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Sound, Vision and Alter Ego: Creating a Visual Narrative for My Music

David Ciura



Sound, Vision and Alter Ego: Creating a Visual Narrative for My Music

by

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BE (Mech), MSs (Ind Des)

*This exegesis document is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Creative Industries*

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Key Words

Musical short film; popular music; music video; fictional narrative; alter ego; synaesthesia; visual narrative; visual hooks and gesture; colour palette; and new media.

Abstract

This artistic research project comprises a musical short film called *Who Is Nate Nixon?* and an exegesis that examines the relationship between the film's music and visuals. Following a review of the literature in four key areas: media; visuals; alter ego; and narrative, I establish the conceptual framework I use to create the short film. The musical short film is based on my original music and a musical alter ego developed for the project. I employ a practice-led methodology in which the creative work and my journals are the main data sources. As the basis of my reflection, I employ textual analysis and examine components of my film including cinematography; movement and gesture; the interplay between visuals and music; performance as an alter ego; and narrative structure. In addition, I use visual methods to compare the colour palette throughout the film and examine how this relates to the narrative structure, alter ego and music. I conclude my experience of making the film and music in parallel, the different modes of creative production—music and visuals—informed one another, employing an alter ego was a performance enabler in terms of my acting performance and beneficial to my songwriting process, the alter ego is not quite the transformation I intended and I plan on developing the character further to make it more divergent from my real persona, I present the importance of the visual design and colour palette aspects of film as a narrative device, visual hooks and gestures underscore the musical hooks to make the music more prominent and memorable, and my findings on the relationship between music and visuals which combine to reinforce each other and enhance the overall audio-visual media form.

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Statement of Authenticity

The original work contained herein is that of David Ciura and has not previously been submitted for an award at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person has been included except where due reference is made.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I have come from a background in music production and songwriting. My interest in film has always been strong but my formal training in this field is limited.

Experience with a number of collaborators (animators, directors, producers) who have produced music videos for me in the past has given me exposure and insight into the film medium which has influenced my creative practice on the visual side. For my 2010 song *Inner Rhythm*, animator and director Luke Flanagan developed a narrative inspired by the lyrics of my song. The 3D animated visuals were his concept, which I gave him feedback on, but he created the visuals of the music video. The music video has a narrative that follows the story of a robot living with the pressures of big city life and finding robot love. For the video for my 2016 song, *Dance, Boogie and Repeat*, the location, lighting, glasses and props were based on my visual concept, and the director/producers filmed and edited the music video. This music video would be described as not having a narrative, or as being “antinarrative”, as it portrays a band playing the song in a club but does not follow any specific story.

With the aspiration of further developing my creative practice in the audio-visual realm, I began a plan to upgrade my skills. In 2017, I undertook a private training course on virtual reality design, and this further expanded my desire to combine visuals and music, and also to continue to advance my education in my creative field. In 2018, I enrolled in the Master of Creative Industries course with SAE Creative Media Institute, which has expanded my knowledge in immersive audio, virtual reality design, app creation, website design, digital marketing and narrative design in film. My interest in film was reinforced following study in the subject of narrative design in which I created the first draft of the narrative structure for the creative component of this research project.

The topic of this artistic research project is “creating a visual narrative for my music” and arose from an interest in developing my filmmaking skills, and the ambition of producing a distinctive visual medium for my music project. The insights that the project afforded make a contribution to knowledge in the discipline of artistic research in the area of music and multimedia and contribute to our understanding of the creative process. The conceptual framework for the creative

component is based on scholarly research in four key areas: media; visuals; narrative; and alter ego. Through an investigation into the relationship between music and visuals in audio-visual media I sought to answer the following question:

What insights into the creative process can be gained through experimentation in: film and visual media; visual design; narrative; and the concept of alter ego?

The audio-visual creative work is a musical short film called *Who Is Nate Nixon?* and is based on a fictional music artist and alter ego of myself, called Nate Nixon.

Prior to the concept of making a short film, I had conceived the name, Nate Nixon, as a stage name or stage persona for a new musical project I was working on at the time. I first intended this to be part of a strategy to market my new project. The name itself is a combination of parts of my two son's names. Nate comes from Nathaniel, a shortening of my youngest son's middle name, and Nixon is derived from my eldest son's first name, Phoenix. Further to this personal connection, I also considered the name to be memorable. Nate Nixon developed from a stage name into an alter ego once I started work on a narrative based on the character, which I then developed into my film's script. I will provide further insights into the process of applying an alter ego in the Reflections chapter.

This exegesis is a presentation and discussion of my artistic research project. My research provides insights into my process and experiences in the exploration of the visual side of my creative profile. Through this undertaking, I also present my examination of the union of visuals and music and how this relates to research on the subject. The research demonstrates through the process of combining sound and visuals to elicit an alter ego can be an integral tool in expression of creativity in writing, musicality and performance. The experience of employing the alter ego provided me insights that I would have not understood without taking on the persona even though the differences between 'real' identity and persona were subtle. I also found that the use of an alter ego in my creative project was a performance enabler.

In Chapter 2, Literature Review, I discuss literature related to my choice of medium, visual style, narrative and the concept of alter ego. The literature review also establishes the conceptual framework that I use to produce the creative component of my research which is comprised of the following elements: a musical short film format; a cause-and-effect narrative; an alter ego for my musical identity; a lead character with two personas with subtle visual differences; the film's colour

palette accentuated through its settings, lighting and colour-grading to stylise key elements of the film; the lead character having the condition of synaesthesia and visual hooks and gesture used to complement the musical hooks. In Chapter 3, my project methodology, I outline my research paradigm—practice-based research—and how this is applied. Further to this, I detail the data sources I will employ—my film and journals—and how I will analyse the data, including my visual method which involves an examination of my film’s colour palette. In Chapter 4, I detail where the creative work can be viewed <https://youtu.be/cFSJFvEv7Kw>, and provide an overview of the film’s visual design, film visual influences, and an overview of the colour palette of the key scenes. In Chapters 5 and 6, I present a reflection and conclusion on my practice and an analysis of the creative work, taking into account relevant critical theory to support my argument. I present the film’s colour palette as being an integral component that supported the narrative and character development. I detail my visual method of comparing the colour palette from each of the key scenes as being effective as it enabled me to visualise relationships between all the scenes in one simple view. Through examples presented in my film and other texts I analysed, I concur that the combined effect of sound and vision is transformative and creates a new and enhanced media form. Further on the connection between sound and image, I illustrate the concept of how I will present my film live in conjunction with the film’s music performed live. In regard to alter ego and my performance in the film, I state it is more accurate to call Nate Nixon an embellishment of my real persona, and not an “alter-ego” or separate persona as I had intended. I discuss that applying an alter ego is a performance enabler as it inspired the musical compositions and lyrics of the songs I created for the film and that playing the alter ego character aided my confidence in my acting performance. For future film projects, I outline my intent to explore characters with greater distinguishable visual features and gestures to make them more memorable. I discuss the significance of efficient storytelling in my short film, and how choices made with my collaborators was critical in making my narrative succinct. I present my visual and narrative journey maps which I created to provide a visual overview of the film’s changes in narrative, alter ego, music and visuals. I underline the importance of having these visual maps at the pre-production stage and that I would employ this method in my future film productions. In terms of methodology, I highlight the impact of continuous feedback and refinement in my process, which includes revisiting literature and also reviewing new literature. In regard to data sources, I present that

making the film and my journals were integral to forming my reflections. Finally, in analysing the data, the visual method I employed of comparing the colour palettes of the key scenes was critical in understanding the characteristics of my film.

The final submission of work for my master's degree will be made available to libraries and submitted to the SAE library catalogue. I have prepared pitches for my short film for streaming platforms and submitted the film to various film festivals around Australia and abroad. Depending on the outcome of these submissions I will then consider releasing the series on video streaming platforms independently on services such as YouTube and Vimeo. I will also apply with selected record labels to publish the EP. Coinciding with the video release, I plan that the audio album will be released simultaneously on music streaming services such as Spotify. In addition, to support the release of the short film and audio EP I will also apply to play at select music festivals and do a short tour in support of the release. These applications will provide a form of peer review in support of the consideration of the work as research output. In addition to the above, I plan to submit my research to journals in the field of Artistic Research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In creating a visual narrative for my music, I determined four primary elements that I would examine in order to develop the conceptual framework for my creative work: media; visuals; narrative; and alter ego. These are represented below in my influence quadrant, Figure 1.



Figure 1. Influence quadrant.

Later in the Conceptual Framework section, I provide graphical summaries of the key themes related to media, visuals, narrative, and alter ego.

Media

In this section I discuss ‘media’, including musical films and music video, YouTube and new media, visual albums, and applications (apps), to provide a deeper understanding of the different media forms relevant to my audio-visual creative project.

Musical films are a film genre known for their elaborate song and dance sequences that drive the narrative. The genre’s emergence coincided with the

introduction of synchronized sound in film, which highlighted the future significance of sound for the genre and helped propel its popularity (Hoffmann, 2014). The first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), was a musical, and thereafter the genre became hugely popular in the golden age of cinema until the 1960s. At this time there was a shift in the genre: “Hollywood had to strive towards more realistic ways of incorporating songs into the musical. One way to achieve this desired realism was to create musicals about entertainment including performing artists actually performing on stage and not in the street” (Sheikhha, 2014). The Beatles’ first feature film, *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964), Figure 2, and their second film, *Help!* (1965) are examples of change in genre. Donnelly (2015) describes their first film as a star vehicle for the band, stating that “the ambiguity between the group acting as non-actors ‘being themselves’ allows *A Hard Day’s Night* to function both as a dramatic film and as a succession of spectacles of the group” (p. 21). The film “established a model and standard for pop music in film, not only setting standards of quality but the means by which pop music and groups could be represented in the cinema” (p. 22).



Figure 2. *A Hard Day's Night*.
(Lester, 1964)

Other notable musical films include Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1982) and Prince's *Purple Rain* (1984), in which the musician played a semi-autobiographical character, Figure 3. My creative project also features a musician lead character and eighties inspired music, and *Purple Rain* is one of my film influences, which I will discuss further in Chapter 4 in the Visual Design section.



Figure 3. Purple Rain.
(Magnoli, 1984)

During the early 1980s, music videos on television, described by Sheikhha (2014) as “3 minute somewhat mini-musicals”, rose to prominence as a result of the popularity of the cable music channel MTV (Music Television), which was launched in 1981. Goodwin (1992), describes MTV as “the most visible and frequently discussed embodiment of music television and music videos ... and is, fun to watch because it brings a rock sensibility to television ... it makes music television musical” (p. xv–xvi). MTV remained a strong marketing tool for music artists in the 1980s and 1990s, taking the emphasis away from the recording artist-marketing function of musical films.

