesting to note that the restaurant depicted in this scene actually exists in the city of Atlanta, it is a locally known business called J.R. Crickets that specialise in buffalo wings. This again demonstrates *Atlanta's* interest in incorporating real life elements and locations into the story line. After the airing of this episode in 2017, the restaurant became so popular that it added '*Lemon Pepper Wet*' chicken wings to its menu (Wicker, 2017).

At the Gasoline Station



Fig. 2.19: '...gives him a strange look as he leaves the gas station'.



Fig. 2.20: 'One of their movements makes it seem like they might be carrying a gun'.



Fig. 2.21: 'Alfred continues to be suspicious. The vibe feels scary'.

As Paperboi is paying at the gasoline station, a man gives him a strange look (Figure 2.19). A few minutes later, when filling his gas tank, he again sees the man leaning against a car and talking to another person:

They seem shady and Alfred is suspicious of them. One of the men is the guy Alfred saw in the gas station earlier. The men watch Alfred casually and gesture to one another. One of their movements makes it seem like they might be carrying a gun. Alfred continues to be suspicious. The vibe feels scary. [1]

Alfred quickly finishes pumping and drops in the car.

DARIUS: Hold, up. I'ma get a Cow Tale. [2]

ALFRED: Nah.

They drive off.

A closer examination of the screenplay reveals some noteworthy elements:

[1] '*The vibe feels scary*' - The capacity of *Atlanta's* producers to effortlessly transition to a more serious tone is demonstrated in this scene. The tension is palpable, and the threat of violence is real (Figure 2.20).

[2] '*Hold, up. I'ma get a Cow Tale*' - Like in the scene before, the screenplay includes allusions to items found in real life within the city of Atlanta. Darius casually mentions 'Cow Tales', chewy snacks made of caramel and filled with cream sold in the United States. Even if many viewers may not know what they are talking about, these localised references help give the show its authenticity.

This is the shortest, and perhaps the most sombre moment in the Paperboi storyline, and unlike other scenes, it is devoid of obvious comedic intent. The two men that he encounters do not appear again in the episode, that is, there is no follow up in the narrative. This also occurs with other characters in the script and illustrates that not all scenes have to provide narrative information, construct new situations or build up to some kind of overt intensity. The incident offers a more serious perspective of the varied situations that arise from Paperboi's recently acquired 'celebrity' status; he is now more self-conscious and fearful of everyone around him. As explored in other scenes, his newfound notoriety elicits a gamut of reactions from the public which vary from special treatment to unwanted attention and now, as seen here, to potentially dangerous situations (Figure 2.21).

Toilet Water



Fig. 2.22: 'He looks like he needs help'.



Fig. 2.23: 'Lee takes a sip of his toilet water and spits it onto Sergeant Simmons'.



Fig. 2.24: 'Sergeant Simmons reaches for his baton.'

Earn sits in a detention centre as he waits to be released on bail. The other detainees are amused by Lee, a seemingly mentally challenged man, while he dances around with a paper cup in his hand. He then walks into the public toilet, fills his cup with toilet water and takes a drink while the inmates watch in gross amusement:

[...]

Everyone turns and watches Lee as he stands before them with a cup of water.

BUCK: (grossed out but excited) Aww man, he's gonna drink it!

The crowd moans as Lee slowly puts the cup to his lips and drinks it. Everyone in the room goes wild once he drinks it including police officers. Lee dances more. It's good fun. Earn isn't amused.

EARN: Why is he getting arrested every week? He looks like he needs help.

Officer Jones hears Earn but barely reacts. He's enjoying it.

OFFICER JONES: (watching Lee but talking to Earn) Hey man. Shut up.

A senior guard laughs at Lee's antics and approaches him; then Lee spits the toilet water on the officer (Figure 2.23):

Lee takes a sip of his toilet water and spits it onto Sergeant Simmons. Sergeant Simmons immediately flips out.

SERGEANT SIMMONS: Oh! The fu-?!?

Sergeant Simmons reaches for his baton. An alarm and flashing red lights goes off and several police officers rush to grab Lee.

Lee begins to scream loudly and flail around as officers try to subdue him. The mood in the room has completely changed. Earn watches the commotion, shocked at what he's witnessing. Its pretty intense.

They pull Lee out screaming. His screams can be heard deep in the jail. They're haunting. [1]

The guards in the room immediately start hitting the mentally challenged man and wrestle him to the ground (Figure 2.24). The sequence alludes to the judicial system's incapacity to identify people with mental disorders, as well as how they are frequently undiagnosed and end up stuck in a revolving door of going in and out of jail without being directed to the appropriate treatment. Earn seems to be the only person worried about Lee: *'He looks like he needs help.'* (Figure 2.22), but an officer quickly dismisses his concern: *'Hey man. Shut up.'* The scene displays *Atlanta's* ability to blend disturbing and tragic situations with amusing ones without neither of them seeming out of place. Landau comments that 'laugh-out-loud moments are juxtaposed against scenes of police brutality, of negotiating the use of the N-word and of cold-blooded murder. How can a dramedy be so gritty and tragic?' (Landau, 2018).

Paperboi and Darius check social media

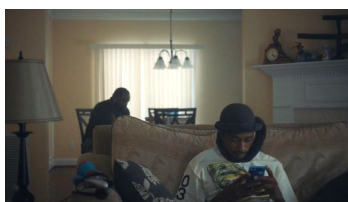


Fig. 2.25: 'XXL picked up the story. Also Complex put you in the best songs of the month'.



Fig. 2.26: 'I don't really feel like being around people. I'm getting weird energy today.'

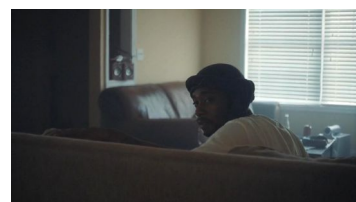


Fig. 2.27: 'Vibe wrote an article called "Is Paperboi Atlanta's 2pac?"'.

Darius reads out loud Paperboi's most recent mentions on social media (Figure 2.25-26). Paperboi is not impressed, he is finding it difficult to deal with all the attention:

ALFRED: I don't know. I'm not feeling it. I don't really feel like being around people. I'm getting weird energy today.

The humorous tone is provided by LaKeith Stanfield's subtle, *nonchalant* portrayal of Darius' character:

DARIUS: I got Google alerts set up on my phone for you so I can see which sites are talking about you. Vibe wrote an article called "Is Paperboi Atlanta's 2pac?"

Alfred looks concerned. Darius reads.

DARIUS: They say "no." But apparently John Boyega is the new Magic Johnson.

This scene is a commentary on the social media's reaction to Paperboi's new found prominence and how his story has now become part of what Samuel Woolley calls junk news: 'articles constructed to look like news that are not actually true, because they lack facts or verifiability' (Woolley, 2020: loc. 47). Hence, Paperboi's situation is used to produce 'click baiting headlines' that immediately generate ridiculous debates, such as, '*Is Paperboi Atlanta's 2pac?*' (Figure 2.27). These so-called news articles invite the public to ponder upon, judge, and ultimately decide on the latest bulletins; in this case: '*They say no*'. Articles about Paperboi are being written less than 24 hours after his alleged participation in the shooting, thus, his fame is more a result of his 'criminal involvement' than his musical achievements. The scene ends with Darius commenting upon another nonsensical article: '*But apparently John Boyega is the new Magic Johnson.*'

Family picture



Fig. 2.28: 'I'm actually Paper Boi'.



Fig. 2.29: 'Wait a second, I heard that song today in the car'.



Fig. 2.30: 'The kids gather around excitedly. Alfred reluctantly gathers with the family for a photo'.

Paperboi sees neighbourhood kids playing with toy guns, they pretend to shoot each other as they yell '*I'm just like Paperboi*'. He approaches and tells them that '*shooting people isn't cool*' as Crystal, an annoyed mother, questions him:

Crystal looks at Alfred confused and annoyed.

CRYSTAL: Yeah I know. Who are you and why are you speaking to me and my children?

Alfred is a little taken aback. He realizes he may have inadvertently pissed this woman off.

ALFRED: Oh, nah. I didn't mean to just get in your business.

CRYSTAL: But you did.

Paperboi explains that he is the rapper they are imitating (Figure 2.28), and the mother's attitude quickly changes as she realises that he may be a celebrity of some kind (Figure 2.29):

CRYSTAL: Wait a second, I heard that song today in the car. I think my girlfriend was talking about you. (to Demarrio) Go get my phone from in my purse.

Crystal hands the toy gun back to Demarrio as he runs off. She doesn't seem to realize what she did, she's distracted now.

CRYSTAL: (excited) Oh my goodness this is crazy. What you doing over here?

Crystal fidgets with her hair and appearance subconsciously. She may be a little star struck even though she doesn't know who Alfred is really.

They all pose for a picture with the 'rap star' (Figure 2.30), even though Crystal just met this man three minutes ago. This is an amusing representation of how, for some people, the suggestion of notoriety or fame can condone even an alleged killer. Furthermore, Paperboi feels a moral obligation to give the kids advice because he senses he now is a celebrity. However, his 'good samaritan' objective falters momentarily when one of them yells '*You ain't Paperboi!*', and he splutters '*Yeah I am! You little...*'. The collision of his pacifist, good intentions with his abrupt, uncontrolled reaction produce an amusing moment. Although these tidbits of humour are quick and subtle, they add up and influence the scene's overall comic tone.

Gay confusion



Fig. 2.31: 'Earn is sitting directly in between Johnny and Lisa'.



Fig. 2.32: 'Johnny is genuinely confused while Lisa sits quietly'.



Fig. 2.33: 'Yo, what's your problem man?'

Earn is in the detention center sitting between Johnny and Lisa, a transgender woman. While Johnny reminisces about when he and Lisa used to go out, Earn seems uncomfortable being in the middle and offers to move to another seat (Figure 2.31), but Johnny angrily orders him not to. Johnny proceeds to tell everyone that Lisa was his girl, however, the inmates assure him that 'she' is really a man and insinuate that he is gay.

Another young inmate, RICO (23), is sitting a few seats down from Johnny. He seems to know Johnny.

RICO: Your girl?

JOHNNY: Yeah this is my ex Lisa. I used to talk to her back after my mom kicked me out.

RICO: My nigga, that's a man.

Johnny is genuinely confused while Lisa sits quietly.

As Johnny apparently grapples with his own sexual identity, the other detainees playfully taunt him. He becomes confused, and angry (Figure 2.32); he then threatens the inmates and insists that he is not gay.

Johnny is still confused. Someone snickers.

JOHNNY: Nah. She...

Lisa seems unfazed. Earn is trying not to be awkward but it's hard not to be sitting so close. Johnny starts to become mad.

JOHNNY: Wait, nah. (to Earn) So you think I'm gay?

Earn is caught off guard. He doesn't care one way or the other so he tries to give a progressive/neutral answer.

EARN: (thinking) Um... No... Or... I don't really care. It's whatever you want...or think...

As the mocking continues, Johnny channels his anger toward Earn, who is not doing or saying anything, and shouts at him to '*Stop being weird!*' (Figure 2.33). Although the detainees continue bullying Johnny in a non threatening manner, his frustration becomes more evident because he is overwhelmed with self doubt and is anxious of how his peers may perceive him. This reflects Landau's statement that 'dramedies are more about hardships and moral complexities of relationships' (Landau, 2018). His confusion and anger turn into a humorous, child-like tantrum directed at the other inmates:

Johnny is so angry there are tears in his eyes.

JOHNNY: (to Buck) I'm gonna stab your old ass when we get upstairs to them cells.

Buck stops smiling. Johnny is still a scary enemy to have.

The bullies suddenly get a 'taste of their own medicine', that is, Johnny now threatens the inmates and they recoil from their comical taunting. This is amusing because the aggressors abruptly become the victims: '*Buck stops smiling. Johnny is still a scary enemy to have.*' This line from the script encapsulates the scene's strive for drama-comedy equilibrium. If

Johnny had been too submissive or too violent, the scene would no longer be humorous, there would be no balance between drama and comedy. Johnny's aggressor-victim role is established from the very start when he menacingly tells Earn he cannot move from his seat; later on, Johnny himself becomes the victim. Another factor that contributes to the dramedy equilibrium is the fact that Johnny takes advantage of Earn's passiveness. He becomes the butt of Johnny's rage even though he hasn't done anything: *'I'm just sitting here'* he says. Earn's nervous tension gives the stressful moment a humorous twist.

'Paperboi live here?'

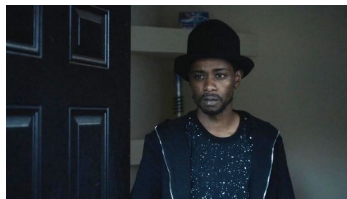


Fig. 2.34: 'He opens the door to find a STRANGE GUY in a Batman mask peering in'.



Fig. 2.35: 'Paperboi live here?'.

Paperboi goes home after his encounter with the woman, her son and nephews. There is a knock at the door and Darius cautiously opens; he sees a man dressed in a jogging outfit and a Batman cowl (Figure 2.34-35):

Suddenly there's a LOUD KNOCK at the door. Darius goes to answer it. He opens the door to find a STRANGE GUY in a Batman mask peering in. He lifts his mask. He's sweating profusely.

STRANGE GUY: Paperboi live here?

DARIUS: (hesitant) Yeah?

STRANGE GUY: (calculating) Okay.

Strange Guy pulls his mask back down and walks off. Darius shuts the door.

DARIUS: You're too hot right now.

This is the most overtly eccentric moment in the episode. It is funny, but also subtly threatening: fanatics now know where Paperboi lives.

Earn leaves the detention centre

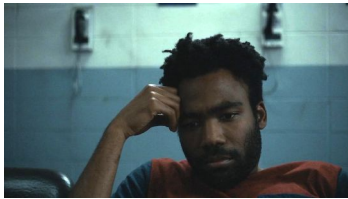


Fig. 2.36: 'Earn looks tired and defeated.'