By 2005, online video-sharing platform YouTube was launched and by 2008 had become the main marketing tool for musical artists to distribute their music

videos, overwhelmingly changing the way audiences consumed music in an audio-visual form. YouTube is an example of new media, which Baron (2016) defines as: “all the media that is interactive, that provides a two-way communication and involves some form of computing ... new media is the opposite to ‘Old Media’ such as the telephone, radio, TV, and newspapers” (Baron, 2016, p. 36). Railton and Watson (2011) highlight the strength of video-sharing platforms for content distribution:

So, it is not just the exponential growth, sheer size and geographical reach of sites such as YouTube that is significant, but the fact that the products themselves are increasingly designed for dissemination on multiple platforms, platforms which both imply and impel different modes of consumption. (Railton & Watson, 2011, p. 143)

Railton and Watson highlight the fact that YouTube is viewable on mobile devices, laptops, desktops and smart televisions. In the past, music videos were only watched on broadcast television or played back on videocassette recorders through a television set. The audience’s ability to interact with music videos has changed. Online streaming platforms have opened up possibilities for users to create remakes, remixes, re-edits of audio-visual works using readily available software (2011, p. 143). What was once a one-way transaction by content creators has now become omnidirectional. Holt (2011) details how online music video content increased rapidly in 2008 and 2009 and asserts that online platforms such as YouTube enabled music artists without record labels to engage in mass-distribution which was not previously available to independent artists:

The practice of mass-distributing video is fairly recent in independent music, but now constitutes a large part of the industry. Here, many are doing simple productions that are quick and inexpensive, and there is potential for innovation in visual production in this domain, too. (Holt, 2011, p. 52)

In addition to music video, the visual album is another musical audio-visual format that is watched on streaming platforms like YouTube. A visual album is a series of short films, one per song on an album and a visual companion for the audio album release. Harrison (2014) provides a detailed case study of the visual album *Beyoncé* by the musical artist of the same name, in which Beyoncé plays several fictional characters. Holt (2011, p. 52) details that from 2010 onwards, the visual side of music has become more prevalent through visual albums and music short

films by music artists and bands such as Kanye West, Animal Collective, Dirty Projectors, Beyoncé, and Thom Yorke. Contemporary examples of the visual album form include *Runaway* (Kanye West), *Beyoncé* and *Lemonade* (Beyoncé) and *Anima* (Thom Yorke). In recent years *Lemonade* has become recognised for popularising the visual album term (Harrison, 2014, p. 9), even though the format has existed in a similar form decades earlier in musical films such as The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*.

Applications (apps) are another type of visual accompaniment for music releases. An example of this form is *Biophilia* (Weisel, 2017), an app supporting Björk's album release of the same name. The app starts with a central hub that shows a 3D constellation in which the user can rotate and zoom in to select one of the 10 separate apps that were developed for each song, Figure 4. Each of the 10 apps include the album music, they are interactive (some game-like and others film-like) and include musical scores and lyrics for each of the songs. In my project I plan to create a short film to enhance and support my music release, however, for the scope of my project, I will not be implementing interactivity into my project as employed in the app for *Biophilia*. Adding interactivity to my film project would significantly increase the project outside the scope of what would be manageable in the time frame, and projects that I have experienced that are interactive can be technically interesting in concept but not necessarily engaging in terms of narrative.

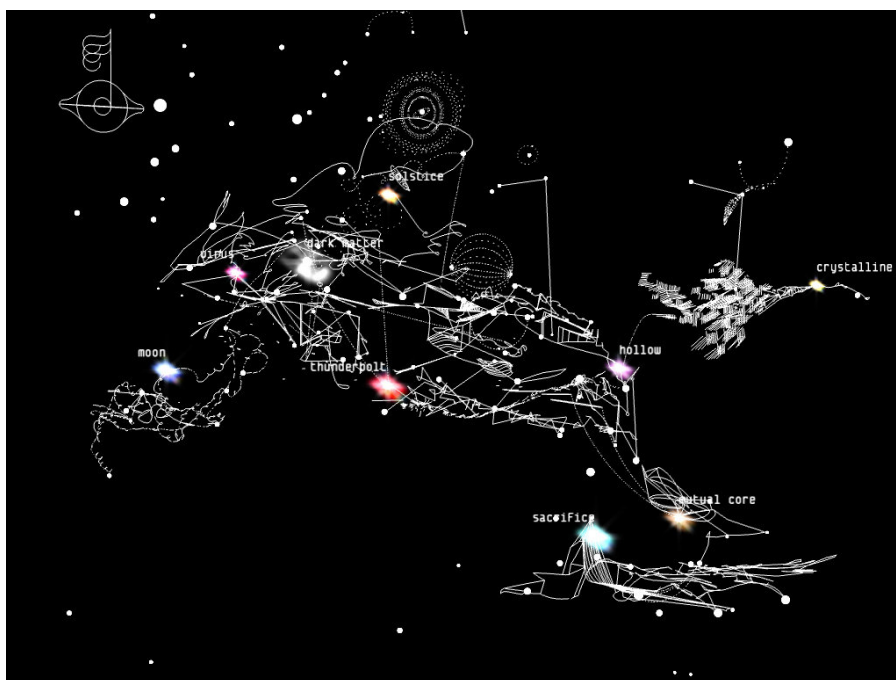


Figure 4. Biophilia menu.
(Weisel, 2017)

In my review of media, Vernallis (2013) highlights that features across media forms are coalescing and “almost every new technology design for the big screen has been adapted for the cell-phone screen and vice versa ... media objects often echo one another simply through their production tropes” (p. 16). Vernallis also provides recent examples of influences between media platforms: music video, film, and YouTube and how these interactions run in all ways between platforms (2013, p. 16). This is important to my project which is at the intersection of music and film and the platforms noted by Vernallis are all applicable to my project, and I can see the cross-influences between them. During the current Covid-19 pandemic I consider streaming platforms as essential for my project. I plan to release my film via online streaming platforms, and I can appreciate the freedom and potential of being able to release it independently to a mass market. At the same time, as streaming platforms are over-saturated with countless audio-visual music projects, without a targeted marketing plan and a well-produced and crafted product these online platforms can yield little return.

Having examined the available audio-visual media and distribution platforms I consider a musical short film format would suit my project as it has a character-driven narrative, and it would be best delivered via a video-sharing platform. As discussed, the visual side of music has become more prominent recently through visual albums and musical short films by popular music artists. To gain further understanding in this area, in the proceeding section I will discuss the literature relating to the visual content of my project.

Visuals

In this section I will discuss the range of literature on film visual design, visual hooks and gesture, synaesthesia, visual music films, pseudo-synaesthesia, and how they came to impact the design of the creative component of my research.

One of the key areas of significance for my project is film visual design, which is “a combination of the art direction (locations, set dressing, costuming, props, and make-up); and the cinematography (recording format, lighting, exposures, choice of lenses, focus, camera angles, and movements)” (Rabiger & Hurbris-Cherrier, 2013 p. 126). A subset of visual design and of importance to my project,

Rabiger & Hurbris-Cherrier describe the “visual palette (photography, costumes and settings)” (2013 p. 127) and its significance in the film *Amélie*, in which Jean-Pierre Jeunet [the director], through the film’s visual palette “produced the perfect visual complement to the tenderly romantic story for Amélie’s selfless acts of kindness” (2013, p. 127). Regarding camera movement and style, Donnelly (2015) provides an example in *A Hard Day’s Night* and describes the film as having “a striking visual impetus to complement the musical drive, having a consistently fast pace and ... blending documentary-derived techniques with the form of a dramatic fiction film” (p. 21–22). Rabiger and Hurbris-Cherrier outline the importance of visual research for discussion with project collaborators and to assemble images and influences to develop a film’s visual style (2013, p. 284). My short film project has a lead character from the year 1987, so I collected imagery from films of that era that I used to develop the visual design of the film. The images I collected along with storyboards formed part of my dialogue with my collaborators, in particular with the cinematographer, also known as the director of photography (DP). While the visual decisions made during pre-production and principal photography are critical, colour grading in post-production can also influence the visual design. “[A] film’s visual design is increasingly determined after principal cinematography, in what has been called a ‘second stage of image creation’” (Higgins, 2003, p. 60). Rabiger and Hurbris-Cherrier define colour grading as “the process of manipulating image characteristics in post production ... and allows one to adjust for inconsistencies in exposures and colour temperatures from shot to shot” (2013, p. 471-472) and further highlight its significance in film visual design. “Jean-Pierre Jeunet used digital color grading extensively in films like *Amélie* (2001) and *Micmacs* (2009) to enhance the image with warm, lush and painterly color tones essential to his nostalgic, hyper-real visual aesthetic” (Rabiger & Hubris-Cherrier, 2013, p. 472), Figure 5. My first strategy is to use the colour and aesthetic of the filming locations and lighting during principal photography to establish my visual palette. However, due to the fantastical nature of my film’s narrative, which features a 33-year time jump from 1987 to 2020, and a lead character with synaesthesia, I made use of digital colour grading to further stylise and accentuate my film as a means of strengthening the narrative with the visual design.



Figure 5. The film Amélie.

(Jeunet, 2001)

On the matter of the visuals augmenting music, Vernallis (2004) highlights a pertinent point regarding visuals hooks, and that many successful music videos employ catchy physical gestures, a visual hook, that accompanies the musical hook. The musical hook “refers to the part of the song that catches the ear of the listener. In other words, it’s a lyrical line or melodic phrase that makes the song memorable” (Estrella, 2018). The visual hook and musical hook work together in tandem to produce an even greater impact on the viewer, according to Vernallis. Shephard and Leonard (2014) also discuss how the visual movement component of a musical performance plays an integral role in the overall performance to the audience in which they describe the gesture of a performer’s body being integrated with the voice (Shephard & Leonard, 2014, p. 149). This draws a parallel with Vernallis’ thoughts on the importance of visual and musical hooks and how the visual side bolsters the message and communication of the music (2004, p. 204), again underlining the importance of visuals in supporting the message of the music.

Synaesthesia may be seen as an extreme instance of the integrated relationship between sound and vision. Shephard and Leonard (2014) describe synaesthesia thusly:

Neurologically, synaesthesia occurs when the stimulation of one sensory modality automatically, and instantly, triggers a perception in a second modality, in the absence of any direct stimulation to this second modality.... a piece of music might automatically and instantly trigger the perception of vivid colors. The interaction of sight and sound (music and the visual) constitutes about 90 percent of neurological synaesthetic cases. (Shephard & Leonard, 2014, p. 13)

In terms of creating visuals for my music, the concept of music triggering colour is an idea I would like to explore further as it challenges convention: visuals for music are typically created for the music or to complement it, not as a result of the music. Visual music films and synaesthesia are discussed in detail by Mollaghan (2015) in which he “explores the concept and expression of musicality in the visual music film, in which visual presentations are given musical attributes such as rhythmical form, structure and harmony” (Mollaghan, 2015, p. 1). Fundamentally the concept of a visual music film is a transformation of music into an audio-visual form. In the past, this has been done most commonly through the medium of film, devices such as an oscilloscope which convert audio signals into visuals, and more recently through modern computer graphics and programming to create visualisations of the music. Mollaghan also examines visual music film and its relationship with the phenomenon of synaesthesia in its different forms, including the form they refer to as pseudo-synaesthesia where:

individuals have learned to make associations between words or letters with colours. They speculate that this form can be attributed to the way that children learn to read from alphabet books in which each letter is assigned a specific colour. (Mollaghan, 2015, p. 12)

The below statement illuminates how accomplished visual music filmmaker Norman McLaren applied pseudo-synaesthesia in his films and the misuse of the term synaesthesia in his creative field:

colour–sound associations he (McLaren) uses are pseudo-/culturally synaesthetic associations. The pianissimo (very quiet) notes are represented by soft muted hues while the loud fortissimo notes are represented in vibrant, contrasting shades of colour. The term synaesthesia has therefore become something of a popular malapropism in relation to the visual music film. (Mollaghan, 2015, p. 12)

Goodwin (1992) explains that musicians and audiences visualise music and provides examples of this in contemporary music (Goodwin, 1992, p. 51). Goodwin also discusses synaesthesia, and sources of iconography in popular cultural memory (Goodwin, 1992, p. 56), however, these are the learnt associations in popular culture, that Mollaghan would refer to these as pseudo-synaesthesia (2015, p. 12). The imagery in a visual music film is typically constructed of rhythmic patterns of colour and shape and whilst I appreciate the imaginative work done in this niche field, this is not the type of visual narrative I wanted to communicate in my project. For my

project, the most significant insight from Mollaghan (2015) and Shepherd & Leonard (2014) was the discussion of synaesthesia and this provided me guidance on employing the condition of synaesthesia as a character trait of my alter ego in my short film. The alter ego in my film was not developed with the intention to portray an accurate representation of the condition of synaesthesia (musical tone and colour related), as its manifestation for individuals can vary broadly. Examples of colour elicited by music can be related to changes in tone, intensity, emotional connection, and in some cases no colour is evoked for certain types of music (van Campen, 1997, p. 3). For my film, I used lighting techniques and digital colour grading in post-production to emphasise the condition of synaesthesia through stylised visuals.