Fig. 2.37: 'She won't even remember this'.

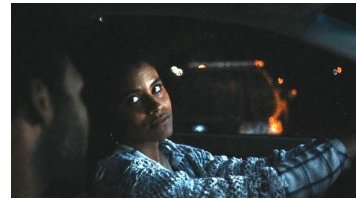


Fig. 2.38: 'You can shut up.'

Earn, tired and worried, waits in the detention centre when he unexpectedly hears his name over the loudspeaker (Figure 2.36). He is surprised and blurts out, to no one in particular, the nonsensical phrase: '*I'm him*'; he then walks out of the county jail and heads toward Van who is waiting in her car with their daughter in the back seat (Figure 2.37-38). Van is visibly angry at him, but Earn tries to lighten the mood:

[...] A moment. Earn breaks the silence.

EARN: Thank you for bailing me out.

Van remains silent. Earn turns around and engages with Lottie.

EARN: Hey mama. (to Van) She won't even remember this. She'll be like..."remember that time we drove at night?" (then) "Me neither."

VAN: (smirking) You can shut up.

Van is still silent. She puts the car in drive and pulls off.

FADE OUT:

END OF EPISODE.

The episode ends with an uneventful note, and a 'life goes on' sentiment while Bill Withers sings 'Grandma's Hands' over the closing credits. Although Earn has overcome the anxiety of being in jail, and managed to get out before he was further processed, there is no happy ending: he gets in the car, his girlfriend is angry and he has no money.

The episode makes several social comments based on real, everyday situations presented as ordinary, sometimes humorous moments. They are normal occurrences, while somewhat exaggerated, that are nuanced enough not to devolve into farce, yet strong and real enough to convey a sense of authenticity and identification. The themes, contained within a plausible everyday context, may be explored as small, tiny moments (a man sees kids playing, Paperboi and Darius get food, filling the car at the gas station, and so on). This is one of *Atlanta's* qualities, it 'builds big themes from small details' (Jurgensen, 2018).

Streets On Lock offers two storylines that explore two distinct aspects of modern life: Paperboi's passage through fame and Earn's journey through the county jail. The former aspect is examined when Paperboi encounters overzealous policemen, opportunistic mothers, intense waiters, and joggers dressed as Batman. Earn's temporary stay at the county jail confronts him with the struggles of low income minorities varying in age and background; it also offers a glimpse into the tedious procedures of the seldom explored world of misdemeanour arrests.

As noted above, each scene in *Streets on Lock* expresses a social concern together with a comic purpose, there is no scene where these two elements are not present. The drama-comedy events are sometimes explored in small moments which, according to Neil Landau, 'every moment matters, and even the insignificant ones are significant' (2018: 28). The scenes occur within everyday situations, 'tiny moments', as they were called in my analysis of Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999). The moments refer to banal events offered in such a manner that they highlight the underlying themes and ideas of the story. In *Ratcatcher*, the intention of 'tiny moments' is to evoke a 'serious response' in the audience, however, in *Atlanta*, along with emotion, they add a comedic touch to the scene. Furthermore, the characters in this episode, as in *Ratcatcher*, do not have clear objectives or antagonists, that is, they do not comply with the hero-protagonist stereotype that has clear goals, and is out to overcome recognizable obstacles; Paperboi's interventions centre around his reactions to his newfound notoriety (he has no objective, he just reacts), while Earn is solely an observer of the goings on within the county jail.

Realism and Surrealism with the *Alligator Man*

Atlanta has many moments that could be described as surreal, absurd or fantastical, such as the appearance of an invisible car; a mystery man in a suit and tie that offers Earn a sandwich on a Bus; or a DJ at a stripclub that talks to Earn directly over the loudspeaker. This section deals with how the series combines reality with the weird and unusual, the dichotomy realism-surrealism is evident in the first episode of the second season with *Alligator Man*.

The episode begins with two young men robbing a local fast food restaurant; during the holdup, the manager defends himself by firing a machine gun at them. Elsewhere, Earn is being forced out of a self-storage unit he has turned into his temporary 'home'. Later on, Darius offers to take Earn to the parole office, and on the way he tells Earn about the tall tale known as 'Florida Man'. Earn's parole officer notifies him that he must take drug prevention

classes, but he cannot afford them. Then he receives a call from Alfred telling him to visit their uncle Willy who has, apparently, kidnapped his girlfriend. However, when Darius and Earn arrive, it turns out Willy locked her in a room accusing her of having stolen \$50 from him. Earn tries to let her out but Willy cautions him against opening one of the doors because there is a live alligator inside. When the cops arrive, Willy refuses to step outside, and threatens to turn the alligator loose on them. They do not believe that there is an alligator inside until the neighbours confirm his story. Earn asks the cops for five minutes to persuade Willy to come out of the house. He and Willy then argue about Earn's apprehension that Alfred will dump him as his manager, suddenly, Willy asks him to smuggle out a golden revolver in his rucksack so the police won't find it. While Earn is leaving, Willy turns the alligator loose in front of the house, distracting the cops long enough for Willy to escape.

Atlanta's storylines can delve into the 'conceptual, the ultra-specific, or some combination of the two', and are generally not explored as a complete, rational entity, but as isolated events or scenes (Herman, 2018). The dramatic events that the show sets up in the early episodes are not necessarily resolved later on, they may be referenced indirectly or entirely ignored. The series rebels against traditional storytelling by alternating between the 'grounded beats of a sitcom' and the exaggerations of an 'absurdist sketch show' (ibid.). One of *Atlanta's* attributes is how it frequently disrupts conventional norms of plot, structure, and characterization. In relation to this, Hiro Murai, the show's co-executive producer and director comments: '[it is] more about feeling than it is about plot, and we'll set up things and sometimes it won't be resolved' (in Press, 2018). An example of the series' narrative freedom occurs when Darius explains the urban legend known as 'Florida Man':

DARIUS: How's your parents?

EARN: They in Florida. Visiting my uncle who's dying.

DARIUS: Tell 'em watch out for Florida Man. With Trump in office, he's pulling double duty.

EARN: What's "Florida Man"?

As Darius opens his mouth...

An array of vignettes follow (Figure 2.39-44), showing 'Florida Man's' imagined misdeeds as Darius explains that they are responsible for a large percentage of the abnormal incidents that occur in Florida. The vignettes illustrate 'Florida Man' headlines: "*Florida Man shoots unarmed black teenager.*" (Figure 2.40); "*Florida Man Bursts Into Ex's Delivery Room, Fights New Boyfriend as She's Giving Birth.*" (Figure 2.41); "*Florida Man Steals Car, Crashes into*

Cop Car, Goes to Checkers". (Figure 2.42); and "*Florida Man Beats Flamingo to Death.*" (Figure 2.43). The misdeeds escalate for comedic effect ending with "*Florida Man Found Eating Other Man's Face*". (Figure 2.44).



Fig. 2.39: 'FLORIDA MAN is filling up his pick up truck with gas. We never see his face'.



Fig. 2.40: 'You see him put out his cigarette, and pulls out his gun'.



Fig. 2.41: '...walks in on a COUPLE giving birth and starts to fight the father'



Fig. 2.42: 'A banged up Jeep pulls up the Checkers' drive-thru'.



Fig. 2.43: 'He jumps into the pen, punching the bloody and squealing bird'.



Fig. 2.44: '...his bloody face and a piece of flesh hanging from his mouth.'

Once this sequence ends, there is a shot of Earn's incredulous reaction to what Darius just told him. The 'Florida Man' legend refers to a compilation of unrelated news stories submitted by internet users regarding strange and absurd crimes or events that take place in the state of Florida and are attributed to the same person. The bizarre stories were popularised in 2013 and have since escalated and formed an exaggerated urban legend. Darius' penchant for wild conspiracy theories draws on such exaggerations and is one of his recurring traits.

Although the 'Florida Man' anecdote is not linked storywise with the rest of the episode, it is an aside that ludicrously demonstrates that whether something is true or not, popular culture can appropriate it as an urban legend. *Atlanta's* creators have the flexibility, and desire for narrative experimentation to showcase elements from real life popular culture without the need to build an entire plotline, it is 'the elasticity of the storytelling allowing whatever creativity struck Glover and his writer-brother Stephen, along with director Hiro Murai, to operate' (Goodman, 2018). In spite of 'Florida Man' not being part of the episode's main story, it is later referenced by Earn's uncle:

EARN: I'm on probation. I can't be here if this is gonna turn into a shoot out.

WILLY: Shoot out? Nigga, I'm not crazy. **I'm not Florida Man.**

Super slowly, Darius turns to Earn: "told you."

The call back to the 'Florida Man' sequence displays how this urban legend is used as shorthand for wild and out of control behaviour.

Later in the episode, the police arrive at Willy's door, and threaten to arrest him if he doesn't come out. In view of the police finding a weapon in his house, Willy asks Earn to take the gun for safekeeping. After Earn hides the gun in his rucksack, he comes out of the house and tells the policemen, '*I can't get him to come out*'. As Earn walks away, the scene changes tone and enters a surreal ambiance which is beautifully conveyed in the screenplay (Figure 2.45-48):

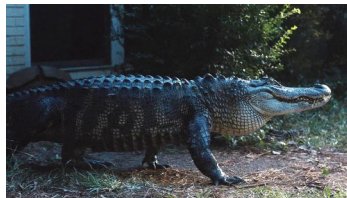


Fig. 2.45: 'an actual ALLIGATOR slowly crawl out of the front screen door'.



Fig. 2.46: 'As we watch this beautiful creature crawl out, we cut to people's faces'.

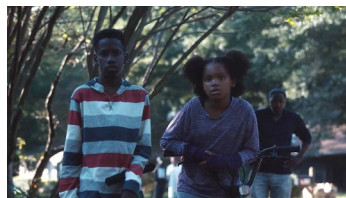


Fig. 2.47: 'Everyone watches this odd, yet beautiful sight'.

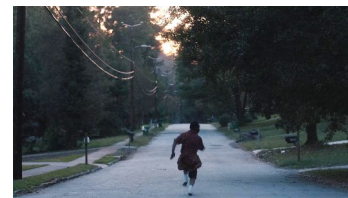


Fig. 2.48: 'Willy, in a robe and Nikes, is running down the street'.

We stare at the front door for a moment in silence. Then "Hey! Love" by The Delfonics starts playing from Willy's stereo. **[1]** This pisses the police off.

OFFICER 1: I'm going in-

OFFICER 2: Wait!

As William "Poogie" Hart's voice begins saying "Hey! Love," an actual ALLIGATOR slowly crawl out of the front screen door. **[2]**

As we watch this beautiful creature crawl out, we cut to people's faces: Earn, Darius, the kids, the neighbors, and the police. Everyone watches this odd, yet beautiful sight. One kid is filming it. **[3]**

The alligator slides into the woods and everyone is in awe. The moment is over. **[4]**

OFFICER 1: Where's Willy?

HARD CUT TO: **[5]**

EXT. STREETS - EVENING

Willy, in a robe and Nikes, is running down the street. [6]

The screenplay builds this surreal-hypnotic moment by guiding the reader through the narrative beats (*ALLIGATOR slowly crawl out, The moment is over, HARD CUT TO*), the character's reactions (*we cut to people's faces, Everyone watches this odd, yet beautiful sight, everyone is in awe*), and the precise indications of what is heard (*a moment in silence, The Delfonics starts playing from Willy's stereo, As William "Poogie" Hart's voice begins*). The screenwriter uses these qualities to expand the moment, and give the sensation of slow motion without actually saying 'slow motion' in the script. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of a love ballad with the image of a dangerous reptile brings forth the surrealist ambience. A deeper analysis of the screenplay text reveals:

[1] *"Hey! Love" by The Delfonics starts playing* - Describing the song that is heard, indicates to the reader the exact mood of the moment.

[2] *Hart's voice begins saying "Hey! Love,"* - The reveal of the alligator coincides with the moment singing starts in the song. This type of specific timing in the unfolding of events denotes a screenwriter with a clear vision of the scene.

[3] *Everyone watches this odd, yet beautiful sight.* - The description gives the moment a sense of grandeur and allure that bolsters the absurdist tone.

[4] *The moment is over* - This type of description is commonly used in screenplays to indicate a transition in rhythm or tone. In this instance, it signals the end of the 'hypnotic' moment as the alligator comes out of the house.

[5] *HARD CUT TO:* It is interesting to note the difference between a 'cut' and a 'hard cut', which 'describes a transition that is jarring' (Riley, 2009: 81), in other words, it indicates an abrupt edit from one scene to another.

[6] *in a robe and Nikes, is running down the street.* - The image denotes a comedic effect.

One of the prominent aspects in *Atlanta* is the importance it grants to the 'surreality of the dramatic situation, not the imagery'. The surreal intensity of the alligator scene is derived from its 'incongruity, yet appropriateness' (Golding, 2012: 200), in other words, it is an absurd yet feasible moment where bizarre situations are subtly handled. In this case, the moment is best served when the surreal incident is treated with seriousness or when the characters approach it as a real event rather than an out-of-place insertion of something fanciful.

Conclusion

Dramedy creates and combines moments that are both profound and humorous. *Atlanta* successfully achieves this blend by balancing amusing and emotional situations in a cohesive manner. The *Streets on Lock* episode reveals the series' ability to handle societal observations alongside comedic nuance, that is, it strives to mix tragic situations with entertaining moments without one cancelling the other. Some of the social themes the episode deals with are: celebrity, social media, social injustice, neglect of the mentally disabled, and sexual identity, among others. These topics are seldom explored in primetime television, and the show does not intend to resolve them or to ascertain their root cause, it just exposes the event and moves on.