In my analysis of the literature on visuals, I determined my short film would primarily use real locations and lighting techniques to achieve my desired colour palette but would be further enhanced by digital colour grading in post-production. Visual hooks and gestures were used to complement the musical hooks and the condition of synaesthesia is a feature of my lead character, but it is a stylised visual representation. The condition of synaesthesia in the lead character was not intended to have any influence on the music composed for the film. Visual design techniques were employed in my film as a narrative device, such as representing changes in the lead character's persona and his condition of synaesthesia. Brown (2016) highlights visuals as a storytelling device and discusses light and colour which he describes as "inherently a part of the storytelling, an integral narrative device" (Brown, 2016, p. 49). The visuals in my short film were a critical component in supporting the narrative, highlighting changes in character, fortifying fantasy elements such as the time jump and making the film more dynamic through the use of visual hooks and gestures. I will discuss the film's visual design and its relationship with the narrative further in Chapter 4 and share my reflections in Chapter 5. In this chapter I have examined how visuals can support the narrative and to provide a foundation for the development of my short film's story, in the following section I will analyse narrative.

Narrative

In this third area of inquiry, I will examine the following sub-topics: narrative theory; narratives in film, music video and visual albums; narrative and character

development; cause-and-effect and personal narrative; and direct and indirect address.

Berger (1997) states that “narratives, in the most simple sense, are stories that take place in time” (p. 6). Rabiger and Hubris-Cherrier (2013) explain the difference between story, narrative and plot, where “story is the overall chronological progression of the complete work, and the dramatic narrative is the way in which he story is told, namely what details are selected and deemphasized ... the selection and ordering of events (the sequencing of dramatic moments), is what we call the plot” (p. 55). In regard to dramatic content in narratives, Rabiger and Hubris-Cherrier define the key terms such as *beat*, which is “a moment in drama producing an irreversible change of awareness in one or more characters” (2013, p. 41) and a *dramatic unit* which “always included at least one beat, which is its crisis point. But a unit may contain several beats along the way towards the unit’s crisis” (2013, p. 42). Rabiger and Hubris-Cherrier outline *The Three Act Structure* which is described as “the basic engine of the dramatic unit”(p. 49) and further detailed, “Act I is the set up act, Act II the development act, and Act III is the result, which in the case of a film’s ending is a resolution” (p. 50). In Act III, “the main character finally goes toe-to-toe with the central problem (the principal opposing force) in the climax (the third crisis point) and this confrontation resolves the central problem” (Rabiger & Hubris-Cherrier, 2013, p. 50). Regarding short films, Gurskis (2007) gives guidance on screenplay length and the number of pages recommended for the setup, rising action and resolution, Figure 6.

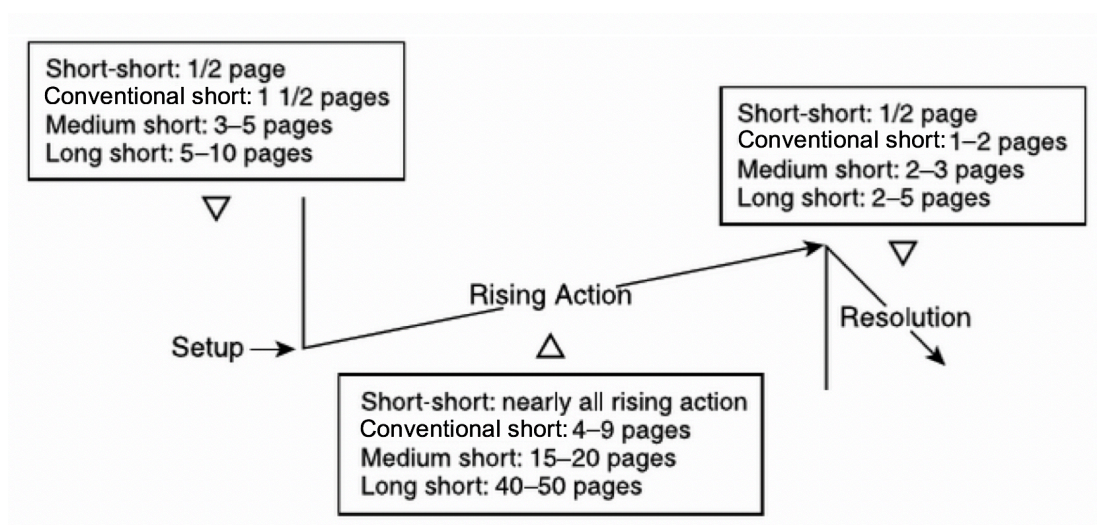


Figure 6. Page count and the three-part narrative structure. (p. 56).

Gurskis highlights a key feature of a short film in which “the climax presents a twist, an unexpected plot turn that functions as a “surprise ending”. In fact, the success of a short film is often judged by the cleverness and appropriateness of this twist” (2007, p. 56). Rabiger and Hubris-Cherrier outline options for organising events in time in a film. Of interest for my project is *chronological time*, “where chronology means putting events in event order, from beginning to end ... many essentially chronological films will insert a flashback and there which disrupts the linear flow somewhat, but not significantly” (2013, p. 60-61).

In relation to film, Berger explains the importance of narrative for the experience of the audience:

Audiences, through the willing suspension of disbelief, become emotionally affected by these images, sounds, and music, and also often identify with characters in films and learn something about themselves and about life in the process. (Berger, 1997, p. 147)

In Harrison’s (2014) examination of narrative and character development, she proposes a key point of difference between the visual album and music video:

By considering the visual album as a hybrid medium between film and music video, we can hypothesise that it expresses qualities of both these media. One important quality that is essential to film, but has often been claimed lacking from music video, is the presence of narrative. (Harrison, 2014, p. 28)

Vernallis (2004) presents a more varied view of music video concerning narrative and makes the point that some view music video as functioning primarily with narrative structures similar to television and film, whilst some consider music video as being antinarrative in structure with flashy visuals and/or focus on the performer or performance. Harrison identifies two different types of narratives: cause-and-effect (classic Hollywood narrative) and personal narrative. A cause-and-effect narrative “begins with one situation; a series of changes occurs according to a pattern of cause and effect; finally, a new situation arises that brings about the end of the narrative” (Bordwell & Thompson, as cited in Harrison, 2014, p. 30). A cause-and-effect narrative is also the equivalent of realism/naturalism as described by Goodwin (1992). My short film follows the cause-and-effect narrative type. In addition, I play the lead character in my film but employ an alter ego and the story is fictional. I will examine alter ego further in the next section. The other main type of narrative, personal narrative, is defined as “the stories people tell about themselves in order to

invest actions and events with meaning” (Hawkins & Richardson, as cited in Harrison, 2014, p. 31), however, this is not something I will investigate further in my project.

Goodwin (1992) presents an analysis of narratives in music videos. They discuss the difference between narratives in popular music and film. In film for example, “it has been assumed that realism/naturalism is characterized by the effacement of narration, through which the process of narrative construction is made invisible to the spectator” (Goodwin, 1992, p. 74). The direct address of the performer in a music video is in opposition to the indirect address of an actor in film, and in film “to address the spectator directly would alert him or her to the fact of narration ... and break the spell of illusion” (Goodwin, 1992, p. 74). As a counterpoint, self-referentiality is now used regularly in modern films such as *Deadpool* (2016), in which the lead character in the film talks directly to the screen and refers to himself in the third person. This type of direct address in films has become widely accepted by audiences, so to say that a music video requires indirect address to fulfil realism and narrative illusion is not necessarily accurate. In addition to this, there is the potential of misinterpretation for the viewer between the public persona of the performer and the character portrayed in a music video, particularly if the person is a famous personality. This does not necessarily imply it will be a concern for the viewer as it can add an aura of mystery to the narrative. Goodwin also discusses the structure of popular music and its commonality with realist narrative: “Similarly, as the realist narrative ends with all its questions answered, so the pop song tells its musical story in order to finish, to complete itself with a final chord and/or hook” (Goodwin 1992, p. 84).

Alter Ego

In this section, I discuss David Bowie, Bob Dylan and neurological disorders in relation to the concept of the alter ego. An alter ego in simple terms is an individual’s alternative personality.

David Bowie was a creative practitioner that embraced the concept of an alter ego through the diverse range of personas he created during his music career. Through his first persona, Ziggy Stardust, Bowie used the alter ego as a springboard to fame and instead of “pursuing fame, as he had in the past, Bowie would act as if

he was already famous beyond dispute” (Dogget, as cited in Leorne, 2015, p. 113). This point is comparable to Goodwin’s (1992) comments on narrative in which music artists such as Prince and the Beatles are portrayed in music videos and films at an embellished level of success and playing at shows bigger than they would normally (p. 106). In Bowie’s own words about his personas: “I left it to them to take on the repressed ego qualities that I had in me, that I would have loved to produce in my real persona” (Leorne, 2015, p. 121) and in a Blank on Blank (2014) video interview with David Bowie, the musician explained that he found it very difficult to write for himself, but found it very easy to write for the personas he created. In his early career, Bowie used personas as a tool to express himself creatively, but ultimately after the third (the Thin White Duke) had come to its natural end, he was confident enough in his creative expression to exist as David Bowie and not rely on a character as a performance enabler (Leorne, 2015, p. 121). Through Bowie’s transformation of his appearance using musical and theatrical practices, his voice was not associated visually with one artistic personality, as would be the case with more conventional music artists (Stevenson, 2015, p. 276). Bye (2015), further highlights theatricality as part of Bowie’s creative process. Ziggy Stardust for example, “drew on Bowie’s fascination with kabuki, a theatrical art form based on “visual excess” and the creation of character through mask and costume” (Bye, 2015, p. 37), Figure 7.



Figure 7. Example of Bowie’s costume inspired by Kabuki and theatrical art forms.
(Bye, 2015, p. 37)

Bowie is most identified by the personas he created during the 1970s, however, even later in his career the practice of using fictional characters continued to be part of his creative process, as evident in his use of character in his 1995 album, *Outside*, in which he performs as seven fictional characters, one of which is a fictional detective who is investigating a murder mystery (Bye, 2015, p. 37). The concept of a narrative with fictional characters is something that I can identify with; as outlined in the introduction I have created an alter ego for my creative project and developed a narrative around this persona.

Bob Dylan is another music artist that has used persona and fictional characters as part of this creative process and identity (Yaffe & Miller, 2011). Dylan's use of personas did not involve an exploration of gender fluidity or extravagant theatrical techniques like Bowie, but instead, his personas were representations of different aspects of his personality or fictional characters in film. Dylan was well known for reinventing himself throughout his career and “the continual metamorphosis in the style, sound, and content of his music, as well as of his physical appearance and character ... resulted in countless analyses and interpretations of his work” (Dobrinsky, 2017). One of these interpretations is the film *I'm Not There* (Haynes, 2007), which features Bob Dylan portrayed by six different actors, Figure 8, personifying different eras of the artist's life: “a film that would— in a premise counterintuitive to Hollywood orthodoxy— actually celebrate the impossibility of pinning down Bob Dylan” (Yaffe & Miller, 2011, p. 32).