Atlanta's social comments are based on everyday, albeit slightly exaggerated, situations. However, they are sufficiently rooted in reality so as to convey authenticity and audience identification, and they have enough humour to reach a comedic tone without devolving into farce or parody. The themes are explored in small, intimate moments contained within everyday contexts. Such events, referred to as 'tiny moments' in my analysis of Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*, are but fragments of daily occurrences, nevertheless, they highlight the main themes and ideas of the story. Donald Glover and his creative team probe identifiable situations while avoiding overly dramatic plot developments and complex character arcs; rather, they rely more on mood and less on narrative twists and unexpected reveals. Many scenes in *Atlanta* do not function in the classical narrative sense, they do not give the viewer important plot information, or set up situations that will be continued later in the episode or the season. In fact, many characters show up only once and are never seen again, there is no follow-up to several storylines. Rather, the show depends on the appeal of the characters, the social commentary within everyday situations, and the humour through exaggeration, absurdism and surrealism.

One of the show's most prominent features is its use of surrealism, but not through strange or fantastical imagery, rather, it arises from the ridiculousness of the situations. The surreal intensity depicted in the *Alligator Man* episode is due to its 'absurd but possible' approach. In other words, it has irrational, but feasible events in which bizarre situations are subtly managed. The surrealist atmosphere of the moment when the alligator comes out of Willy's house is created by the screenwriter's use of several cinematic devices: the pacing, the character's reactions, the precise indications of what is heard, the distention of time, and finally, the collision between disparate elements, such as a love song coupled with an alligator coming out of a suburban home.

Atlanta's characters do not fit the classic hero archetype known for its clear goals and ability to overcome recognizable barriers, that is to say, the protagonists in the series have no apparent objectives or distinguishable antagonists. Earn and the other main characters are depicted as 'underdogs' whose stories revolve around their stasis, not their growth; their actions are not intended to be funny *per se*, they become amusing within the context of the situation. Many of the comedic effects are dependent not only on the absurdist situations in which the characters find themselves, but on the actor's ability to project the ludicrous moment, mostly through their deadpan delivery. *Atlanta*'s writers trust the actor's talent to bring forth the diverting tone from a scene that in the script is subtly humorous instead of conjuring something overly funny. Another component that adds to the show's uniqueness, is how it handles dialogue to delineate the characters instead of only providing story information. This is achieved with specific vernacular and colloquialisms, and although some viewers may not totally grasp the meaning of the dialogue, these informal expressions contribute authenticity and emotion to the scene.

Atlanta manages to be amusing while at the same time, presenting serious, and sometimes disturbing, social situations. The show's cinematic qualities and narrative dynamics discussed here, alongside those analysed in the previous chapter for *Ratcatcher*, were implemented in the original screenplay, *Lucy Drives a Car*, which is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Three

Writing *Lucy Drives a Car*

This chapter details the writing process of the original screenplay *Lucy Drives a Car* as well as a review of the narrative qualities found in the final version of the script. After examining *Ratcatcher's* (Ramsay, 1999) and *Atlanta's* (FX, 2016-18) overall structure, and analysing their narrative qualities, as described in the previous chapters, I began to visualise how to implement them in my script. I am particularly interested in incorporating their art cinema, dramedy and surrealist attributes.

The story of *Lucy Drives a Car* takes place in the city of Guadalajara, Mexico. For the purpose of this thesis, the screenplay is written in English, although the intention is for the film to be spoken in Spanish. The script contains British terminology for certain expressions, such as lift, lorry, flat, etcetera, equivalent to the American English words for elevator, truck, and apartment, respectively. I also tried, as much as possible, to work with colloquialisms commonly found in British-English to convey the Mexican-Spanish vernacular used in everyday conversations. This approach allowed me to transmit the cultural equivalents of specific terms and modes of expression.

Story context

Although a film should be understood without explanations that go beyond what it narrates, a brief description of the social context in Mexico may be beneficial for the purposes of this research project. According to Mexico's National Search Commission, there are nearly 100,000 missing persons dating back to 1964 (Lopez, 2021); of these, more than 52,000 have not been identified due to deficiencies in Mexico's forensic policies (Linares, 2021). Furthermore, less than one-third of all the disappeared persons are identified as victims of a specific incident currently under investigation (Mexico News Daily, 2021). It is assumed that most of the missing are dead, but no one knows where their remains are, who killed them or why. The uncertainty haunts the collective memory and reflects the existence of organised crime as well as the government's incapacity to carry out these criminal investigations and to bring the offenders to justice. Public spaces in different cities in Mexico expose portraits of the disappeared in banners and posters pleading for information about their whereabouts. Grieving relatives can only seek and wonder what happened to their loved ones, hoping against hope they are alive.

Having described Mexico's social context, *Lucy Drives a Car* frames Oscar's disappearance as a backdrop. The script explores the emotional consequences of a missing loved one while the rest of the family is confronted with having to continue with their everyday lives. Like *Atlanta's* social commentaries, it is my intention to subtly bring this issue to light, although at no point does the screenplay propose a solution. Rather, the film comments upon the problem indirectly as Lucy and her mother Carmen try to go back to 'normal' living.

Summary

Lucy, a twenty three year old, college dropout, drives to several convenient stores and businesses in the outskirts of the city where she lives. She asks store owners and managers, in a bored, disinterested manner, if she can put up missing person posters and if they know anything about Oscar, her brother who has been missing since 2017. Carmen, Lucy's 47-year-old, grief stricken mother, cannot let go of the past and keeps searching for clues of her son's disappearance. She takes Salsa dancing classes and occasionally sits by the 'Roundabout of the Missing'¹⁰, a public monument appropriated by the families of missing persons in protest against their disappearances. Lucy wants to put up a banner at the roundabout for her brother hoping it might bring closure to her mother's stagnation, but Carmen is not sure she wants to do it just yet. In an effort to get a grip on her life, Carmen tries to stop smoking and focus on her Salsa routine. She also takes calls from people who claim to have information about the car Oscar was driving when he disappeared; once in a while they follow these clues, but many of them are prank calls that lead nowhere. Meanwhile, Lucy starts frequenting a male prostitute named Derek, although her intentions with him are not entirely clear. Derek, who wants to be an actor, helps Lucy put up flyers and ask people for information about Oscar's disappearance. Finally, Carmen decides to accept Lucy's suggestion to put Oscar's picture on the 'Roundabout of the Missing'.

¹⁰ This roundabout, located in Guadalajara, México, was previously known as the roundabout of 'Heroes of Mexican Independence'. In 2018, it was appropriated by the general public and the families of missing persons in protest against the government's apathy and lack of action concerning this matter. Today, it is filled with banners, posters, protest slogans, candles, flowers, urban art and graffiti. It's now popularly known as the 'Roundabout of The Missing'.

Outline

1. A car stops in an open field outside the city limits. Lucy, a young, dark haired, thin woman, steps out of a tattered, blue, 1998 Pontiac. She looks around, and takes pictures with her mobile. She then sits on the boot of the car, smokes a cigarette and gets back in. She pours vodka into a bottle that contains orange juice, takes a drink and drives away. (pg. 13)
2. Lucy tapes a flyer to a lamppost. The flyer reads MISSING and has a picture of a young man and a white car. She goes to a supermarket, a grocery store and a coffee shop and puts up other flyers. (pg. 13)
3. Carmen, Lucy's mother, lies on her bed, mid-morning in a darkened bedroom. She gets up and listens to a self-help audiobook as she walks toward a messy kitchen. She washes a plate, looks at the rest of the dirty dishes, shuts off the water and leaves the kitchen. She goes to the living room and sits in front of a large city map covered with pictures, notes and newspaper clippings of missing persons. (pg. 14)
4. Lucy drives up to a roadside restaurant. She explains to the owner why she wants to put up a flyer of Oscar, her missing brother. The owner does not let Lucy put up flyers, he tells her he will put them up later. Lucy gets back in her car and crosses out a location circled in a city map. She drinks from her orange juice with vodka and drives away. (pg. 16)
5. In her bedroom, Carmen looks at her worn out trainers and leaves for her Salsa class. Carmen is not a good dancer but she does her best along with the other students. The teachers tell them they will have their final dance presentation the following week. Carmen buys instant noodles and cigarettes at a Quickmart convenience store. (pg. 18)
6. Lucy is at a luxury car dealership, looking around at cars that are clearly out of her range. She gets in a luxury SUV, takes in the 'new car smell' and glides her hand across the dashboard and the seats. She leans the seat back and relaxes. (pg. 21)
7. Carmen sits in front of the Roundabout of the Missing; it is covered with banners and pictures of missing persons, protest signs, flowers, candles and graffiti. She smokes as she looks at videos of amusing cats on her mobile phone. (pg. 22)
8. Lucy drives in the city and stops at an intersection. She looks over at male prostitutes standing on the sidewalk and drives off. She enters a traffic tunnel and is caught in slow moving traffic. (pg. 22)
9. Carmen and Lucy eat instant noodles in silence. Finally, Lucy tells her she went to an empty field to check out a lead on Oscar's car but she did not find anything. Carmen listens to Salsa music in her bedroom and practises her dance steps. Lucy walks into Oscar's rummaged room, and smells a bottle of cologne laying on the dresser. She finds an old picture of a young man, a little boy and girl, and a twenty-something year old Carmen. They are smiling and leaning on a red, 1982 Datsun. She puts the picture in her jacket and takes the bottle of cologne. (pg. 23)

10. Carmen practises her Salsa dance steps in her bedroom. She accidentally hits her foot against the bed, she rubs her foot and starts dancing again. (pg. 25)
11. Lucy is at a small local print shop. She wants to pick up an Oscar banner she previously ordered but it is not ready. The printer lady tells her it will be ready another day. When Lucy walks out, she notices a red car; it is similar to the one in the old photo. She takes a picture of the front and rear of the car and walks away. (pg. 27)
12. Carmen is crouched down in a field searching here and there for 'clues' (this seems to be the last place where Oscar was seen). She finds some items and places them inside a plastic container. Lucy waits by the car. Carmen shows her some of the things she found; Lucy watches unenthusiastically. A black truck slowly drives by and stops fifty yards away. Lucy and Carmen cautiously drive away, keeping an eye on the black truck. (pg. 28)
13. Lucy lies on her bed, staring at the ceiling and looking at the picture she found in Oscar's room. Lucy drives to the male prostitute's street corner, and picks up Derek. Inside the car, Lucy asks Derek if they can just hug. She asks Derek to put on some of the cologne she brought. She pays him and they hug. (pg. 30)
14. Lucy and Carmen sit at the kitchen table eating instant noodles. Lucy tells Carmen she is going to pick up Oscar's banner and asks her when she wants to put it up. Carmen is reluctant: she wants to put it up but cannot make up her mind when. Lucy walks out of the kitchen. (pg. 33)
15. Lucy and Carmen sit in an office and listen to a social worker read a missing person report. She asks them if the information is correct and tells them the request will be submitted to the Metropolitan Police and the Criminal Records Office. They sign the request, and the social worker places it on top of a large pile of other requests. Afterwards, Lucy and Carmen are driving in the traffic tunnel in bumper to bumper traffic. Carmen tries to remember a tune Oscar liked, she hums it and asks Lucy if she recalls it, she does not. (pg. 35)
16. Carmen sits in front of the Roundabout of the Missing admiring the trainers she recently bought. The Quickmart cashier, Nina, is sitting nearby and compliments her new trainers. They have a conversation about Carmen's Salsa classes, and funny cat videos. Carmen asks Nina if she talks to her mother. Nina replies that they talk to each other all the time, and then goes back to work. Carmen stays and stares at her new shoes and the Roundabout. (pg. 38)
17. Lucy, at a petrol station, fills the radiator of her car with water. She sees a red vintage car parked nearby, walks up to it, and takes pictures. The car's owner approaches and reprimands Lucy for taking pictures. Later, Lucy drives into the traffic tunnel, now strangely empty. She picks up speed, the car swerves, skids, and hits the tunnel wall. Lucy is startled and walks out of the car. She looks at the damage and takes pictures of herself and the damaged car. (pg. 40)
18. Carmen receives a phone call: it is someone giving information about a car that looks like Oscar's. She places the information on the map of clues, and goes out to the Quickmart. She finds Nina working at the store, and they chat. A thief robs Nina at

gunpoint while his accomplice stands as a look out. Nina hands over the money and the thief places it in a bag. He orders Carmen and Nina to get on the floor and not move, then he and the accomplice flee. Nina's hands begin to shake, Carmen calms her down and helps her call the police. Nina is still shaking while they both smoke a cigarette. (pg. 43)

19. Carmen walks slowly in an open field as she searches for 'clues'. She finds something and shows it to Lucy who is smoking near her car. Lucy fills the car radiator at a petrol station while Carmen sits in the car. She gets back into the car and they both see the black truck parked nearby. They wonder if they should report it to the police, they decide not to. Lucy gets out of the car and walks over to the truck; it backs up and drives away. (pg. 49)
20. Lucy picks up Derek and takes him to a hotel. Derek and Lucy look down at the 'tiny' cars and people from the hotel window. Derek does a couple of pushups, takes a shower and gets dressed. Lucy asks him to put on Oscar's cologne she brought from home before they lie in bed. (pg. 53)
21. Lucy picks up the banner at the printer shop. She and the printer guy unfold the banner to check it. Lucy likes it and smiles: it has a nice picture of Oscar, the date he went missing, and it reads 'beloved son and brother'. (pg. 56)
22. Lucy and Carmen slowly drive around an old industrial area of the city. They see a white, abandoned car by the side of the road. They walk toward the car and look it over; it has been ransacked and there are branches and leaves inside. Lucy peers inside; a bird appears among the debris trying to fly away. It finally gets away. Lucy and Carmen compare the car's serial number with the one Lucy has in her mobile, it does not match. (pg. 57)
23. Lucy and Derek are at a coffee shop. Derek's face is bruised, he tells her he was mugged; they took his money and shoes, and he has a small stab wound below his rib cage. Lucy waits by her car in a run-down neighbourhood, Derek comes out of the building with a rucksack and the rest of his things in a rubbish bag. They drive away. Lucy takes Derek to her flat. (pg. 60)
24. Carmen finds Derek sleeping on her sofa. He wakes up and tells Carmen he is Lucy's friend. Carmen makes breakfast (eggs with chorizo) and invites Derek to eat. They chat at the kitchen table and Derek tells her he wants to be an actor. (pg. 64)
25. Derek memorises what he has to say about Oscar's disappearance. Lucy sits on a bench observing Derek as he talks to a store clerk. She crosses out a location on her map. Derek walks out to her and tells her everything went fine. He wants to try something different in the next location; he wants to add more emotion to the speech. They go to other locations and hand out flyers to pedestrians. (pg. 66)
26. Lucy and Derek are in a public park. Lucy records him as he does his hip hop routine. He finishes his routine, takes Lucy's phone and records her doing silly poses. Derek now records the sunset; he pans the camera and captures Lucy's sad face. (pg. 69)