Figure 8. Six Dylan personas from the film *I'm Not There*.

(Haynes, 2007)

Yaffee and Miller also discuss the film, *Renaldo and Clara*, which is a four-hour concert film from 1978 which features Dylan role-playing a fictional character named Renaldo (2011, p. 57). This was filmed during the 1975 *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour in which Dylan played to smaller venues with other like-minded musicians. Footage from this concert has also been made into a new 2019 Netflix documentary by Martin Scorsese called *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story*, which combines elements of fiction with actors mixed with the real filmed content (Zacharek, 2019). A meld of reality and fiction is a similar concept I had for my graduate project, as I had drafted a fictional narrative for my film with parts of the story inspired by real events.

Following my analysis of musicians Dylan and Bowie, I decided to apply a different lens and investigate neurological disorders regarding alter ego. Leorne (2015) in her chapter called *Dear Dr, Freud – David Bowie Hits the Couch*, provided insights into psychoanalytic theories around Bowie (p. 111). Feinberg (2001) details the transformation known as personal confabulation in which: “the patient misconstrues an actual event in his or her life or creates a wholly fictitious narrative about life, in which they play the starring role in another identity” (2001, p. 55). Feinberg also describes autoscopia, which “is the hallucination of the self-projected into the outside world” (2001, p. 80). Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is another condition that is relevant to my project as I will use this as a characteristic of my lead character. DID is defined as “the existence of two or more distinct identities (or “personality states”). The distinct identities are accompanied by changes in behaviour, memory and thinking. The signs and symptoms may be observed by others or reported by the individual (*What are dissociative disorders?*, 2018).” For my creative project, I did not elect to have a narrative in which the main character had a hallucinated version of themselves projected into the real world as outlined by Feinberg (2001), however, my project did incorporate DID at the end of the film, though this is not a central focus of the film.

In terms of Dylan’s style and appearance, while there have been many as shown in Figure 8, his use of personas in his career has been more understated compared to the grandiosity of Bowie’s creations. In my film, and more in tune with Dylan, a subtler difference in appearance will be employed. The musical reinvention that both Bowie and Dylan experienced through their alter egos is an area that I explored in my work as the music I composed for the Nate Nixon alter ego in my

film was unlike the music I had made in previous creative works. One other consideration is that both Bowie and Dylan in their careers employed fictional characters and fictional narratives in their creative process, however, one point of difference between them is that Bowie would sing about his characters in his songs. I too have used fictional characters and a fictional narrative in my film, but I do not refer to the characters in the songs I created for the film. Though both distinct from each other in their approach to alter ego, I took inspiration from Dylan and Bowie in the visual changes employed for Nate Nixon, use of fictional characters and fictional narratives, influence on my music creation, and enabling my performance. I will provide further details on my use of alter ego and my reflections on this in Chapter 5.

Conceptual Framework

The common relationships and findings of the literature review can be seen in Figure 9. This diagram formed the conceptual framework for the development of the creative component.

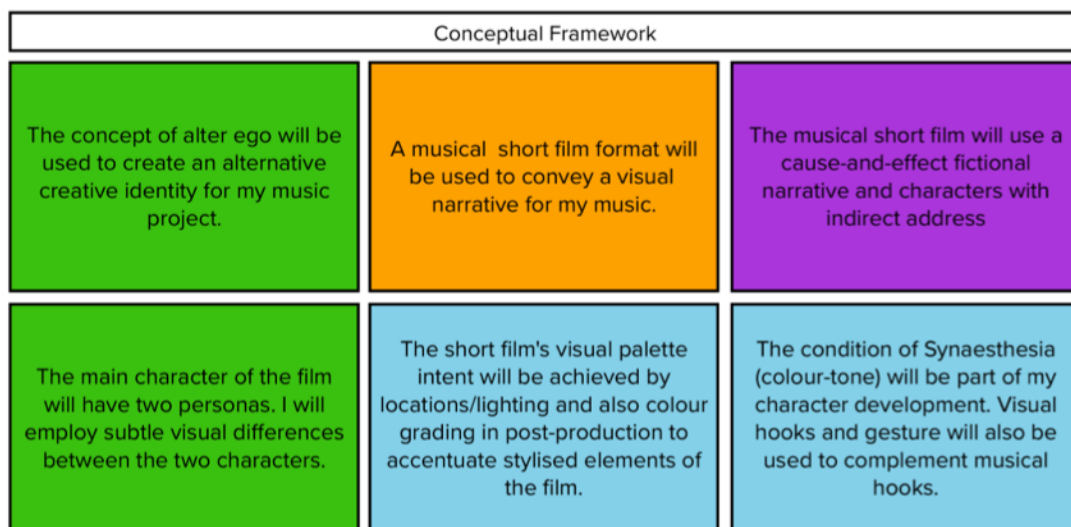


Figure 9. Conceptual framework.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

My research paradigm is artistic research, which can be further described as performative research led by practice as defined in *A Manifesto for Performative Research* (Haseman, 2006). I based my project methodology primarily on Skains (2016) and Figure 10 shows his practice-based research framework. My additional comments in the green boxes detail how my research aligns with this framework. Step 1 is establishing the research problem; this is where I drafted my research question. Step 2 is conducting the background research (literature review), in which I read and analysed the creative texts and critical theory related to my topic. Step 3 is revisiting the research problem following the background research phase. Following what I learnt through my literature review I revised and refined my research question. Step 4 is conducting the empirical research (producing the creative work – my short film) and Step 5 in parallel is continuing the contextual research, that is further reading and analysis of creative texts and critical theory related to my topic. During the creation of my short film and after it was completed, I continued to review the literature relating to my topic and found additional sources that would shape my argument and discussion. Step 6 is revisiting the research problem following the creative practice and further research and if any refinement is required to the research question. I refined my research question at least five times from the start of the project through to writing the exegesis. Skains' methodology shows that continuous refinement of the research question is required, and I concur with this as I found myself doing the same many times as part of my process. Step 7 is forming an argument/discussion and shaping an answer to the research question. Step 8 is writing the exegesis. Though Steps 7 and 8 follow a sequential path in Skains' framework, I found that in writing my exegesis I was regularly returning to earlier steps, but I had anticipated this would be required and part of the review and refinement process.

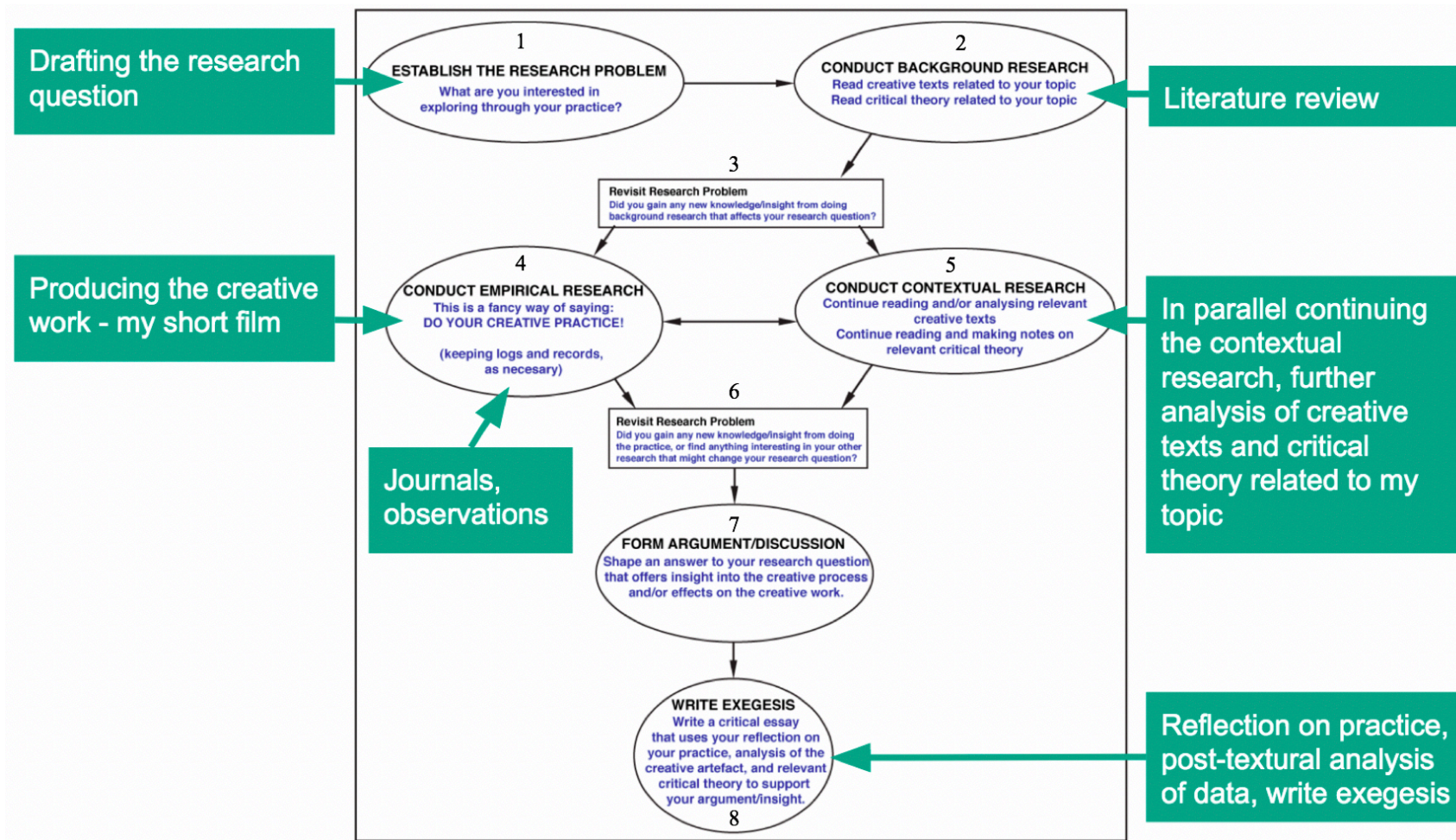


Figure 10. Practice-based research framework.

(Skains, 2016)

In producing my creative work (Step 4 from Skains' methodology), I began with the music, lyrical ideas and a narrative structure for the film that I would work on in parallel. As outlined in Chapter One (Introduction), I created a musical alter ego which I play in the film and the narrative structure developed around this concept. I had neither employed an alter ego in my music nor acted in a short film prior so this was something different for me in my creative practice. I will detail the insights into my creative process in using an alter ego and the development of the film's narrative in Chapter Five (Reflections). Pre-production work such as storyboarding, collating visual influences, finding suitable locations and collaborating with the DP was critical in establishing the visual design of the film. I provide further detail on this subject in Chapter Four (The Creative Work).

In terms of data sources, the creative work—my short film—was primary. I also employed journals: logs; records; self-reflection; and observations taken during the creative practice part (Daichendt, 2012, p. 95–99). The journals, in particular, detailed my work and reflections during pre-production (discussions with DP, location scouting), production (what occurred during filming), and post-production (collaboration with editor/colour grader and sound editor). Having these written journals that I could refer to was critical in writing my reflections. In regard to my self-reflection, I applied an autoethnographic methodology to my personal experiences in making the film and playing the alter ego of Nate Nixon. Using personal insights, I examined my findings against the related literature I reviewed in Chapter Two (Literature Review). In this autoethnographic approach, I analysed the relationships I had with key collaborators and the outcome this had on my creative project.