27. Carmen does her dance routine at the Salsa studio, she is wearing her new trainers. The teacher gives her a diploma as Lucy and Derek politely applaud. Lucy, Carmen and Derek are at the luxury car dealership from before. They sit inside an SUV admiring the leather seats, and the new car smell. (pg. 71)
28. Carmen puts her dancing diploma on the kitchen table and takes off her shoes. She sits on a chair in her balcony and calmly smokes a cigarette while she looks at the funny cat videos on her phone. She watches the sunset over the city. Lucy walks out to the balcony and joins her for a smoke. Later, Carmen and Lucy take down the maps, pictures and notes from the wall of 'clues' and put them in a box. (pg. 72)
29. Derek and Carmen are waiting at a bus station. Lucy arrives and hands Derek a bus ticket. The three look at each other and hug. Derek promises to call when he gets a movie part; he gets on the bus. Lucy and Carmen are now driving through the empty traffic tunnel. Carmen takes her hand out of the car window and enjoys the air through her fingers. Lucy does the same. (pg. 73)
30. Lucy and Carmen park near the Roundabout of the Missing. It starts to rain. They step out of the car; Carmen carries the banner and Lucy rope and scissors. They tie the banner to the wall that surrounds the Roundabout. There are many other banners and pictures of the missing on the wall. Afterwards, they sit at a coffee shop table and quietly sip their coffee. THE END. (pg. 75)

Writing *Lucy Drives a Car*

The initial inspiration for the *Lucy Drives a Car* story came from a mental image of a young woman driving a car throughout the city. This core idea went through several writing attempts:

1. Lucy steals and sells car stereos in order to make money to impress a girl she likes.
2. Lucy steals cars, but she gets in trouble with a gang of car thieves. The story ends with a police chase.
3. Lucy works at a convenience store. One day, the store is robbed, and as the thief escapes, he leaves part of the money behind. Lucy and her co-worker, take the money for themselves, and drive around the city not knowing what to do with it.

After several months of writing, outlining, and revising these ideas, they resulted in predictable and conventional storylines. I was trying to avoid this type of storytelling while at the same time getting closer to the art cinema style, however, narrative cliches kept reappearing in the proposed structures; consequently, I decided not to pursue these tentative story ideas.

Lucy Drives a Car was developed in tandem with, and informed by, other writing projects. *Fourteen Days* is an example of such a project, it is a 30-page script about a London nurse during the first weeks of the COVID pandemic (see Appendix for the complete screenplay). As the days go by, the hospital wards are full beyond capacity, medical equipment runs out, and deaths increase day by day. As the nurse takes care of her patients, she deals with the isolation and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic. It is a firsthand look into her struggles through the outbreak of the disease, and its impact on everyday life. Aside from being my creative response to this global disruption, *Fourteen Days* also informed and improved the writing of *Lucy Drives a Car* by demonstrating how a story can begin with the dramatic problem from the outset: *Fourteen Days* begins with COVID as a reality; *Lucy Drives a Car* starts with intercity violence as its actuality. Since the orthodox narrative *dictum* of first establishing the protagonist's environment and then disrupting it with a 'crisis' is no longer required, my creative process now focused on how the characters cope with their new reality.

Avoiding the 'orthodox' narrative

As mentioned throughout this thesis, the classical film mindset encourages cinematic narrative managed by cause-effect rationale and space-time logic. Ian W. Macdonald refers to this approach as 'orthodoxy'. In his study of the process of screenwriting he states that orthodox screenplay structures are 'essentially concerned with problem and resolution, and with showing causality' (2013: 48). Art cinema, however, does not follow this traditional narrative trend.

While trying to find the art cinema style, I maintained a distance from the narrative approach governed by cause and effect. As discussed in chapter one, art films are characterised by coincidence, chance, and a random sequence of occurrences that establish the plot's narrative links. The structure of the story can be significantly fragmented, with specific scenes being interrupted by other moments. As for the characters' motivations, they are 'not readily discernible, and they cannot be relied on to explain the logic and direction of the story.' (Speidel, 2012: 86). In my attempt to construct the *Lucy Drives a Car* script, I began with the traditional screenwriting approach, in which a broad summary of the story is written followed by an outline that contains a brief description of the possible scenes that makeup the screenplay. The next step is to write each scene as established in the outline. However, in my case, this method led to stories that relied heavily on plot, in other words, the events of the film and the context of the story had been predetermined. I tried

the synopsis-outline approach many times but it produced unsatisfying storylines, therefore, I opted to leave the formal screenwriting method aside. I was committed to writing cinematic moments without worrying about the scene's function within previously established structures or outlines. Writer-Director of *Peaky Blinders* (BBC Studios, 2013-22) and Birmingham native Steven Knight, states that the writing process of a script outline or treatment requires a rational approach to communicate what is going to happen from one scene to another, from one place to the next. He insists that this logical procedure is 'the last thing you want' in a creative process. Although he may have a destination for the end of a film, he gets to it 'in whichever way comes to you'. This approach may lead to unpredictable narrative situations that are difficult to structure, however the dramatic solution can be 'something that you probably wouldn't have come up with if you were planning the treatment' (in Goldsmith, 2022: min. 10-14).

One of the first scenes I wrote without considering a pre-planned structure was a moment midpoint through the screenplay, when Lucy is driving and Carmen tries to recall a song Oscar liked (Figure 3.1-3.2).



Fig. 3.1: 'I don't know. Da-da-di?'



Fig. 3.2: 'Di-da-da... How did the song go?'

Carmen hums the tune, as Lucy also tries to remember. The purpose of this scene may be difficult to envision during the outlining phase; after all, in essence it is a non-event in which characters are not especially active. Many art cinema films allocate large parts of running time to sequences that demonstrate little story progress with 'plot dramatisation in which no significant action takes place, and is pointedly superfluous to the unfolding of the story' (Speidel, 2012: 86). Nonetheless, the scene's value stems from Carmen opening up and recounting a moment she had with Oscar. As I realised the purpose of these types of moments, I decided to search for stories within smaller events in order to convey emotional meaning. This provided a creative space where I was able to write authentic and relatable moments in which the characters interact with each other and their personalities come to life.

Once several scenes were written, I looked for possible story structures that would give them order while at the same time maintaining some of their disconnected qualities. Sometimes the structure or narrative solution was not immediately evident; it was difficult to

establish the relation between scenes and characters. Nonetheless, when I eventually came up with the solution, it generated compelling narrative situations with interesting character dynamics. Thus, the structure became a function of the emotion and not vice versa. In his study of independent film, Geoff King observes this quality in art cinema, where '[e]vents seem to develop more organically, out of the situations in which characters are found, rather than being imposed artificially from less plausible-seeming outside intrusions' (King, 2005: 85). Although this free writing approach goes against the orthodox script writing method, I found it helped me imbue the art cinema essence I was looking for in my screenplay. Without the recourse of surprising story revelations or plot twists, I wrote scenes that sought to communicate deeper meaning from mundane moments, much in line with Ramsay's 'tiny moment' approach in *Ratcatcher*. An example of this can be found when Carmen speaks with the corner store Cashier who compliments her new shoes; they strike up a conversation and share amusing cat videos (Figure 3.3). Earlier versions of this casual interaction did not delve deeper into Carmen's emotional state. However, after adding Oscar's backstory, and writing about Carmen's estranged relationship with Lucy, this scene presented the opportunity for Carmen to share her emotions. Instead of expressing them in an overblown fashion, she communicates in a very limited and subdued manner: she asks the Cashier two simple questions: 'Do you talk to your mother?' and 'Does she talk to you?' (Figure 3.4-3.5).



Fig. 3.3: Carmen and the Cashier share funny videos.



Fig. 3.4: 'I tell her how I'm doing and... stuff like that'.



Fig. 3.5: 'Do you talk to your mother?'.

CARMEN: Can I ask you something?
 CASHIER: Yeah.
 CARMEN: Do you... do you talk to your mother?

Cashier is puzzled by the question.

CASHIER: Hmm... yes.
 CARMEN: About what?
 CASHIER: Well... not much. I tell her how I'm doing and... stuff like that.

A beat.

CARMEN: Does she talk to you?
 CASHIER: Oh yeah... all the time. She rambles on. I have to remind her to get to the point.

Carmen thinks for a moment.

CARMEN: That's good. Thanks.

CASHIER: You welcome... good luck with your dance class.

Carmen watches the cashier as she walks away.

The emotional weight is not in the scene but in the context of the scene, in other words, the spectators perceive the dramatic moment because they are aware of Carmen's uneasy interaction with her daughter, they understand Carmen's motivation behind the question 'Do you talk to your mother?'. Thus, the scene strikes a balance between the casual and the profound without getting overly sentimental or resorting to exposition filled dialogue.

Oscar's disappearance is the emotional backdrop that binds the story. This unifying theme came as I was driving in Guadalajara by the Roundabout of The Missing, and saw it covered with a multitude of posters and banners of missing people. Although I had previously been to this makeshift place of protest, I had not considered it as a narrative device until that moment. Early screenplay versions with this newfound idea described Oscar's abduction, however, I decided such a scenario was inadequate since my intention was to focus on the family's struggle to adjust to everyday life after experiencing such a traumatic event. The next question was how to handle Oscar's disappearance, could it be managed as an inciting incident, and if so, when should it be introduced? *Ratcatcher* and my original script for *Fourteen Days* provided the idea that the inciting incident, that is, the transformational event that sets the story in motion, could be presented early in the film without having to set up the characters and their life situation beforehand. Ryan's death in *Ratcatcher*, is a transcendental moment that is presented in the first five minutes of the film, and the COVID pandemic in *Fourteen Days* is ongoing prior to the beginning of the story. In *Lucy Drives a Car*, the dramatic context, which is Lucy's missing brother, is revealed before setting up the story, however, the emotional implications for the main characters are gradually revealed throughout the film.

Narrative qualities in *Lucy Drives a Car*

The use of commonplace situations, surrealism and societal observations are narrative features integrated in the *Lucy Drives a Car* screenplay; they are analysed in the following sections.

Tiny moments: a small bird and a milk swirl

Ramsay uses commonplace situations, or what she calls ‘tiny moments’, to bring forth the story’s underlying themes and concepts. This is to say, she finds deeper meaning from the mundane moment. Although these sequences have no narrative role in the traditional sense, their purpose is to reflect the character's innermost sentiments. An example of this narrative technique is Lucy and Carmen’s follow up on a phone call which may help locate Oscar's car. Next to an abandoned factory, they find a car filled with debris, branches and leaves. As they look inside, a bird suddenly flies out (Figure 3.6-3.7):



Fig. 3.6: ‘Lucy peers inside...’



Fig. 3.7: ‘The bird desperately flutters its wings inside the car’.



Fig. 3.8: ‘The bird escapes through an open window’.



Fig. 3.9: ‘Carmen watches the bird as it flies away’.

The car has been ransacked: The front lights, the steering wheel and the passenger's seat are missing. Inside there are some branches and dry leaves.

Lucy peers inside... SUDDENLY A SMALL BIRD FLIES OUT FROM AMONG THE BRANCHES -- Lucy and Carmen jump back.

The bird desperately flutters its wings inside the car, collides several times against the windows, and finally escapes through an open window. Carmen watches the bird as it flies away.

The bird's struggle to escape (Figure 3.7) may be interpreted as a symbol of Lucy and Carmen’s inability to let go of their grief. After the bird flies away, they verify the car’s serial number and realise that it is not Oscar’s, the scene depicts the longest interaction they have sustained throughout the film (Figure 3.8-3.9). It seems they are able to communicate with each other as long as the conversation is not about themselves or requires that they express their feelings. It is ironic that this brief and subtle bond occurs through a simple exchange of randomised numbers and letters.

Another moment that accentuates dramatic intention by attaching meaning to mundane situations takes place when Lucy talks to Derek in a coffee shop after he has been

mugged (Figure 3.10-3.11). The scene starts with a close up of milk swirling on the surface of a cup of coffee.



Fig. 3.10: '...they took my money and my shoes'.



Fig. 3.11: 'WE NOW SEE LUCY. Concerned. She looks down'.



Fig. 3.12: '...the MILK SWIRL is barely moving'.

CLOSE ON coffee inside a paper cup, MILK SWIRLS on the surface. We hear Derek's voice:

DEREK (O.S.): Yesterday they took my money and my shoes.

[...] Derek nods and lifts up his shirt. We see a small cut on his chest.

DEREK: I've been putting on some *Icy-Hot*. It's okay.

WE NOW SEE LUCY sitting across the table from Derek. Concerned. She looks down: WE SEE Derek's coffee, the MILK SWIRL is barely moving.

After Derek explains his predicament, Lucy looks down at Derek's coffee; the milk swirl is now barely moving (Figure 3.12). We see the milk quickly swirling at the beginning of the scene and then almost coming to a stand still at the end; this may symbolise Lucy's stagnation, Derek's indecision or perhaps a sense of looming danger. This visual metaphor is similar to those observed in art cinema in general, and particularly in *Ratcatcher*.