In analysing the data, I applied the following strategies: focus on the key questions, themes, events, and concepts; identify patterns, connections or themes; and interpret (Daichendt, 2012, p. 100–101). In respect to the visuals in my film, I also considered the following stages as outlined in *Action Research and Reflective Practice* by Paul McIntosh: a descriptive stage; an analysis of the personal meaning of the experience; and a comparative stage of the image work (McIntosh, 2010, p. 144). The analysis of the colour palette in each of the scenes of my film became a key component of my reflection. In addition to comparing the colour palette between different scenes I also overlaid the changes in colour palette against the changes in

narrative, change in alter ego, and changes in music in the film, and from this gained insight into the relationships between them.

I applied the above strategies to prompt my reflection on *Who Is Nate Nixon?* and these are captured in Chapter Five (Reflections).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Creative Work

Who Is Nate Nixon? can be viewed by visiting: <https://youtu.be/cFSJFvEv7Kw> in your browser, or on the USB flash drive accompanying this document. The teaser trailer for the film can be viewed by visiting: <https://youtu.be/doGgxP19-9Y>. Figure 11 is the opening title.

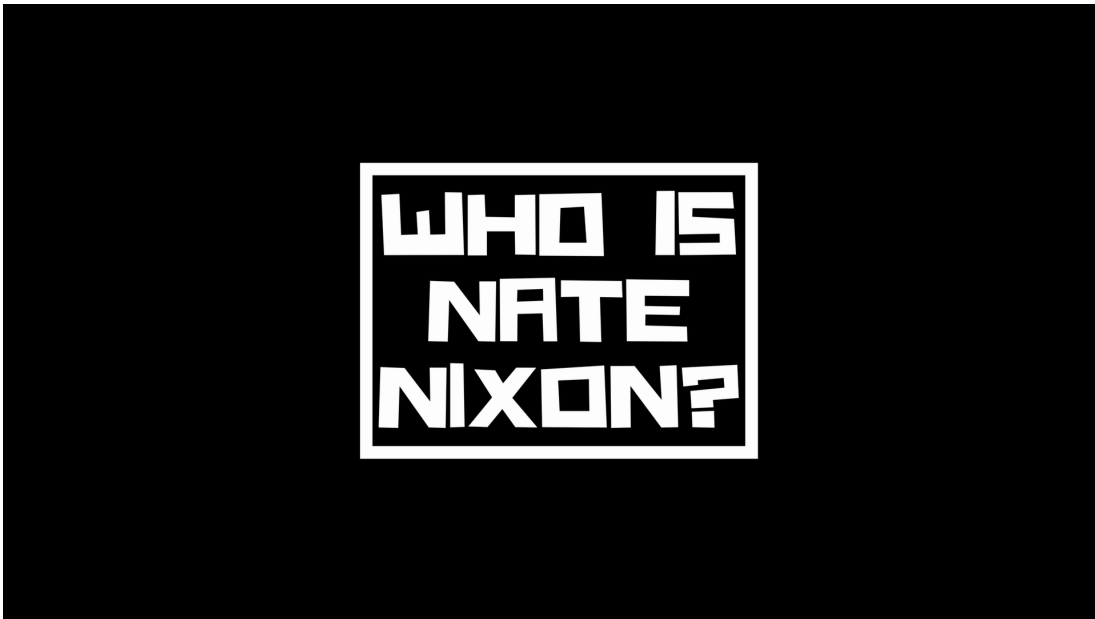


Figure 11. Who Is Nate Nixon? - opening title.

Music

The film features four songs I composed and produced for the project: *1987*; *Turn*, *Pressure* and *You Can't Bring Me Down*. The film also features three songs I have released previously, and these are used for background music in the bar scenes: *Good Life*; *This Is Your Night*; and *Dance, Boogie and Repeat*.

Visual Design

After I had completed my film's script, I met with my DP, Tyron Seeto, for pre-production meetings. We had detailed discussions regarding the visual style of the film and examined matters such as film influences, colour palette, lighting, locations, storyboard ideas and the condition of synaesthesia in the main character and how this

would be portrayed in the film. My initial literature review focused on media formats, narrative and alter ego, however, after meeting with my DP, it became evident that the visual design aspect of the film would become integral to my project. This also required me to go back and review the literature on visual design. Much of what I had been discussing with my DP began to connect with the new concepts that I had been investigating in this new research. From this point, the subject of visuals became one of my four key influence areas.

The DP and I discussed film visual influences. One I presented was the film *Big* (1988), Figure 12, and the scene in which the lead character encounters a fortune-telling machine, and after making a wish wakes up as an adult the next morning. I was looking for a fanciful incident in my film to send my lead character 33 years into the future from 1987 and my choice was a psychic who would predict Nate's future and fate, Figure 17. I would not say the colour palette of my film is similar to *Big* as that film uses more natural tones than my film, but the fantasy element of this iconic scene was an inspiration for my film.



Figure 12. *Big*.
(Marshall, 1988)

The DP recommended the film *La La Land* (2016) as an influence, for its vibrancy and the red, purple and pink colour palette of the shots below, Figure 15. He also noted the use of spotlighting on the performers and employed some comparable techniques as he also spotlighted performers in the *Pressure* scene in my film.



Figure 13. La La Land.
(Chazelle, 2016)

Another film influence, cited earlier in my review of musical films, is Prince's *Purple Rain* (1984), Figure 3, for its purple and blue colour palette and use of neon lights. In *Purple Rain* the colour purple is a visual motif throughout the film, and although an inspiration for my film, the colour palette is not as saturated as mine. Further to this, Prince's film visually has a grittier atmosphere than my film which is more fanciful, and this is also a reflection of the difference in my film's lighter narrative compared with the darker drama in *Purple Rain*. A further film that came to my attention following the post-production of my film was Nicholas Winding Refn's *Only God Forgives* (2013), Figure 14. In an examination, I see a lot of similarities in the colour palette of my film and this film, in particular the bar and performance scenes in both my film and Refn's bar scenes. Both films use saturated red, complimented with shades of blue. *Only God Forgives* also uses neon lights which give it an 80s aesthetic. Similarly, in my film, we used LED tube lights to colour the bar scenes, and in particular the *Pressure* scene, in Figure 29, in which you can see a number of these lights used to add glowing red tones to the furniture. Part of the reason I used saturated reds and blues was that I wanted to stylise the scenes featuring Nate Nixon and to refer to his synaesthesia. I also wanted to present a hyperreal aesthetic to suit the fantastical nature of the story. Whilst my film has a

similar colour palette to Refn's¹, his film is noticeably darker visually and this works well with the more ominous tone of the film narrative which involves the criminal underworld. In contrast, my film is lighter visually and this is also reflected in the more light-hearted nature of my narrative.

In terms of locations, the DP and I both agreed on selecting spaces that inherently had the type of colourisation we were seeking for the film and then using additional lighting on set to further augment and achieve the visual palette intent. An example of one of the locations we filmed at, *Lazybones Lounge*, Figure 15, already had rich red tones and provided a good starting point for the look we intended to capture in the film. We also used a lot of additional LED lighting and spotlights to enrich the colour and add some complementary colours to the shots.



Figure 14. Only God Forgives.

(Refn, 2013)

¹ Refn is colour-blind and has been quoted as saying “I can't see mid-colours. That's why all my films are very contrasted, if it were anything else I couldn't see it” (Taylor, 2015).

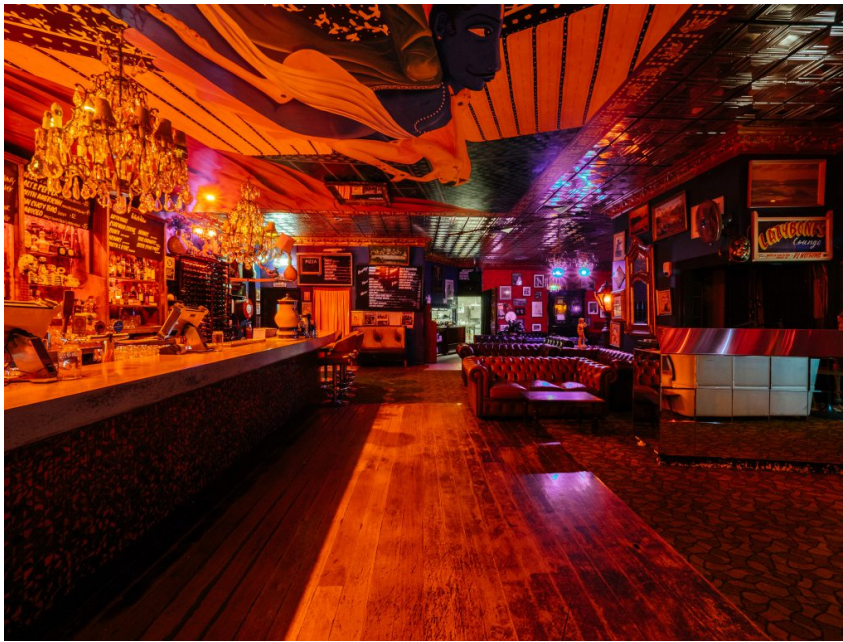


Figure 15. Lazybones Lounge.

(Lazybones, 2016)

In this chapter to support the visual analysis of my creative work on each of the screen captures from my film I have added the colour palette which is embedded at the bottom of the images. For the bar and performance scenes, Figure 16 is an example of the representative colour palette of the film. Figure 17 is an example of how we employed lighting to create a hyperreal scene in which it could be conceivable that Nate could time travel 33 years into the future. For the house filmed scenes, Figure 18 is an example of the representative naturalistic colour palette. In Figure 19, where Nate hears one of his old songs, my intention here was to highlight his condition of synaesthesia and bring vibrant colour to the sound emanating from the speaker. While the shot does not come from Nate's point of view, it shows the viewer an abstract interpretation of what synaesthesia could look like for Nate. This effect also brings to the shot some of the colour palette from the bar and performance scenes, shown in Figures 16 and 17, which provides a connective tissue in the film between the house scenes which have largely naturalistic tones, versus and the bar and performance scenes which have saturated colours.



Figure 16. Example of the typical colour palette of the film (neon bar tones).



Figure 17. Additional lighting employed to enhance a key moment in the film.



Figure 18. Example of the typical colour palette of the film (naturalistic tones).



Figure 19. Lighting effect used in one of the house scenes.

In the final concert scene, Nate Nixon enters as the David Ciura alter ego. The colours are muted, with mainly black and red colours, Figures 20 and 21. When the David alter ego declares he is performing as Nate Nixon and puts on Nate's signature glasses, the vibrant colour palette associated with Nate Nixon returns to the film and the effect signifies the change in persona, Figures 22 and 23.