Finding surrealism in a traffic tunnel

Michael Richardson considers that surrealism in cinema 'is not a thing but a relation between things and therefore needs to be treated as a whole', in other words, it must be thought of holistically; the formation of the surrealist moment is contingent upon how that scene is positioned within the logic of the rest of the film (2006: 3). In *Lucy Drives a Car*, a surrealist approach is depicted in moments when Lucy drives through a traffic tunnel. In the first scene, she is caught in a traffic jam, and later on she drives through the tunnel without incident. In a third scene, Lucy accelerates, loses control of the car and impacts the tunnel wall (Figure 3.13-3.15). As she surveys the damage, a red car passes by recalling a similar automobile previously mentioned in the film. She feels a sense of beauty and awe in the tunnel's white, flickering light, and she decides to take a photograph of herself with the damaged car. This moment in the script relies on the visual power of film to convey a sense of eeriness, and to transport the viewers to another level of interpretation.



Fig. 3.13: 'The hazard light next to the smashed headlight still works'.

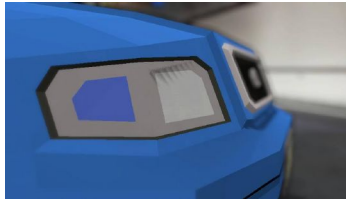


Fig. 3.14: 'It blinks: ON... OFF... ON... OFF'.



Fig. 3.15: 'Lucy is transfixed by the blinking light'.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Strangely, the tunnel is now EMPTY. Lucy looks ahead at the never ending tunnel and starts to accelerate. The car picks up speed and goes faster and faster.

The tunnel lights flash over Lucy's face.

[...]

The hazard light next to the smashed headlight still works. It blinks: ON... OFF... ON... OFF.

Lucy is transfixed by the blinking light, almost hypnotised.

A DISTANT SOUND breaks the stillness of the moment.

Lucy sees a RED CAR driving down the tunnel. The RED CAR's hazard lights begin to flash.

Similar surrealist moments are presented in *Ratcatcher* and in *Atlanta*. In the former, two scenes exemplify this approach: Kenny's mouse goes to the moon while tied to a red balloon, and in the film's final scene, James' fantasy is fulfilled when the entire family marches through a wheat field as they head toward their new home. In *Atlanta*'s 'Alligator' scene, the reptile's appearance when it exits Willy's house under the astonished gaze of neighbours and police officers, references the series' surreal approach where an event can be both ridiculous yet plausible. Although the tunnel's symbolism in *Lucy Drives a Car* is not explicit, it is odd enough to motivate different levels of interpretation. My intention is not to create a clear and simplistic analogy or metaphor, but to allow the spectators to arrive at their own magical, spiritual or ominous perception, and to construct their 'Fabula' as discussed in Chapter One.

The last scene that features the tunnel occurs when Lucy and Carmen drive through it as they head to the roundabout:

Lucy and Carmen ride the car as they go through the same tunnel as before.

ONCE MORE, the tunnel is empty. The lights in the tunnel create a SLOW STROBOSCOPIC EFFECT over their faces.

The symbolic significance of this moment is visually accentuated by the stroboscopic effect on Lucy and Carmen. I could characterise the tunnel as a representation of Oscar's memory, Lucy's depression, her isolation, or Lucy and Carmen's relationship. However, I find that the goal of this surrealist event, and thus surrealism in general, is not to thrust upon the viewer a predetermined set of explanations, but to offer a space for free association in which there are no correct or incorrect readings, rather, all interpretations are admissible.

'Funny' moments

One of the key aims of this project is to give a comedic flair to a melancholic narrative. Some of the *Lucy Drives a Car* moments that combine drama with humour are:

- Lucy tapes a flyer to a lamppost.
- Lucy's precautions before she goes to a male prostitute for the first time.
- Carmen's dancing scenes.
- Carmen's cat videos.
- The Quickmart robbery.
- Derek's attempts at acting.

Similar to *Atlanta's* protagonists, Lucy and Carmen do not fit the classic hero archetype known for its clear goals and ability to overcome recognizable barriers. In other words, the *Lucy Drives a Car* characters have no obvious ambitions or discernible obstacles, their stories revolve around their stasis, not their growth. Their ambiguous and wavering personalities may lead to humorous moments that, although not intended to be funny *per se*, become amusing within the context of the situation. As stated in Geoff King's study of film comedy, the combination of comedic moments with serious ones may 'tread an almost unbearable, exquisitely painful line between tragedy, banal awfulness and comedy' (2002: 195). This sometimes-inappropriate mixture of moods provokes 'a state of unstable and contradictory emotional response' (ibid.: 196). The humour found in *Lucy Drives a Car* attempts to be 'low-key or mixed with painful and relatively unmelodramatic tales of dysfunctional relationships' (ibid.). Most of the comedic elements in the script are understated, rather than obvious or insistent, with notes that depend, for the most part, on the actor's ability to project the amusing undertone.

The comedic element is incorporated into Lucy's story to avoid the plot from becoming mawkishly sentimental. The humour found at the beginning of the script is, for the most part, subtle: '*Lucy tapes a flyer to a lamppost, Lucy goes to a car dealership, Carmen accidentally hits her foot against the bed as she practises Salsa*', etc. These moments serve

as a counterpoint to the tragic situation of Oscar's disappearance. Even though I wanted a touch of levity in the screenplay, I was mindful not to impose comedy into a scene where it would be inappropriate. The amusing detail was not pushed; rather, it came about organically. In this screenplay, less proved to be more. Later in the film, the arrival of Derek's character adds an even lighter tone to the text. This shift in humour begins with Lucy's first encounter with Derek, as she drives to a street corner frequented by male prostitutes, picks him up, and then they talk in the car. Lucy asks him to put on a cologne she has brought:

LUCY: Could you... spray some of this on you?

Derek takes the bottle. Puzzled.

DEREK (looking at the bottle): I don't like this brand. This is like... cheap.

Lucy looks at him.

LUCY: Just put it on.

Derek is reluctant. He looks at the bottle.

DEREK: I got real Tommy Boy on. This is going to fuck it up.

LUCY: I'm paying you. Just put it on.

'I don't like this brand.' and *'I got real Tommy Boy on.'* introduce a distinct degree of humour to the narrative that was not there before. Tone shifts such as the one observed in this scene, are part of the dynamics of cinematic narration. *Ratcatcher*, for example, goes from depressing melodrama to bittersweet situations to fantasy sequences of a mouse travelling to the moon. And as was observed in the *Streets on Lock* episode, the mood can flux from scatological humour to the tragedy of a mentally challenged person being beaten by police guards. Likewise, *Lucy Drives a Car* varies its tone through different sections of the screenplay.

Another humorous moment involving Derek occurs when he takes over Lucy's 'role' as the grieving relative looking for the missing loved one. Derek memorises what he has to say about Oscar's disappearance and then repeats it to a store clerk. Lucy waits outside the store and observes from afar. Derek walks out and tells Lucy that he wants to try out variations in his 'performance':

DEREK: I'm gonna try something different with the next one... I'm gonna play it like I'm sad first and then I get angry and then sad again but almost crying. So: SAD, ANGRY, SAD ALMOST CRYING...

This scene exemplifies the drama/comedy dichotomy. Derek's attempt to bring false emotion into his performance displays to Lucy how her speech, which was once emotional, has now degraded into a dispassionate and repetitious monologue. The scene employs a humorous moment to bring deeper meaning to the story. Another example of the use of subtle humour in the *Lucy Drives a Car* script occurs in a moment before Carmen and Nina are robbed inside the Quickmart:

Nina is behind the counter trying to set up a mini cardboard stand for 'Rojo Loco' energy drink. The stand is too flimsy and flops over. After a couple of tries, she gives up.

The store is empty except for Nina and two customers. Carmen enters the store and approaches the counter...

In many early drafts, the screenplay simply presented Carmen walking into the store. However, in one of the rewrites, I spotted an opportunity to add some levity. This moment has no bearing on the storyline, yet it evokes a certain degree of empathy toward Nina's character. It is an example, among others, of subtle moments of humour found throughout the screenplay. This moment, albeit small and inconsequential, stands out in my mind because it affirms a shift in my creative screenwriting process: I could now perceive narrative possibilities within small spaces, minor actions, 'tiny moments'.

Societal Observations

Lucy Drives a Car attempts to make a statement about inner-city violence and its repercussions on the protagonists. Aside from Oscar's impactful disappearance, the social commentary is represented in the script through minor acts of aggression, some overt and others more subtle. For example, Carmen and the Cashier are robbed at the Quickmart, Derek is mugged and injured with a knife, Lucy feels threatened in Derek's neighbourhood, and an unexplained black truck seems to follow Lucy and Carmen. There is also a general mistrust of police officers, evidenced when Carmen suspects that the police themselves might somehow be involved with the appearance of the mysterious black truck. Furthermore, the intention in the screenplay is to portray these events without judging or victimising Lucy, Carmen, or any other character. The mysterious black truck with tinted windows appears twice in the film: when Carmen and Lucy are trying to find information about Oscar's disappearance, and then again as it parks behind Lucy's car in a supermarket car park. Lucy

suggests to her mother that perhaps they should call the police, to which Carmen expresses her apprehension:



Fig. 3.16: 'Lucy walks towards the BLACK TRUCK. Carmen steps out of the car and looks on.'



Fig. 3.17: 'Lucy keeps walking. We HEAR the TRUCK'S ENGINE START'.



Fig. 3.18: 'Lucy watches as the truck drives away'.

A pause.

LUCY: Maybe we should call the police?

CARMEN: They probably are the police. Either they're criminals, drug traffickers or police. Just ignore them.

Carmen keeps eating. Lucy looks at the truck through the rear view mirror.

The scene continues as Lucy steps out of her car and, in an act of defiance, walks towards the truck, which suddenly backs up, and ultimately drives away (Figure 3.16-3.18). The moment gives Lucy a small sense of victory after confronting the source of intimidation, but at the same time it is still unknown who is behind the menacing vehicle.

I consider I have achieved the goal of writing a screenplay with social commentary that does not impose a certain ideology on the audience. I ventured to present a story without overly explaining every detail of the plot or relying on expository dialogue. Much like in *Atlanta* and *Ratcatcher*, the social observations are set in everyday relatable situations.

Unresolved: The ending of *Lucy Drives a Car*

From the beginning of writing the screenplay, I envisioned a non-dramatic ending that would give way to a life-goes-on conclusion. After Lucy and Carmen put up Oscar's banner at the Roundabout of the Missing (Figure 3.19-3.20), a non-event follows in which both women are at a coffee shop (Figure 3.21). As they sit in silence, there is still an emotional distance between them that subverts the expectation (both of the spectator and the characters) of a significant change once the banner goes up.

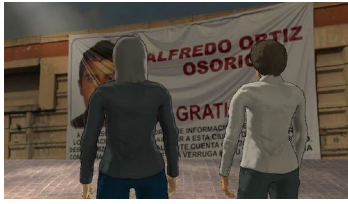


Fig. 3.19: 'Oscar's banner now hangs alongside many other banners and pictures of the missing'.



Fig. 3.20: 'They contemplate for a moment... Carmen and Lucy exchange glances. They walk away'.



Fig. 3.21: 'They drink quietly. They sip as they ponder'.

Lucy arrives at the table with two cups of coffee. Her clothes are also wet. Carmen stops drying herself with the napkins and takes her cup of coffee.

It continues to rain outside.

They drink quietly. They sip as they ponder.

We HOLD on the moment.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END

Maybe Lucy and Carmen expected that placing the banner would offer emotional closure and improve their mother-daughter relationship. Art cinema does not pretend such a tidy conclusion, rather it conveys the idea that our experience of the world is not one of simple cause and effect, and that human behaviour and human stories are difficult to resolve. 'Art films suggest that characters cannot control events, and that the action will not necessarily reward us with satisfying answers'. Furthermore, art film conclusions tend to favour a sense of ambivalence, where it has 'ceased to dramatise rather than resolved the story's dilemmas' (Speidel, 2012: 86). *Lucy Drives a Car* ends with a sense of unresolvedness in Lucy and Carmen's relationship while it also references the melancholy mood displayed in *Ratcatcher's* conclusion, and the 'uneventful, life goes on sentiment' of Atlanta's closing scene in the *Streets On Lock* episode.

Conclusion

The script for *Lucy Drives a Car* seeks to include aspects of art cinema, dramedy, and surrealism. In the film, the disappearance of Oscar, Lucy and Carmen's brother and son, respectively, serves as a backdrop for the emotional implications of losing a loved one while struggling to go about with their daily routines. The narrative for the screenplay was inspired by a mental image of a young woman driving alone around the city. I began developing this idea using the orthodox screenwriting method of synopsis, outline and scene writing which, in my case, led to stories that relied largely on plot, and generated conventional cause and

effect narratives. Since I was searching for more complex emotional situations, as is typical in art cinema, I opted to forgo the formal screenwriting approach and the narrative structures it produced. I wrote scenes without considering (at least for the time being), how they would fit into pre-existing frameworks. This allowed me creative freedom to explore characters without being constrained by a predetermined goal for each scene. After gathering a few of these moments, I gave them a tentative narrative structure; this method resulted in interesting story scenarios with unexpected character dynamics. As a result, the structure became a function of the emotion rather than vice versa.

Another concern in the writing process of the screenplay was how to address Oscar's disappearance. Could it be handled as an inciting incident, and if so, when should it be introduced? Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* and my script for *Fourteen Days* provided the idea that the transformative event that sets the story in motion could be presented as the film's backstory. An additional objective was to situate the emotional weight of the script on the context, not on the scenes; in other words, have the spectators perceive the dramatic moment because they are aware of the character's emotional situation. I also tried to maintain a balance between the mundane and the profound without being excessively sentimental. Surrealist events occur when Lucy drives through a traffic tunnel. These moments are not intended to produce a clear and straightforward connection or metaphor, but rather to let the viewers come to their own magical, spiritual, or foreboding perspective. The purpose of the film's surrealism is to provide the audience with a free association space where interpretative readings are neither accurate nor inaccurate, rather all are permissible. The majority of the humorous events in the screenplay are attenuated, not blatant or obtrusive. They are low-key and try to blend in with largely un-melodramatic stories of fractured relationships. The script also tries to explore the consequences inner-city violence has on the protagonists. Aside from Oscar's dramatic abduction, the societal critique is delivered in the form of minor aggressive acts, some overt, and others not so easily perceived, but without forcing a specific viewpoint on the spectator. Much in line with art cinema endings, where the conclusion favours a sense of ambivalence, the finale in *Lucy Drives a Car* evokes a life goes on mood: Lucy and Carmen's estranged relationship is not completely resolved, and a sombre tone prevails.

Conclusion

We HOLD on the moment... CUT TO BLACK.

This research project points out the key elements in the writing process of an original screenplay, *Lucy Drives a Car*, that attempts to portray art cinema sensibilities combined with dramedy. During the development of the project, I investigated the properties of these narrative styles, and analysed how they are used in the film *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay, 1999), and in selected episodes of the television series *Atlanta* (FX, 2016-18). The results of this study helped me determine how to use both modes of film narrative in my script.

Chapter One described the narrative qualities found in Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* and several sequences were analysed in order to identify its structure. Specific words and phrases from the screenplay were examined to better understand how they reflect the film's melancholic tone, and how the characters' emotions are conveyed with minimal dialogue. Lynne Ramsay's narrative style of seemingly insignificant incidents to project emotional depth was also analysed. Other narrative strategies that prompt the viewer's engagement, such as the use of ellipsis and narrative omissions, were scrutinised as well.

The goal of Chapter Two, '*Atlanta*: not quite laughing, not quite crying', was to deduce the narrative features of the series' comedy and drama approaches, as well as to identify how the show remarks on societal issues without being pretentious or overbearing. The chapter probes into how *Atlanta* manages to work the dramedy genre without creating overly dramatic plot developments or surprising narrative twists. It also analysed how the show incorporates surrealist themes into seemingly ordinary settings.

Chapter Three, Writing *Lucy Drives a Car*, appraised the creative writing process of the screenplay. It examined the initial story ideas and their progression from a plot-driven structure to an art cinema modality, and the implementation of a free writing technique that highlights character development above plot, and emphasises the use of cinematic qualities within the script. The section discussed several narrative aspects, and analysed how they reveal emotional themes, promote symbolic interpretation, and provide societal commentary without imposing an ideological position on the viewer.

In the following sections I will review some of the art cinema and dramedy features mentioned above to determine if they were successfully integrated in the *Lucy Drives a Car* screenplay, and if the key aims established at the beginning of this research project were fulfilled.

Were the art cinema characteristics achieved?

Some of the art cinema features identified in previous chapters were integrated in *Lucy Drives a Car*. Among them is the trend to avoid traditional plot narrative, and rather use a fragmented structure with character motivations that are not readily portrayed and do not explain the logic of the story's direction. Commonplace circumstances, or 'tiny moments', as Ramsay refers to them, brought out the story's fundamental themes and reflected some of the character's innermost emotions. One of these scenarios occurs when Lucy and Carmen find an abandoned car, presumably belonging to Oscar, and they witness a bird flying away from inside the car. Another art cinema feature is the use of visual metaphor. Lucy and Derek's rendezvous at the coffee shop after he had been mugged depicts such an analogy; the dwindling speed of a milk swirl in a cup of coffee may represent Lucy's immobility, Derek's hesitation, or even a sense of impending danger.

The subtle application of social criticism, as observed in both *Atlanta* and *Ratcatcher*, is characteristic of art films. In the case of *Ratcatcher*, the characters and locations may imply that it belongs to the social realism tradition, but this implication is consistently undermined by Ramsay's lyrical approach to her narrative. Thus, the film presents many layers of 'reality' (including a social realist one) that permeate and run over each other. Much like *Ratcatcher*, *Lucy Drives a Car* tries to 'set up and weave together' several levels of emotional and social realities (Kuhn, 2008: 17). Its depiction of inner-city violence is intended to examine its influence on Lucy and Carmen's daily lives. Different acts of aggression, such as Derek mugged and injured with a knife, Lucy feeling threatened in Derek's neighbourhood, Carmen and the Cashier robbed at the Quickmart, an unexplained black truck that follows Lucy and Carmen, and the general sentiment of mistrust towards police officers, serve as societal commentaries. The screenplay reaches its objective of social criticism without imposing a specific viewpoint on the spectator.

Was the dramedy element reached?

The screenplay was written with Oscar's disappearance as the emotional backstory rather than the film's focal point. The issue of a lost family member, a dramatic event in and of itself, is reflected in the palpable disengagement between Lucy and Carmen and their incapacity to move on after Oscar's abduction. Throughout the screenplay, I sought to present the film's emotional themes in an understated manner while at the same time avoiding melodrama. If I compare *Lucy Drives a Car* to *Ratcatcher*, I feel the dramatic, yet

subtle tone was achieved. However, compared to *Atlanta*, the dramatic approach may have been too profound, and therefore unbalanced the story's comedic goal.

The challenge of combining a serious subject matter, such as missing individuals, with humorous elements avoided an overly dramatic story, but based on the concept of dramedy described in Chapter Two, I feel the comedic aspect of this genre was not entirely reached. Although some sequences contained an amusing quality, others did not reach the folly and ludicrous moments which characterise a dramedy, such as *Atlanta*. Nevertheless, I benefited from the experience because it gave me a deeper understanding of this style which simultaneously avoids tear jerking melodrama and gratuitous comedy.

Were surrealist moments conveyed?

Another goal of the screenplay for *Lucy Drives a Car* was to imbue the story with surrealist moments, represented here by the traffic tunnel scenes. We first observe a traffic jam in the tunnel while Lucy drives alone, and then another moment of heavy traffic as she travels with Carmen by her side. As the story progresses, we encounter the tunnel two more times: first, when Lucy suffers a vehicle accident in the midst of an empty tunnel, and then again, when both Lucy and Carmen head to the Roundabout of the Missing to place a banner of Oscar's disappearance. The tunnel scenes may symbolise the character's emotional progress, Oscar's memory, or Lucy and Carmen's strained relationship, however, my intention is to offer a space where the viewer's interpretation, whatever it may be, is valid and acceptable. Though the surrealist ambience may be faint in the screenplay, I am confident that it will be further enhanced by the visual and auditory attributes that are found in the cinematic medium.

The art cinema and dramedy features discussed above and throughout this thesis, as well as the experience derived during the writing process of the screenplay, brought forth the following considerations:

- The free writing approach in which scenes did not depend on how they should fit in previously defined story structures, helped imbue the screenplay with the art cinema qualities I was looking for. This procedure resulted in finding deeper meaning in understated moments, which then allowed the film's structure to work in favour of the emotional themes, and not the other way around.

- Recognizing the importance of little moments, or so-called 'non events,' modified my perspective from plot-driven stories (as evident in my early story ideas), to a more meditative film narrative.
- I was often concerned that the understated, non-plot approach used in the screenplay would result in a dull or uninteresting story. However, after reviewing and analysing my art cinema references, I realised that despite their lack of an overtly dramatic plot, the films managed to reach a compelling narrative. Therefore, I learnt to trust the capacity 'tiny moments' have to engage the spectator, as well as the proficiency of cinema to heighten the narrative details found in my script.

Future challenges arise at the end of this project. *Lucy Drives a Car* started with a dramatic premise, and humorous aspects were added later on. My subsequent screenplays may benefit from a different approach, that is, initiate them with a comedic concept on which to integrate the dramatic elements. Additionally, the detailed analysis of screenplay texts carried out in this research led to the study of narrative qualities, such as omission of story information, avoidance of expository dialogue, and the creation of deeper meaning through apparently mundane situations. However, additional narrative characteristics are yet to be explored, particularly films that rely heavily on dialogue, such as *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (Kechiche, 2013), *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (McDonagh 2017), *Locke* (Knight, 2013) and *Two Days, One Night* (Dardenne, 2014). Analysing different types of dialogue can determine how they sustain different types of stories, and how they coincide with the tone of the film. Another challenge derived from this research project, is related to my work as a university professor, that is, I am interested in teaching and applying the ideas discussed in this thesis. Therefore, a future endeavour is to design a teaching program that would encourage students to grasp and implement the storytelling tactics presented here. A guide of this type may motivate them to seek the cinematic qualities found in art cinema, and, if they so choose, move away from mainstream forms of narrative.

The study and understanding of art cinema and dramedy carried out in this research, is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of these cinematic styles and their respective screenplays. Instead, it implies that no single method of screenwriting is enough to deal with the complexities of film narrative. This practice based research modestly presents my findings regarding film narrative, story design and screenwriting techniques from my experience in the writing process for *Lucy Drives a Car*. Hopefully, it opens a window to the potential of a more in-depth examination of the narrative intricacies that can be found in the screenplay text, and encourages researchers to go beyond the realm of traditional structural

analysis. It also provides, perhaps, an alternative pathway for screenwriters who want to write in the art cinema and dramedy genres.

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Appendix - *Fourteen Days* screenplay

FOURTEEN DAYS

written by

Jordi Capó

EXT. LONDON - DAWN

Empty city streets. Traffic lights change for no one.

In the distance: an AMBULANCE drives down an empty road. Flashing lights. No siren.

EXT. CAR PARK - DAWN

An empty parking space. The SOUND of a rattling car INCREASES... The CAR comes into frame, it parks in front of CAMERA.

The driver is MELISSA BALI, 34. She looks tired.

Melissa takes out a small bottle of hand sanitizer and rubs it on her hands. She carefully puts on a SURGICAL MASK.

She grabs her duffle bag, opens the door and gets out.

A TEXT APPEARS: Thursday, 2 April 2020.

INT. HOSPITAL / LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa takes off her jacket and puts it inside her locker.

She washes her hands.

INT. HOSPITAL / PREP ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A nurse hands out NEW RESPIRATORS to the hospital staff.

They put on their respirators, protective visor, hair bonnet, gloves.

One of the other nurses is JOY (30).

Melissa and Joy help each other put on their protective gowns.

NURSE LEADER (PRE-LAP)
Good morning. How was the night
shift?

INT. HOSPITAL / STAFF ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The hospital staff stand around the NURSE LEADER (45). Melissa stands next to Joy as they listen.

NURSE LEADER
...I just want to go over some of the numbers in the system. As for London... we got twelve hundred new cases reported since yesterday.

Some look at each other in quiet concern.

NURSE LEADER
And... there was a spike of 162 deaths.

A SUBTLE GASP emanates from the staff.

NURSE LEADER
...as for the PPE and other equipment. We're receiving a shipment next Monday.

A pause.

NURSE LEADER
All right, do a handoff and have a great day. Night shift, sleep well.

The group gives a mild applause.

INT. HOSPITAL / LIFT - NIGHT

MELISSA and JOY ride the LIFT in full protective garments.

WE CAN ONLY SEE their eyes on their half-covered faces. Muffled VOICES through the respirators.

MELISSA
How's Ahmet?

JOY
Good. He's staying with his mother.

A pause.

JOY
How're the kids?

MELISSA

Good. Tim is taking care of them.

(a beat)

I'm sleeping in the living room.

The LIFT comes to a stop. *DING!* The doors open.

BUSY HOSPITAL SOUNDS rush in. They step out.

INT. HOSPITAL / HALLWAY - MORNING

Sick patients await in the hallway. Melissa is asking them questions and filling out their admission forms. She's in full protective gear.

MELISSA

How long have you had this pain in your chest?

OLDER WOMAN

(coughing)

Oh... four days.

Melissa is now talking to a MIDDLE AGED MAN--

MELISSA

What is your name, sir?

Middle Aged Man coughs.

A YOUNG MAN--

MELISSA

And how long have you had this fever?

YOUNG MAN

Like... 4, 5 days.

A WOMAN (62)--

MELISSA

Have you recently traveled abroad?

A MAN (48)--

MELISSA

Have you come in contact with someone who has recently traveled abroad?

THIN WOMAN--

MELISSA
Have you been with someone who has
recently come back from another
country?

THIN WOMAN
(coughs)
No.

In that moment DOCTOR DUNCAN (42) rushes by.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
(to Melissa)
Nurse Bali... Could you help me?
Please.

Before Melissa can answer, Doctor Duncan is already down the hallway.

Melissa looks at THIN WOMAN as she coughs again.

CUT TO:

INT. AMBULANCE ENTRANCE DOORS - CONTINUOUS

Melissa is rushing towards the Emergency Entrance. Blue-uniformed EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS wheel in a stretcher with MR. KOUROS (72). Doctor Duncan is already there.

EMT
(to Doctor Duncan)
72 years old... we found him on
the floor... neighbours called.
Pulmonary distress. He's going in
and out.

Melissa helps with the I.V. bag.

AT THAT MOMENT another stretcher comes through the door.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
I'll get THAT...
(re: MR. KOUROS)
You take him.

MELISSA
Got it.

INT. HOSPITAL / ROOM THREE - DAY

A team of workers has descended upon MR. KOUROS, including several orderlies who are cutting away his shirt.

Melissa looks up his name on his chart.

MELISSA

Hello Mr. Kuoros. My name's Melissa. You fainted. You are having difficulty breathing. You are at North West Hospital. We're giving you oxygen. Can you hear me ok? Do you understand?

Mr. Kouros nods. The staff is putting several electrodes on his chest. A nurse places an OXYGEN MASK on him.

MELISSA

We are putting an oxygen mask on you so you can breathe better.

Melissa checks his HOSPITAL ADMISSION SHEET.

MELISSA

You got someone you'd like us to call for you? Wife? Children?

Mr. Kouros shakes his head.

MELISSA

Do you live alone?

Mr. Kouros nods.

MELISSA

You're going to feel some warmth in your chest. It's perfectly normal.

MELISSA

(to Nurse)
Radiology?

NURSE

They're coming...
(opens a valve)
He's got oxygen.

MELISSA

Mr. Kouros we're giving you some oxygen... Have you had pneumonia before? Do you smoke?

Mr. Kouros shakes his head.