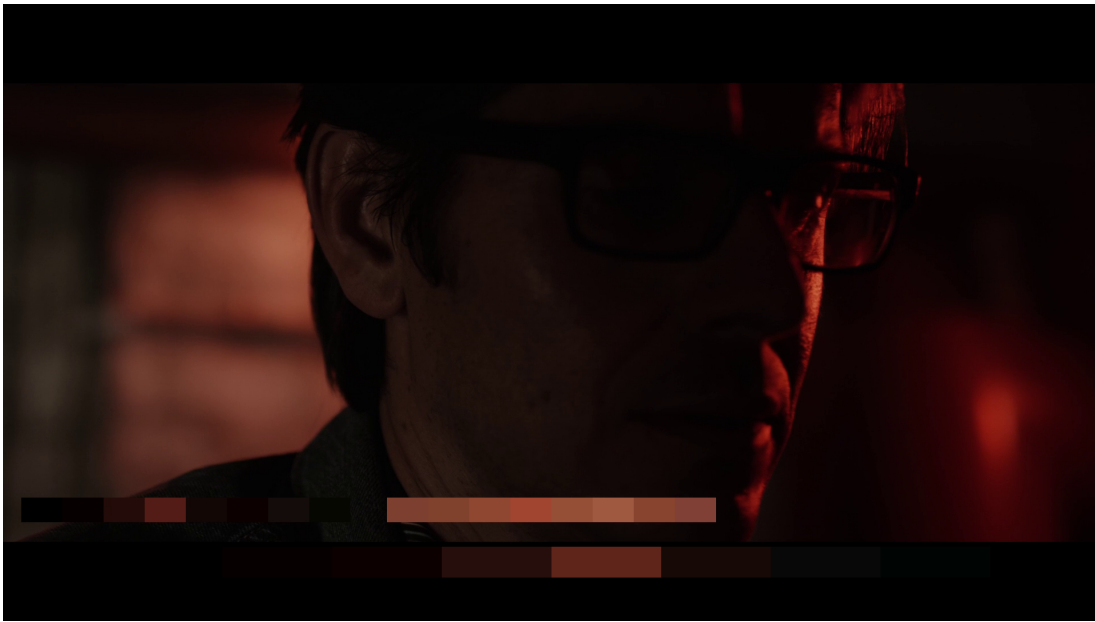


Figure 20. Muted colour palette in the concert scene 1.

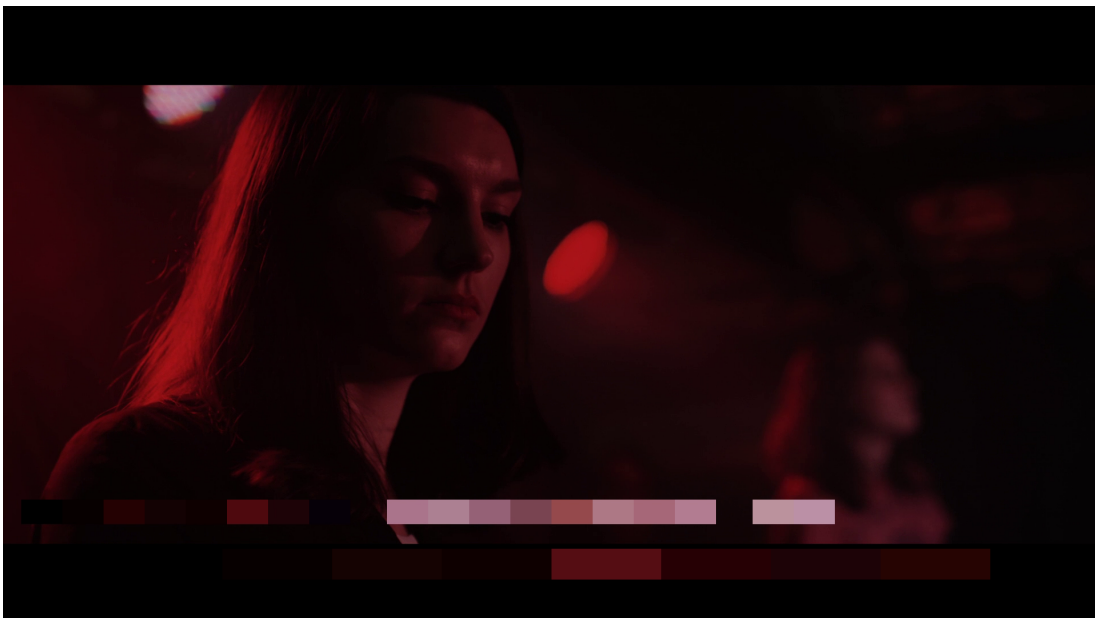


Figure 21. Muted colour palette in the concert scene 2.

Following a flash of blinding light in the concert scene, and also the final scene of the film, Nate awakens as the David alter ego in a psychologist's home office and it is revealed that the main events of the film occur with David/Nate under hypnosis, Figure 24. In the windows, we added coloured cellophane to wash multi-coloured tones in the scene. The bright colours in the room create an association with the colour palette of the preceding concert scene which implies an ambiguity to the ending and whether it is the "real" world.



Figure 22. Vibrant colour palette of the concert scene 1.

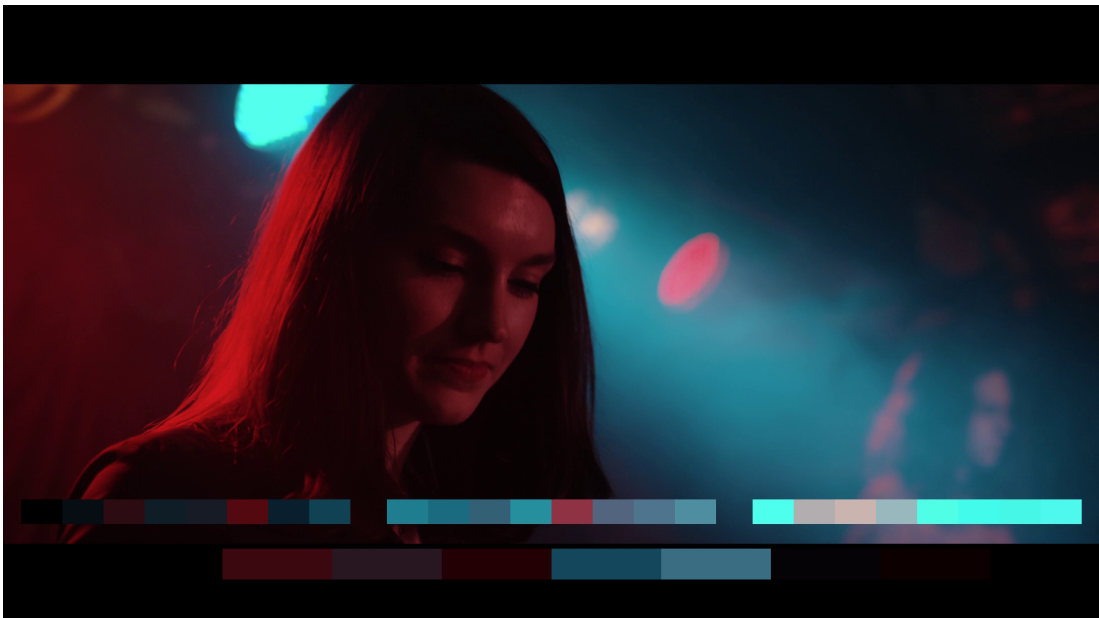


Figure 23. Vibrant colour palette of the concert scene 2.



Figure 24. Final scene of the film which used coloured cellophane to enhance the background.

Finally, digital colour grading in post-production was important as it allowed me to further enhance and manipulate the colours which helped to fulfil visually the hyperreal fanciful moments in the film. As part of this process, I also added warmth to the naturalistic tones of the house scenes to bring a better consistency between the significantly different tone of the other scenes in the film with saturated colours.

In the Reflections (Chapter Five), I will examine and provide my reflections on the key visual design aspects of the film.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections

In this chapter I will present a reflection on the following subjects that became fundamental to my research and creative work: visuals; visual hooks and gesture; alter ego; and narrative. In particular, I will focus on the visual methods I employed in analysing my film. Further to this, I will discuss my reflections on the effectiveness of my methodology.

As detailed in the section on visuals in Chapter Four (The Creative Work), colour and lighting are used to stylise elements of the film, such as the bright spinning sparkling lights behind the psychic, or the red and blue neon accentuated colours in the *Pressure* scene, to create a hyperreal environment. I also explored the concept of colour being a narrative device and the concert scene is an illustration of this. In this scene, when the David alter ego changes back to the Nate Nixon alter ego and the colour palette goes from muted red and black to saturated red and blue, this is an example of the film's colour palette being an important supporting function for the change in character. Rabiger and Hurbris-Cherrier (2013) highlight that visual design "can cadence the movie by color and lighting design in step with the mood of the story and character" (p. 290) and while I agree with this statement, I think this understates the significance that visual design had on my film. The visuals were a critical component that worked in conjunction with and strengthened the narrative and character development, and I examine this further in the Narrative section below and visually in Figures 32-34. Figure 25 provides a colour palette overview for the entire film. It displays a visual summary of the colour palette for each of the scenes. Representing them together enabled me to see how they related to each other and provided a visual snapshot for the film that is challenging to observe when watching the frames of a film move by at rapid speed. The colour palette overview was useful in showing patterns, connections and themes between the key scenes and part of my data analysis methodology as outlined in Chapter 3. As an example, for scenes that have dialogue and no music, the colour palette is naturalistic as represented in screenshots 1 and 5. In contrast, screenshots 2, 4, 6, 9 are scenes that feature music performance or music playing and the Nate Nixon alter ego and hence the neon colour palette is reflected in these shots. I found this visual method of data analysis

very effective as it enabled me to visualise relationships between scenes all in one simple view. From my perspective, this was a revelation in terms of how useful this would have been to have had before filming. I will detail further my plans for using these visual design methods in future projects in the Narrative section below.

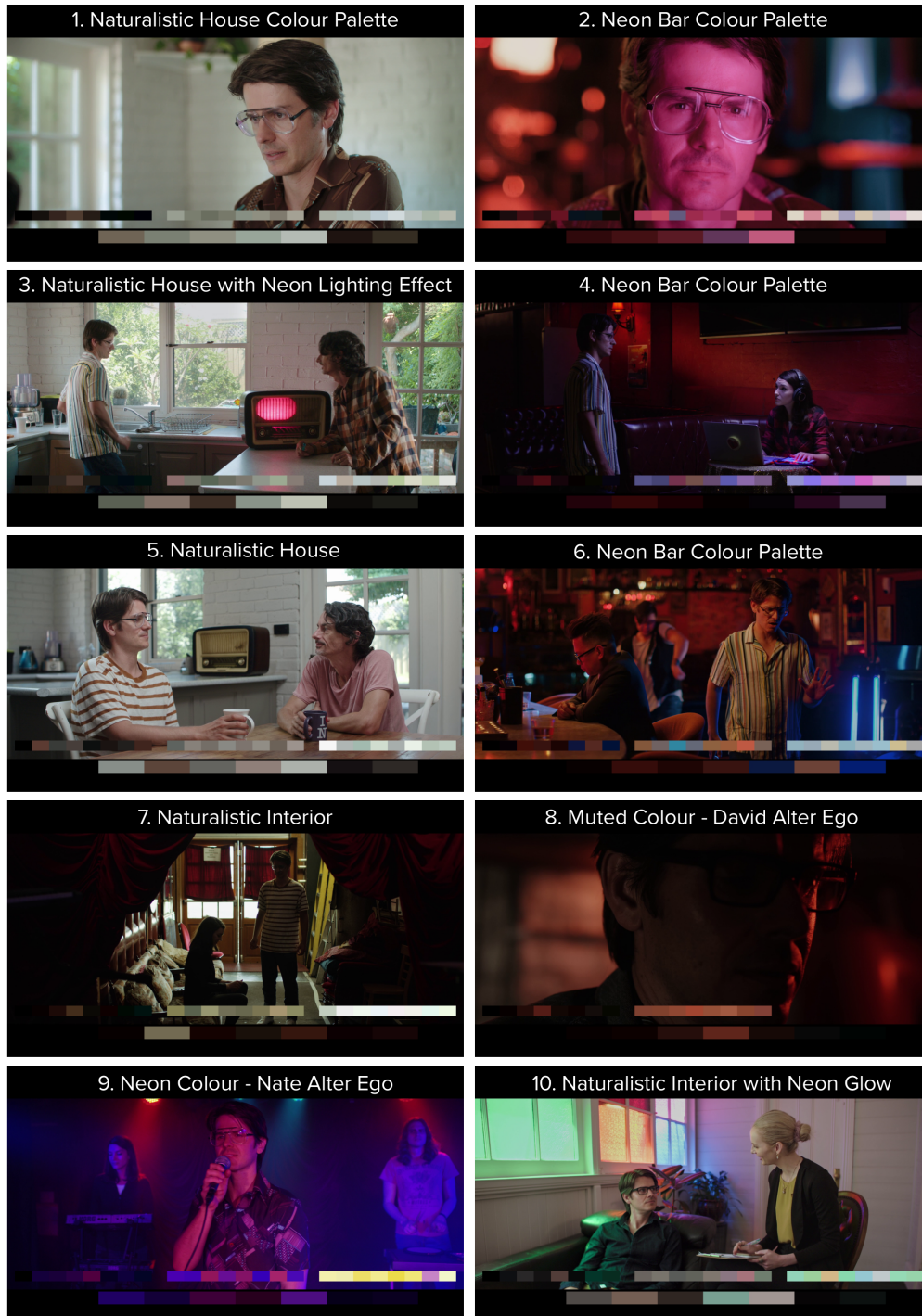


Figure 25. Colour palette overview.