MELISSA

Mr. Kouros we are going to take an
X-ray of your chest. Okay?

ON MR. KOUROS breathing through the oxygen mask.

INT. HOSPITAL / WARD - LATER

WE SEE several nurses attend to patients.

Melissa is adjusting an OXYGEN CONCENTRATOR. A young man is lying on the bed next to the machine. His name is LAZER-- 21, thin, wearing a *Slipknot* T-Shirt.

Lazer is lying to his side while he breathes in a shallow manner. Melissa is listening to his breathing with her stethoscope.

MELISSA

When did your fever start?

LAZER

Tuesday.

MELISSA

Breathe in...

Lazer inhales, then exhales.

LAZER

I live with my mum... so we began
staying away from each other.
(coughs)
You know... being cautious.

MELISSA

That's good. What's your name?

LAZER

Lazer.

MELISSA

Cool name. Breathe in... breathe
out.

Melissa removes the stethoscope from her ears and rests it on her neck.

MELISSA

I'm going to put an oxygen mask on
you. You'll be able to breathe
better. Get more oxygen in your
lungs. Okay?

Lazer nods.

Melissa starts to assemble the oxygen mask.

MELISSA

So... you like Slipknot?

Lazer is pleasantly surprised that this nurse knows about his favourite band.

LAZER

Yeah...

MELISSA

I like *Iowa*.

LAZER

Yeah...

(coughs)

it's the best one.

Melissa opens the oxygen valve.

MELISSA

Breathe in... breathe out.

Lazer breathes.

MELISSA

Better?

Lazer nods.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

CLOSE ON MRS. McCULLY (68) talking to her daughter through a video call on a MOBILE PHONE. Melissa is adjusting her OXYGEN CONCENTRATOR.

MRS. McCULLY

...don't forget to water the plants...

Mrs. McCully coughs.

DAUGHTER

Don't worry about that... you just get better.

Mrs. McCully nods as she continues to cough.

DAUGHTER
Okay... Let me talk to the
nurse... talk later.

Mrs. McCully gestures to Melissa and gives her the phone.

DAUGHTER
Hello... I'm Rachel... Laura's
daughter.
(emotional)
Thank you for taking care of her.
Ummm... how... is she doing?

MELISSA
She's... stable.

Mrs. McCully keeps coughing.

MELISSA
(clears throat)
Call her as often as you can... it
helps.

Daughter understands.

DAUGHTER
All right. Thank you.

The CALL ENDS. Melissa turns around and puts the mobile on the table next to Mrs. McCully.

INT. HOSPITAL / WARD - LATER

The ward is busier than before.

MELISSA helps a patient do some breathing exercises. She looks over to see...

ANGLE ON

A nurse hands another nurse a TABLET COMPUTER. They stand around a bed with an UNCONSCIOUS PATIENT.

A curtain is drawn around the bed. The view is obstructed, creating a private space inside for the PATIENT and the NURSE with the tablet.

BACK WITH MELISSA

Melissa sees this from afar. She knows what this is: *The last goodbye.*

INT. HOSPITAL / STAFF LOUNGE - DAY

CLOSE ON: Melissa taking off her gloves. Washing her hands. A PLASTIC CONTAINER is opened.

Melissa is eating a sandwich and sipping juice from a juice box.

Joy and SENIOR NURSE are also having a quick bite. The three of them eat at different tables. WE COME IN MID-CONVERSATION:

SENIOR NURSE
...they're trying Dexamethasone
over at Bartholomew's.

JOY
Is it working?

SENIOR NURSE
They don't know yet.

Melissa listens as she eats.

JOY
A friend at Northwick told me some
are getting strokes.

SENIOR NURSE
So it's also a blood thing?

No answer.

Melissa is concerned but keeps eating her sandwich. They eat in silence.

And LOUD BEEPING SOUND builds...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL / WARD - LATER

A respirator is *BEEPING RAPIDLY*. A MAN is going into cardiac arrest.

The medical staff is attempting CARDIAC RESUSCITATION. Doctor Duncan is pressing down on the patient's chest. Melissa holds the AIR PUMP over the patient's mouth. She squeezes.

The ELECTROCARDIOGRAM does not detect a pulse. Doctor Duncan presses down several more times... NO PULSE. He gives up.

Appendix 1: *Fourteen Days*

The STEADY HIGH PITCHED TONE from the electrocardiogram fills the room. The staff stand around the bed.

A frustrated Doctor Duncan looks up at the clock, checks for time of death.

DOCTOR DUNCAN

2:43.

He walks away.

A BEAT.

Melissa and the rest of the staff know what to do after a patient dies. THEY DO IT.

INT. HOSPITAL / LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa carefully takes off her respirator mask. IT'S THE END OF THE SHIFT.

Several nurses take off their PPE. They are exhausted. No one speaks.

Melissa looks in the mirror. There are SUBTLE WOUNDS around her face from the respirator.

She takes out her MOBILE and sends a text message. She exhales.

The SOUND of a RATTLING CAR builds up...

EXT. ALDI CAR PARK - NIGHT

Melissa's rattling car enters an almost empty Aldi Supermarket car park. She approaches a PARKED CAR.

ANGLE ON THE PARKED CAR

Inside is ARZU, 31, dark clothes. She listens to LOUD METAL MUSIC as Melissa's car parks next to hers. Arzu stops the music and lowers her window. Melissa does the same.

ARZU

Did you bring the microchips?

Melissa knows she's fooling around.

ARZU
I got the million *quid* in my
briefcase... but it's handcuffed
to my wrist... and I lost the key.

Melissa smiles slightly.

MELISSA
Hey.

ARZU
Hey. How are you?

MELISSA
Fine... Not fine.

For a moment, Melissa looks down. Arzu thinks of something to say.

ARZU
How're the kids?

MELISSA
They're good. They're happy
there's no school. Tim is still
figuring it out. I think the girls
are starting to get tired of
waffles for breakfast.

Arzu smiles.

MELISSA
Tim's worried. The company started
cutting personel in *delivery*... so
there's that.
(a pause)
How's your mom?

ARZU
Well... we're trying to get along.
Must be odd for her... Last time
time I lived at the house, I was
17. She wants to go to the
Sainsbury's. She says I don't know
how to pick fruit. - Hey I know
how to pick fruit: *Green bad.*
Brown bad. Everything else, good.

Melissa chuckles.

ARZU
But we'll manage... It's just a
couple of weeks. Right?

MELISSA

Ummm. No... I don't know... But
it's not a *couple of weeks*.

An uncomfortable silence... so Arzu changes the subject.

ARZU

Hey, look what I bought.

Arzu lifts up TWO CANS OF BEER. Melissa smiles.

ARZU

(singsong)

*You know I brought the good
stuff... I got the good stuff...*

Arzu opens the car door.

EXT. CAR PARK - CONTINUOUS

Arzu gets out of her car carrying one of the BEERS. Melissa looks on.

Arzu walks to the front of the two parked cars. She puts the beer can on the ground. She takes out a spray bottle of disinfectant and sprays the can.

ARZU

See... Sanitised for your
protection!!

Melissa is amused. Arzu walks back to her car.

Melissa gets out of her car with a rag in hand. She walks up to the CAN OF BEER, picks it up with the rag and wipes it clean.

Melissa gets back in her car.

They both open their BEERS - *TSSST!* They take a drink...

It's so good.

MELISSA

Thanks for being stupid and making
me laugh.

Arzu turns to Melissa.

ARZU

Hey... You be safe over there.
Okay? Yeah *do your job, help
people*. But... be careful. Okay?

Melissa nods. They both take another drink.

WEE SEE the two cars in the middle of the empty car park.

EXT. MELISSA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD - NIGHT

A modest middle class neighbourhood. Rows of cut and paste houses built several decades ago.

Melissa's rattling car comes up the street. She parks in front of her house.

INT. MELISSA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Melissa opens her front door and enters. She pushes the door open with a DISINFECTING WIPE. She's careful not to touch the door with her bare hand.

INT. MELISSA'S HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Melissa flips a switch and turns on a DIM LIGHT in a small living room.

There's an inflatable mattress on the floor. A BOWL OF FRUIT and BOTTLED WATER are on the table.

On the mattress there's a child's DRAWING of a *Woman with a stethoscope under a rainbow*. It reads: I LOVE YOU MOMMY. Melissa looks at the drawing.

She opens a plastic bag and takes out clean clothes and pyjamas.

Her mobile RINGS. It's an incoming video-call from TIM. She answers.

We see TIM (36) on the SCREEN. He speaks with a Birmingham accent.

TIM

Hey...

MELISSA

Hey... How did it go?

TIM

Fine... they're... beginning to fight a lot. Normal I guess.

A pause.

TIM

I left your clothes and a drawing
Molly made.

MELISSA

Yeah, I saw it... thank you.

TIM

How did it go?

MELISSA

More people coming in. More than
yesterday... and yesterday was
more than the day before.

A beat.

TIM

Are you safe? They giving you the
gear you need?

MELISSA

Yes.

TIM

They can't make you work if they
don't give you the protective
gear. If they're making you work
without the proper equipment,
that's against regulations, you
know?

(getting agitated)

Maybe even grounds for a lawsuit.
You know Ivan's got the union
lawyer's number--

MELISSA

We're not calling a lawyer. People
are getting sick, and that's my
job: Help people that are sick.
So...

Tim calms down.

MELISSA

And *they* are giving us the PPE. So
don't worry.

TIM

"Don't worry"...?
(re: being separated)
So what's all this then?

ON Melissa... no answer.

She takes another look at Molly's drawing. She sits on the mattress, on the floor, under the dim light.

MATT HANCOCK (PRE-LAP)
...I can assure staff that the PPE that we need according to the agreed guidelines, that is available...

INT. MELISSA'S CAR (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

CLOSE ON Melissa's duffle bag.

CLOSE ON Melissa's mobile: WE SEE A VIDEO of a man in a suit, behind a podium, giving a speech. He's MATT HANCOCK, Secretary of State for Health.

MATT HANCOCK (ON THE MOBILE)
...there's a shortage of PPE because the demand for PPE, understandably, in so many countries has shot up. And therefore, we're out buying it around the rest of the world. And I'm really glad that a whole host of factories...

Melissa drives as she listens.

The speech continues through THE NEXT SCENE--

INT. HOSPITAL / LOCKER ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON A LOCKER DOOR: Melissa takes out a torn PROTECTIVE GOWN and her RE-USED RESPIRATOR.

The staff is putting on their SLIGHTLY WORN OUT protective equipment.

MATT HANCOCK (V.O.)
...Behind every single death is a family's heartbreak, and we must do everything humanly possible to save as many lives as we...

Joy's respirator strap SNAPS. She ties the strap together and puts it on.

Joy closes a gap on Melissa's gown.

--THE SPEECH ENDS.

INT. HOSPITAL / LIFT - DAY

Melissa and Joy ride the lift. Again, in full protective gear. Melissa coughs. Joy glances over... Melissa coughs again. Joy is now concerned.

MELISSA
I'm okay.

A pause.

JOY
You should get tested.

MELISSA
(annoyed)
Yeah?...

DING! The lift doors open.

MELISSA
...we all should.

Melissa walks out.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Melissa holds a patient by the legs.

NURSE
One, two, three...

Melissa and 5 other nurses STRUGGLE to flip over an unconscious patient. They lay him chest down on his bed.

LATER

Melissa fills a syringe and injects a woman as she lays on her back.

LATER

A BLEEPING CARDIAC MONITOR. A doctor does CPR on a patient in cardiac arrest. Melissa squeezes the AIR PUMP.

LATER

Melissa and Joy help with the INTUBATION of a patient. They INSERT A TUBE down the patient's mouth with difficulty.

INT. HOSPITAL / STAFF LOUNGE - LATER

CLOSE ON A BOWL OF GRAPES. Melissa, too tired to eat, just moves the grapes around with her fork.

Other nurses eat at different tables. SENIOR NURSE starts sobbing quietly. Melissa looks up but does nothing for her, no one does -- seems hospital staff crying is now normal.

Melissa looks back down and EATS ONE GRAPE.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - LATER

LAZER is lying on his side. Eyes open. Breathing through an oxygen mask. Each breath is a struggle. Melissa checks his breathing with her STETHOSCOPE.

MELISSA

Did you sleep last night?

LAZER

Little bit...

(coughs)

My chest hurts. Can't get air in.

I feel like I have tiny lungs.

MELISSA

I... I'll tell Doctor Duncan.

(a beat)

Hey, I brought you something...

Melissa takes out a black t-shirt. She unfolds it and shows it to Lazer.

Lazer's eyes grow wide. IT'S A SLIPKNOT T-SHIRT.

MELISSA

Slipknot. London Arena. 2002. I was there.

LAZER

Oh shit!

MELISSA
It was insane.

LAZER
(coughs)
Fuck yeah.

MELISSA
This thing's a collector's item.
(pretends to smell it)
I think you can still smell the
sweat.

Lazer chuckles but starts to COUGH.

MELISSA
Listen, when you get out of
here... you can have it. It's
yours. Okay?

Lazer nods as he struggles to breathe.

LAZER
Thanks.

They look at each other.

INT. HOSPITAL / SERVICE ENTRANCE - DAY

CLOSE ON A BOX being pulled by a rope down a LONG HALLWAY.

A HOSPITAL STAFFER is pulling on the rope. On the other end of the corridor is DELIVERY GUY wearing a respirator, goggles and work gloves.

Delivery Guy unloads several boxes of PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT from a delivery LORRY.

Hospital Staffer pulls on the rope. Behind him are several STACKED BOXES.

The box reaches the Hospital Staffer, he unties it and puts it on a stack. A YOUNG STAFFER sprays the boxes with disinfectant.

DELIVERY GUY
That's the last one.

HOSPITAL STAFFER
(to Delivery Guy)
That's it? We're supposed to get
15.

Delivery Guy signs a receipt attached to a CLIPBOARD.

DELIVERY GUY
(indifferent)
That's all I have.

He ties the clipboard to the rope and puts the clipboard on the floor.

DELIVERY GUY
Sign on the dotted line, please.

Hospital Staffer starts pulling the rope.

The SOUND OF THE CLIPBOARD BEING DRAGGED across the floor fills the LONG HALLWAY.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Melissa is now handed a TABLET COMPUTER.

Melissa and Joy stand next to a bed where an ELDER MAN lies on his side. He is unconscious and a ventilator is aiding his breathing.

Other nurses draw a curtain around them. Melissa and Joy now stand in this private space with the patient.

Melissa and Joy look at each other, they're both nervous about this. MELISSA dials on the tablet. The call is answered.

ON THE TABLET, WE SEE MAYA - Elder Man's daughter. She's clutching a handkerchief. SOMEBODY'S hand rests on her shoulder for support.

MAYA
(on the tablet)
Hello?

MELISSA
(nervous)
Hello... ummm...

Maya nods, saving Melissa having to say things... so she just turns the tablet towards the Elder Man.

MAYA
(on the tablet)
Hi Daddy... It's Maya... Ravi is here... We just... I just want to say that we love you very much...

Appendix 1: *Fourteen Days*

A wave of emotion reaches Maya, she cries.

Melissa's eyes swell up. She holds the tablet, listening, trying to keep her emotions in check.

Maya breathes, finds strength and continues talking to her father.

MAYA
...you'll always be in our
hearts...

On Melissa breathing... holding back the tears.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL / TOILET - MOMENT LATER

THE DOOR OPENS. Melissa quickly steps in the toilet and closes the door behind her. She's upset.

INTERCUT MELISSA AND A STRETCHER:

--A DECEASED PATIENT is put inside a BODY BAG. The body bag is placed on a STRETCHER by two orderlies.

--CLOSE ON a faucet being opened. Water rushes out. Melissa splashes water on her face.

--The orderly pushes the STRETCHER down a corridor. He goes past the hospital's MORGUE. We see that the morgue is filled with body bags.

--Melissa looks at herself in the mirror. She sees DEEPER WOUND MARKS from the respirator around her mouth.

--The STRETCHER is pushed out the hospital's back door. The orderly pushes the stretcher up a ramp and into a REFRIGERATED TRAILER. WE SEE OTHER BODY BAGS INSIDE.

--ON MELISSA looking at herself in the mirror.

EXT. ALDI CAR PARK - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A CIGARETTE being lit up.

MELISSA'S PARKED CAR

Melissa takes a drag from the cigarette. We are at the same ALDI CAR PARK as before. Melissa is smoking inside her car with the window rolled down.

She texts ARZU on her mobile: "All good?"

At that moment, the mobile RINGS: An incoming video-call from MUM. Melissa answers.

MUM appears on the screen.

MELISSA

Hey.

MUM

Hi Dear. How're you doing?

MELISSA

Fine... tired.

MUM

How things at the hospital?

MELISSA

Umm... a lot of people coming in.

MUM

Oh Honey... be careful. If you need anything, you let us know.

MELISSA

Thanks.

DAD joins the video call.

DAD

Hi Honey.

MELISSA

Hey Pa.

DAD

(enthusiastic)

Look what I put back together!

Dad lifts up a HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER.

DAD

Remember? It still works. I just had to buy this hook here.

MELISSA

You went to the store?

DAD

I didn't have the hook and we didn't have nectar.

MELISSA
You went out?

DAD
(now cautious)
Well yes... but with the surgical
masks...

Melissa is aggravated.

MUM
(remembering)
Oh Honey... I made you some
biscuits... peanut butter... your
favorite. I'll drop them by with
Tim later--

MELISSA LOSES IT.

MELISSA
HEY!! You want to do something for
me?!! --

Mum and Dad freeze.

MELISSA
-- STAY INSIDE!! THAT'S HOW YOU
CAN HELP ME! Stay at home. THIS IS
NOT VACATION TIME! You want to go
to the hospital?!? DON'T GO OUT!!

MUM and DAD are taken aback.

Melissa laments her reaction.

MELISSA
I... I'll call later.

Melissa ends the call.

A PAUSE.

Hearing a BUZZ, Melissa checks her mobile--

It's a message from ARZU: "*Can't make it (sad emoji)*".

Frustrated, Melissa tosses her mobile to the passenger's seat.
She thinks for a moment...

She opens the car door and gets out.

EXT. CAR PARK - CONTINUOUS

Melissa walks near and around her car. Stretching her arms.
Breathes deep.

Melissa does some kind of *insane stress-releasing exercises*.

--Melissa flails her arms around.

--Melissa runs in shorts sprints.

--Melissa jumping and spinning.

She's enjoying just moving around without the cumbersome protective equipment.

She's now doing SQUATS like at an aerobics class. Up and down.

MELISSA
(while squatting; to herself)
I'm okay. I'm okay.

She then STOPS. Out of breath. She notices something at a distance:

A PARKED CAR with TWO TEENAGERS inside. They are eating McDonald's from the drive-thru. They've been watching Melissa this whole time. Just eating and watching the *free entertainment*.

Melissa is so OUT OF BREATH that she doesn't even care.

MELISSA
(to teenagers)
It's okay...
(breathes heavily)
...I'm a Nurse.

Melissa starts walking slowly back to her car.

INT. MELISSA'S HOUSE / MAKESHIFT BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

A SHOT FROM ABOVE -- Melissa pulls down a cardboard box from a top shelf.

She puts the box on the floor. Rummages through several things inside and then she... takes out some SKI GOGGLES.

INT. HOSPITAL / PREP ROOM - NEXT DAY

A BIN BAG is laid out on an EMPTY TABLE. Scissors cut some holes on the bag.

In a slow and mundane manner: Melissa, Joy and 15 other nurses put on their improvised protective equipment.

Melissa puts on the SKI GOGGLES. Joy puts on some CONSTRUCTION SAFETY GLASSES she also brought from home.

They help each other put on the BIN BAGS in lieu of protective gowns.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

The hospital is now at full capacity. All the beds in Melissa's ward are occupied. People coughing. Shallow breathing.

Melissa walks up to DOCTOR DUNCAN. She hands him a *Ventilator Assignment Order*.

MELISSA
Two ventilators...

Doctor Duncan looks nervously at the ORDER and thinks.

MELISSA
Is it alright?

Doctor Duncan doesn't answer. Keeps calculating something.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
(calm but weary)
Yeah... There's only one ventilator left.

MELISSA
I thought we had six this morning.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
We already used three today and two broke down.

Anguish looms over Melissa.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
So... the thing to do here... is umm...
(MORE)

DOCTOR DUNCAN (CONT'D)
(lowering his voice)
assign the ventilator to... the
youngest patient...
(amending the order)
...right here.

Melissa struggles to process the life and death decision that is taking place.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
Right?

MELISSA
(perplexed)
Umm... right.

Doctor Duncan signs the form and gives it to Melissa.

DOCTOR DUNCAN
More ventilators are coming.

Doctor Duncan walks away. Melissa stands there. Numb.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL / HALLWAY - MOMENT LATER

Melissa walks down a hall with a DETERMINED LOOK IN HER EYES. She steps into the LIFT and presses a floor number.

INT. HOSPITAL / WARD - CONTINUOUS

JOY and other nurses are taking care of their patients. Joy coughs once.

Melissa enters the room and walks up to NURSE LEADER.

MELISSA
(stern)
Hey, what's the news on the
ventilators?

Nurse Leader is annoyed by Melissa's tone.

NURSE LEADER
They're coming.

MELISSA
Coming when?

NURSE LEADER
By the end of the week.

MELISSA
Yeah... You said that last week.
What about the PPE?

NURSE LEADER
It's coming.

Joy and the other nurses listen as they keep working.

MELISSA
How can we do our jobs if we're
not protected? Huh?

Melissa points at the rubbish bag she's wearing.

MELISSA
Look at this!

NURSE LEADER
I... Listen... I want to give you
what you need but it's not up to
me!

MELISSA
WHEN is that PPE arriving? WHERE
are the tests?!

Nurse Leader SNAPS.

NURSE LEADER
I'm telling YOU what they're
telling ME! AND THEY DON'T TELL ME
SHIT!!

The STAFF stop working and turn to Nurse Leader and Melissa.

Nurse Leader catches herself and calms down.

NURSE LEADER
I'm... we're all working to get
everybody what they need.

Joy starts to COUGH UNCONTROLLABLY.

Melissa and Nurse Leader turn to Joy. *What's wrong?*

MELISSA
Joy?

JOY
(weak)
Yeah...

Joy collapses. Everybody rushes to help JOY. Melissa lifts Joy's head.

EXT. MELISSA'S HOUSE / BACKYARD - EARLY MORNING

Melissa is in her backyard, sitting on a lawn chair, smoking a cigarette.

A NOISE from inside the house. She quickly puts out her cigarette and gets up.

INT./EXT. MELISSA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Melissa walks up to the glass door that goes from the kitchen to the backyard. Entering the kitchen is 7 year old MOLLY, still in her pyjamas.

MOLLY

Mummy!

Behind Molly... Tim enters whilst carrying 5 year old SARAH. Melissa kneels down. Molly walks up to the glass door and sees her mother's WOUNDS around her mouth.

MOLLY

Mummy... What happened around your face?

Little Sarah sees her mother's wounds and turns around burying her face on her father's shoulder.

MELISSA

(to Molly)

Oh... Well... the mask that I use at the hospital... I've been using it alot... and it made these lines but... they'll heal. Okay?... It doesn't hurt.

TIM

Sarah, say "Hi" to Mummy.

Sarah refuses, burying her face deeper and hugging Tim tighter.

MELISSA

Sarah?

MOLLY

Look what I made you.

Molly holds up her new drawing.

MELISSA

Oh it's beautiful. Thank you.

MOLLY

Mummy... please don't get sick.

MELISSA

I won't get sick.

MOLLY

Promise?

MELISSA

(knot in throat)

I promise.

Melissa presses her hand on the glass. Molly does the same.

Tim and Melissa look at each other... caringly.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

CLOSE ON hands taking out clothes from a plastic bag.

--MR. KOUROS is in front of a mirror, combing his hair.

--A MAN (62) is putting on his clothes.

--A WOMAN (55) is putting her things into a rucksack.

The SOUND OF CHEERS AND APPLAUSE BUILDS...

INT. HOSPITAL / HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

MOST of the staff from the WARD are applauding and cheering.

THE WOMAN, THE MAN and MR. KOUROS are well enough to leave the hospital. The three of them wear masks.

Mr. Kouros humbly raises his fists in a small gesture of triumph.

The three of them now applaud back to the doctors and nurses. They GESTURE HUGS.

THE WOMAN *breaks protocol* and walks up to hug a nurse. The NURSE and the WOMAN enthusiastically embrace.

Melissa gently applauds. She then turns and sees:

ANGLE ON INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Behind the GLASS DOORS there's a patient lying on a bed --
Intubated. Melissa sees this from a distance.

Melissa's hopeful mood fades. She walks OUT OF FRAME.

INT. HOSPITAL / INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

The SOUND OF *BEEPING* VENTILATORS.

WE SEE several intubated patients, one of them is LAZER.

WE THEN SEE... JOY, also lying on a bed, also intubated, also
connected to a ventilator.

Melissa stands by Joy's bedside. Choking back tears. She then
takes off her GLOVE and HOLDS JOY'S HAND, giving her some HUMAN
CONTACT.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Busy ward again. Several VISTAS OF PATIENTS, NURSES AND
DOCTORS.

INT. HOSPITAL / ADMISSION DESK - CONTINUOUS

A tired ADMISSIONS CLERK is going through several documents.

Melissa walks up.

MELISSA
Patient list?

The Admissions Clerk hands Melissa a clipboard with the list.
Melissa looks it over.

MELISSA
All these COVID?

ADMISSIONS CLERK
Yes... Hey...
(signalling afar)
That's Charlie.

Melissa turns to see a very young man wearing a surgical mask. He is sitting nervously in the waiting room. He watches the NEWS on a TELEVISION MOUNTED ON THE WALL.

MELISSA
Who's Charlie?

ADMISSIONS CLERK
Joy's temp.

Melissa takes a look at this *kid*... JUDGING.

INT. HOSPITAL / WAITING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON THE TV: Boris Johnson gives a speech.

BORIS JOHNSON (ON TV)
...We're going to do it with
testing. We're going to do it with
new medicines, and new digital
technology that will help us to
see the disease as it is
transmitted, and thereby...

Charlie watches the speech as Melissa walks up.

MELISSA
(dismissive)
You Charlie?

Charlie stands up.

CHARLIE
Yes.

MELISSA
I'm Nurse Bali. You'll be working
with me.

Melissa takes a closer look at Charlie.

MELISSA
What hospital are you from?

CHARLIE
Umm... I... did my internship at
Saint Thomas.

MELISSA
You're a student?

CHARLIE
I... They just graduated me.

Melissa is disappointed.

CHARLIE

But... I... I just want to help.

Melissa shifts her attitude towards Charlie. *Let's give him a chance.*

MELISSA

Well... Let's get you ready.

CLOSE ON THE TV.

BORIS JOHNSON (ON TV)

...eliminating it, to stamp it out. And above all, now we're going to defeat this disease with a huge national effort to slow the spread by reducing unnecessary social contact...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL PREP ROOM - LATER

Melissa and Charlie are putting on their protective gear. Melissa helps Charlie put on his makeshift *rubbish bag protective gown*.

INT. HOSPITAL / LIFT - DAY

Melissa and Charlie ride the LIFT in full protective garments. We can ONLY SEE THEIR EYES on their half-covered faces. MUFFLED BREATHING through the respirators.

Charlie seems nervous. Melissa is calm but focused, she knows what's coming. The LIFT comes to a stop. *DING!* The doors open.

LOUD VENTILATOR BEEPING SOUNDS rush in. They STAND STILL. We HOLD ON THEM and then:

CUT TO BLACK

THE END