In my review of the literature on visual hooks and gesture, the two key concepts that I presented were that physical gestures in music videos are employed to

augment musical hooks, citing Vernallis (2004), and gesture in music performance is integral to the overall performance for the audience, citing Shephard and Leonard (2014). There are several instances of how I employed visual hooks and gestures in my short film, and I will provide my reflections on these in the below passages. In addition, I will provide further insight into the relationship between audio and visuals in the audiovisual form.

The first performance scene which featured the song, *Pressure*, employed visual hooks and gestures to support the soundtrack. The song features the lyrics, “press repeat and play” and “stuck in a loop like a sample in a song”. In this performance scene, the choreography was built around repeated movements to underscore the concept of repetition and looping in the lyrics. There are a number of examples of this. First, Figure 26 had a woman working behind the bar bringing the glasses down with the beat of the song, and this was repeated in the scene. Second, Figure 27, had a man seated at the bar repeatedly raising his hand in the same way for bar service several times. Third, Figure 28 had the Nate Nixon character walking back and forth with robotic movements in a somewhat trance-like state. Figure 29 showed Nate at the bar singing the lyrics “it’s in my bones oh yeah”, at the same moment the character grabs his wrist with his other hand to reinforce the sung words with a visual gesture.



Figure 26. Pressure scene 1.

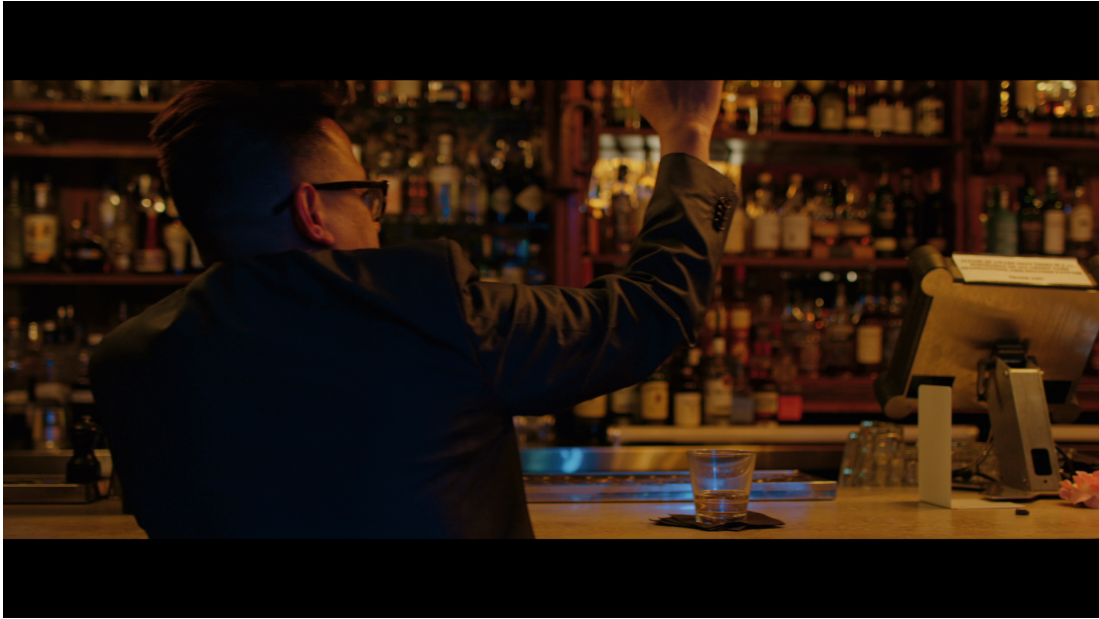


Figure 27. Pressure scene 2.

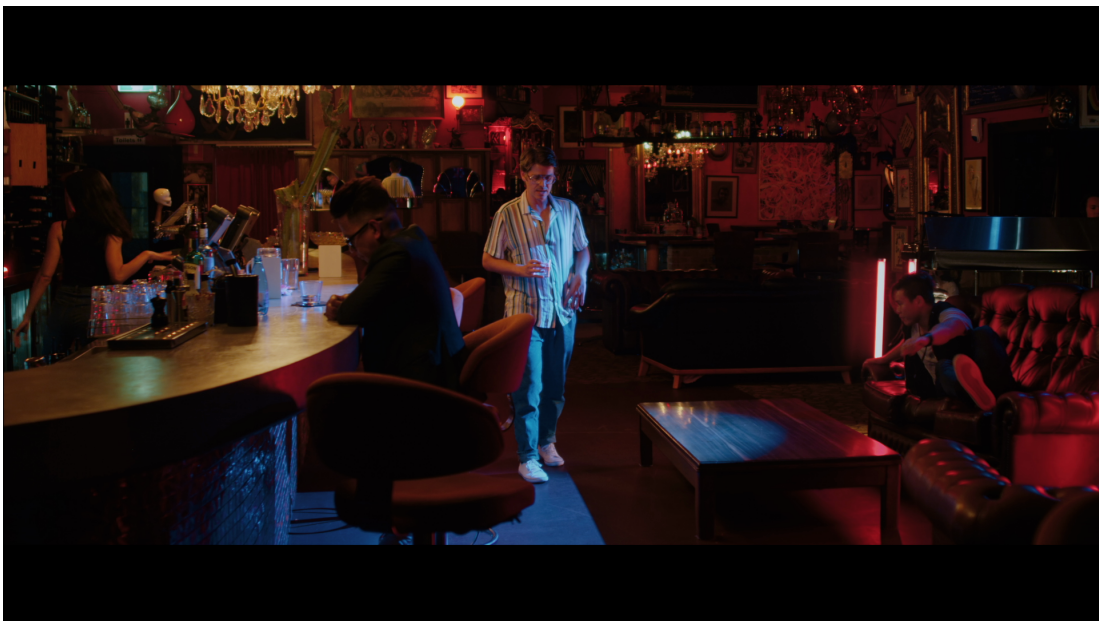


Figure 28. Pressure scene 3.



Figure 29. Pressure scene 4.

In the concert scene featuring the song *You Can't Bring Me Down*, Figure 30, David puts on Nate's eighties glasses, a visual cue signifying the change from David Ciura to Nate Nixon, and at this time the film's colour palette transforms from muted black and red to vibrant colours. Further to this, one of the hooks in the song is "cause you've got me spinning round and round and round", and to support this I used a hand gesture which has my arm spinning around in a circular motion which is repeated as this lyric is sung, Figure 31. The use of visual reinforcement has been commonly used in music video for example where "the hook for Naughty by Nature's "Hip Hop Hooray" is accompanied with hands waving in the air" (Vernalis, 2004, p. 204). The visual hook in *Hip Hop Hooray* is very effective in underscoring the musical hook and the combined effect contributes to making this a memorable music video and I believe this significantly attributed to its success as a pop music release. In examination of my film, and in particular the *Pressure* scene, I consider that the visual hooks and gestures combined with the musical hooks made the scene more dynamic and was effective in adding energy to the audiovisual form.



Figure 30. Concert scene sunglasses gesture.



Figure 31. Concert scene spinning hand gesture.

Michel Chion's (2019) extensive work on the relationship between sound and vision in audiovisual media further underscores the characteristics of the combined form. Chion's research further reinforces the work I reference above by Vernalis, Shepard and Leonard, and what I observed in the reflection of my creative work. Chion defines the term *synch point*, which is "in an audiovisual sequence, the most salient moment of synchronous meeting between a concomitant audio moment and visual moment ... a moment where the effect of synchresis is most marked and

accentuated, creating emphasis” (Chion, 2019, p. 209). The term *synchresis* was coined by Chion and refers to the “psychophysiological phenomenon arising in the neural pathways, which consists in perceiving as a single phenomenon occurring both visually and acoustically” (Chion, 2019, p. 211). When sound and vision are combined they can bring about something in each other that can not be observed in separate parts. Together they can emphasise key moments, make the work more dynamic, define the rhythm, and evoke strong emotional responses. Through my investigation, I concur that the combined effect of sound and vision is transformative and the two reinforce one another creating an enhanced media form.

Relating to my research topic of *Creating a Visual Narrative for My Music*, and the relationship between visuals and sound, Shephard and Leonard state that in “the analysis of performance, it can be argued that gesture, image, and sound stem from the same process of musical expression” (2014, p. 146) and that “acknowledging the importance of these aspects and their interconnectedness, and investigating them simultaneously rather than considering them as separate elements, is essential to an understanding of how people make sense of music” (2014, p. 151). As part of my plans for the release of my music and short film, I am contemplating how I will present this in a live format. One approach is to have the short film shown and distributed separate from the live musical performance. However, I am also now considering how to produce a multi-layered show which incorporates the short film and live performance, which brings it more in line with the argument put forward by Shephard and Leonard. This would involve screening the film, with the music components of the soundtrack removed, and the music performed live off-stage and in-sync with the film. Following the short film and live performed soundtrack, the show would feature additional songs played live to close the performance.

The Nate Nixon alter ego was originally conceived as being an unpredictable and carefree character. As someone that personally values being disciplined and structured in real life, playing a character like Nate Nixon felt quite liberating and to some extent, it felt as if I was stepping outside myself or at least into an altered version of myself. This was further supported by subtle visual differences through eighties clothing and glasses and growing my hair longer than it would normally be so it could be styled to suit the eighties era. For me to be styled as Nate Nixon felt like I was wearing a costume and though subtle it aided my transformation. Playing this alternate and fictional version of myself through the character of Nate Nixon

supported my confidence in my acting performance. While artists such as Bowie experimented with illicit drugs and extravagant costumes this is not something I employed in my process. Bowie referred to his personas as a channel to express his “repressed ego qualities” (Leorne, 2015, p. 121) and “by becoming someone else, ... able to see the world and talk/sing about it through a different point of view, projecting things that he would have never had as David Bowie” (Leorne, 2015, p. 121). As a means of expression, I believe the Nate Nixon alter ego aided my performance, however, I would not say the alter ego represents an entirely different point of view from my real persona. In the early phase of my project, I laid the framework that Nate Nixon would have some visual differences as outlined above, and I had visualised the alter ego to be more outrageous and brash, but not to the extent of the alter egos created by David Bowie. To think quantitatively, if Bowie’s alter ego creations were considered a full 10/10, my original intent for Nate Nixon would have been a 5/10, but in the end, I think I ended up with closer to 3/10. The 3/10 score is reflective of the Nate Nixon alter ego not being as audacious as I imagined, and the visual side, such as clothing and hair not as wild as intended. In review of the film, my performance, and the character itself, I believe it is more accurate to call Nate Nixon an embellishment of my real persona, and not quite the transformation I had intended. Visually my changes were subtle, so more in keeping with Dylan in that respect, but the personal and fictional narratives he employed were often intertwined and this is as part of his mystique with the public. Nate Nixon for me is a performance identity and I found it creatively inspiring in my film project, but it is separate from my personal life. In terms of my research and applying an alter ego for my project, while not quite achieving my intent in terms of character, it was still an interesting investigation in terms of what an alter ego can facilitate, which I will expand upon below.

In my review of the literature, I discussed personas as being a performance enabler for Bowie, and I would agree with that in my case for two reasons: firstly, the music I created for the Nate Nixon persona was unlike the music I had created previously and writing for a character that came from a past era was inspiring and this influenced the style and genre of the music I created. Further to this, the events that unfold in the film’s narrative inspired the lyrical content of the songs. It is important to highlight that the Nate Nixon alter ego provided me inspiration to compose and write for, but I would not say that I had difficulty writing as myself as

asserted by Bowie. Secondly, and discussed earlier, I felt that playing the Nate Nixon character in my film was an enabler for my performance and gave me an enhanced level of confidence that I would not have had otherwise. In addition, it would be reasonable to say that in the musical performance parts of the film, such as the concert scene, I felt more comfortable acting due to my previous experiences performing as a singer on stage, however, for the non-musical parts which I had limited acting experience, I believe acting as a different character supported my performance. Following a viewing of my film with the cast and crew, one of the actors in the film, Joe Tomarchio, who I had played with in a band before, said he thought my acting felt very natural and that I had performed well for my first acting role in a short film. He asked me what it was that most helped my performance. First, I explained the rehearsals with the other main actors, Michael Wheatley (Michael) and Georgia Davies (Leigh), was important as they are experienced actors and practising our scenes beforehand made me feel more comfortable and confident with my performance. Second, and linking back to what I discussed earlier on performance, I explained that acting as another character and wearing the character's eighties clothes, made the performance and transition to Nate Nixon feel natural for me.

In regard to creating the alter ego, Nate Nixon, character-centric mannerisms and gesture are subjects I would like to investigate further in character development for future films and musical performances. Taylor positions that “we should be cognizant of personalized attunements to an actor’s gestural particularities—especially recurring or iconic ones” (2012, p. 4). In one respect, I would like to develop further the physical movements and nuances of my characters to give them unique and memorable features. This would be supported by applying different acting and performance techniques and experimentation in dance and costume. In terms of cinematography, I would like to focus further on capturing the physical gestures and movements of the characters to make sure these are more distinguishable. This objective of better capturing character gesture also applies to visual hooks used to complement the music and ensuring that these visuals have the prominence they require.

The short film medium also enabled me to reflect on narrative structure and the value of succinctness in screen media. My film followed a fictional cause-and-effect narrative. During the development of the narrative, some of the scenes I had



written were based on real-life events but after reviewing the script, I ended up removing these scenes as they were deemed not essential to the narrative. What started as fifteen scenes ended up being twelve, and removing the inessential scenes allowed the story to be more streamlined and to convey the key themes more efficiently. Rabiger and Hubris-Cherrier highlight the need to be efficient in short films, “every element must have an especially strong reason to be included, and everything probably contributes more than one aspect to the story” (2013, p. 70). An example of this in my film is where Nate talks to Michael about having a successful gig with his new band member, Leigh, and also his meeting with a band manager named Barry Cutler. In the earlier drafts of my script, I had a scene with Nate and Leigh performing at a gig and also a scene with the aforementioned band manager. In development meetings with my DP we both agreed to trim certain scenes such as the example above, and instead of having Nate talk about these events as an alternative rather than filming them enabled more economical storytelling.




Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the concept of colour being a narrative device and provided an example of this where the colour palette changes when the David alter ego changes back to the Nate alter ego. In this section, I will provide a visual overview of how the visual palette, synaesthesia, visual hooks and gesture, alter ego and character, and narrative relate together in my film. I have always considered myself a visual thinker. Although I had not previously directed or written a short film before, I have been involved in the creative process for the music videos produced for my music releases in the past, and I have designed album cover art, gig posters, and been involved in website design. My visual way of thinking is also demonstrated in this exegesis and I have summarised my literature review using visual mapping to arrive at the six elements of my conceptual framework, Figure 9. When writing this Reflections chapter, I began analysing the visual imagery of my film and did this by taking snapshots of the colour palette from key scenes of the film. I then laid them out together in what I call the colour palette overview, Figure 25. Through my research and in writing this Reflections chapter, the interconnectedness of research areas became more apparent. To demonstrate how the research areas are connected and to provide a visual and narrative overview of my film I created Figures 32-34, which are visual and narrative journey maps. During pre-production, I created black and white storyboards for all the scenes and also discussed film influences and visual aesthetics with the DP. In reflection having

visual and narrative journey maps at the pre-production stage would have been very beneficial in achieving my end goal. Having screenshots of a film in pre-production is not possible but I could have coloured the storyboards, used coloured swatches or screenshots from films with similar colour palettes as a replacement. Much of the planning that the DP and I did before the shoot was through marking up the script with comments and preparing a shot list plan. Having this visual and narrative map at the pre-production stage for discussion with the DP would have been ideal for my film and this is something I would apply for future film productions.

Narrative	Act I: The Setup		
Alter Ego	Nate Nixon		
Music	Intro Song: "1987"	Background Music: "Disco's Bad"	Background Music: "This Is Your Night"
Visuals / Musical Short Film	<p>1. Naturalistic House Colour Palette</p> 	<p>2. Neon Bar Colour Palette</p> 	

Figure 32. Visual and narrative journey map of Act I.

Narrative	Act II: Rising Action	
Alter Ego	Nate Nixon	
Music	Song: "Turn"	Background Music: "Dance, Boogie & Repeat"
Visuals / Musical Short Film	3. Naturalistic House with Neon Lighting Effect 	4. Neon Bar Colour Palette 

Narrative Structure	Act II: Rising Action	
Alter Ego	Nate Nixon	
Music	Song: "Pressure"	
Visuals / Musical Short Film	5. Naturalistic House 	6. Neon Bar Colour Palette 
Visual Hooks		



Narrative Structure	Act II: Rising Action	
Alter Ego	David Ciura	
Music	Song: "You Can't Bring Me Down"	
Visuals / Musical Short Film	7. Naturalistic Interior 	8. Muted Colour - David Alter Ego 

Figure 33. Visual and narrative journey map of Act II.



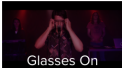

Narrative Structure	Climax			Act III: Resolution		
Alter Ego	Nate Nixon		David Ciura	Nate Nixon		
Music	Song: "You Can't Bring Me Down"			Song: "You Can't Bring Me Down" (Reprise)		
Visuals / Musical Short Film						
Visual Hooks						

Figure 34. Visual and narrative journey map of Act III.

Throughout this chapter, I have provided reflections on the methodologies I employed. I would like to reassert the importance of continuous feedback and refinement in the writing of this exegesis as outlined by Skains in his practice-based research methodology. Revisiting and reviewing new literature related to my topic was essential in exploring further my area of research and the refinement of my research question. In terms of data sources, making the film was critical as it provided me with a visual and audio creative work to write my reflections on. If I had not experienced the process of making the film myself, I do not believe I would have gained the insights and knowledge that I did. In addition, acting in the film and playing an alter ego was an enlightening experience and enabled my performance as summarised previously in the Alter Ego section. The other data sources that were key were my journals. They were important in recording in detail the key moments in the production of my film. I repeatedly referred back to my journals during the writing of my reflections and it was an important source as it meant I did not have to rely on my recollections of the events. Finally, in analysing the data, as discussed in detail in the Visuals and Narrative sections above, I found a visual method of comparing the colour palettes against other characteristics in the film to be fundamental in forming my reflections.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Before embarking on my research project, I considered music and visuals to be more separate forms. Music would be produced, and the visual side would be more or less an adornment or a consideration that occurs after the music is completed. In contrast, I began *Who is Nate Nixon?* with some instrumental music with an outline of lyrical ideas and in parallel I wrote a narrative structure for a musical short film for my musical alter ego, Nate Nixon. The different modes of creative production also informed one another. For example, writing the script gave me inspiration for the lyrics and, the two key songs from the film, *Pressure* and *You Can't Bring Me Down*, had a direct influence on the visuals of those scenes. The rhythms and structure of the music and the lyrical content had a significant effect on the visual hooks, gesture and choreography in the scenes they were used in. There was substantial consideration regarding the type of music used and how it would fit with the given scene of the film, including scenes without musical performance but requiring background music. During the production of the film, I had to make shorter edits of the main songs to suit the length required for their respective scenes and the choreography and movements in the performance scenes of the film were dependent on the tempo and rhythms of the music. The examples above from my project illustrate the interplay between music and visuals and how closely they are connected.

In my literature review, I arrived at six components that made up the conceptual framework that shaped the look and sound of my musical short film. In the *Reflections* chapter I concluded:

1. Playing the Nate Nixon alter ego—an alternate fictional version of myself—combined with the subtle visual styling changes, was a positive experience and a performance enabler. It aided my acting performance and also inspired the writing of the film's narrative, music and lyrics;
2. It is more accurate to call Nate Nixon an embellishment of my real persona, and not quite the transformation I intended. I plan to continue to explore the Nate Nixon alter ego character and further develop character-centric

mannerisms, the visual styling of the character and dance and movement to make the character more divergent from my real persona.

3. Inspired by my exploration of the intersection of visuals and audio, I plan to present my film and live music performance in a mixed-media performance.
4. The visuals in my short film are a critical component that strengthen the narrative and character development. The Nate Nixon alter ego, the condition of synaesthesia and music performance are supported and embellished by the film's visual design, in particular the colour palette.
5. Visual hooks and gestures underscore the musical hooks to make the music more prominent and memorable.
6. The combined effect of sound and vision is transformative and the two reinforce each other to create an enhanced media form.
7. In the short film format working with key collaborators in pre-production is critical in ensuring only essential scenes are part of the narrative and economical storytelling is achieved.
8. Continuous feedback and refinement are critical, in particular revisiting and reviewing new literature related to my topic was essential in exploring my area of research and refining my research question.
9. In terms of data sources, making the film was critical as it provided me with a visual and audio creative work to write my reflections on and without it, I would have not gained the insights and knowledge that I did. Secondly, my journals were important in recording in detail the key moments in the production of my film and it was an important source in writing my reflections.
10. I found my visual method of comparing the colour palettes of the key scenes to be effective in analysing the characteristics of my film. The visual and narrative journey maps I created which visualised the changes in narrative, alter ego, music and visual hooks and gestures, were very insightful in representing how all the elements of my film worked and relate to each other. Based on how effective I found using this in my research, this is a method I intend on applying in future film productions.

Whilst music can evoke different visual responses in individuals in their imaginations, the colour, lighting and visual considerations in my film enrich the musical short film and make it more than the sum of the two parts. What I have learnt from my research and creative project is that in my practice, music and visuals are not divergent elements pieced together to make one form: the music and visual side are directly related to each other and when united together can make something special.

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