Empathy Is the Devil: Employing Conventions and Themes of Early Cinema in Contemporary Practice

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature of Candidate

Date ____________________________ 31.08.16
ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, the international screen has witnessed a revival of silent cinema techniques. Eighty or so years after the advent of the talkies, titles such as France's *The Artist* (Hazanavicius, 2011), Spain’s *Blancanieves* (Berger, 2012), Australia's *Dr. Plonk* (de Heer, 2007), Portugal’s *Tabu* (Gomes, 2012) and Argentina’s *La Antena* (Sapir, 2007) have drawn on a palette of almost forgotten techniques to great effect. While each might be read as an homage to this foundational period in cinema history, the filmmakers’ objective has not been to remake silent films or to reject modern digital modes of filmmaking, but to reinvigorate the rich and varied ways by which stories may be told on film.

_Empathy Is the Devil_ is a 12.5-minute silent black-and-white film strongly featuring dance, the themes of which include addiction, mental health, and homelessness. The film’s protagonist, who is at odds with the modern world, suffers a curious addiction: a daily pressure to give to charity more than he can afford. He finds solace in a nostalgic past in which property is freely shared and wealth is not the ultimate goal.

In keeping with many films of the silent era, the project addresses social issues both subtly and overtly, using humour and pathos. Importantly, the film revisits the close collaborations of modern dance and film, two art forms that emerged alongside each other in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as witnessed by one of the earliest films *Carmencita* (Dickson, 1894). Each discipline contributed in a fundamental way to the development of the other: film looked to dance for an exploration and understanding of movement, while the filming of modern dance both authenticated this new art form and provided another platform for its expression. An example of this is the work of Loie Fuller, creator of the *Danse Serpentine* [*Serpentine Dance*] (Lumière, 1896), whose innovations in

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1It is very difficult to confirm actual footage of Fuller performing this dance. She is
staging and lighting influenced early film techniques. After their foundational phases, however, the two disciplines drifted apart.

In *Empathy Is the Devil*, dance is employed for twin purposes: to reinvest dance and film with an equal and collaborative partnership, neither one at the service of the other; and to drive the narrative, by allowing the protagonist’s inner thoughts to be expressed through choreographed movement. *Empathy Is the Devil* utilises the silent era cinema techniques of inter-titles, iris transitions, and a reactive score. It also draws on elements of melodrama and broad slapstick to offer the viewer a cultural/historical link to the silents’ glorious past, even daring to invoke Chaplin and, by extension, the social issues with which he engaged, such as: addiction, and society’s treatment of the poor and the socially awkward.

In this doctorate I pursue the questions: What intersections can be found between the advent of modern dance and early cinema? How might the now anachronistic techniques of early silent, black and white cinema be reinvigorated in contemporary screen practice? And how might early cinema techniques be used to elicit empathy today for social themes that hark back to the 1920s and 30s but are still live issues? What role might dance now play in realising such narratives? Overall, the objective has been to devise a film complex enough to reward the cineaste and simple enough to be enjoyed by the public as a visual/aural feast.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Although early cinema conventions are no longer in common use, the popularity of recent films dubbed ‘New Silent Cinema’ has shown that contemporary audiences respond with enthusiasm to supposedly obsolete techniques, and, I argue, their use provides a conduit to a particular era collectively and fondly recalled through black-and-white photography and silent films.

My doctorate has two parts: *Empathy Is the Devil*, a 12.5-minute, black-and-white, silent film, and this accompanying exegesis. I recommend reading the exegesis first, as it explores the film, its objectives, and how it relates and contributes to its specific field of filmmaking. *Empathy Is the Devil* features dance, which has been employed to speak to the protagonist’s inner journey, his unspoken self.

The story follows an overly generous man who becomes addicted to giving. He is at odds with his environment, living in a fast-paced near future, and retreating in his mind to a nostalgic past, a time when he believes giving and sharing were free and easy. His plethora of pledges soon leads to debt, unemployment, and homelessness. After suffering a breakdown and losing everything of importance in his outward reality, he finds that only his physical circumstances have changed, not his true generous and giving nature, a realization which is brought to life in the final dance sequence.

While making a comment on today’s society by way of the past, my hope is to help reinvigorate the techniques and tropes of silent film, and to encourage filmmakers to unite technologies of a bygone era with those in operation today, effectively widening their options in theme, technology, and story. According to David Pierce’s 2013 Library of Congress report on silent films, 75% of those made between 1912 and 1929 have been lost. Work is underway to preserve what is left and to archive them for the future: ‘Few art forms emerged
as quickly, came to an end as suddenly, or vanished more completely than the silent film” (Pierce, 2013). It has been a key objective of this research to draw attention to the narrative affordances and unique aesthetics of silent film as both creative endeavor and homage to these foundational films.

My doctorate has been driven by an inquiry into early cinema techniques and their emphasis on movement and gestural storytelling, as popularised by movie stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. It questions whether the utilisation of early cinema techniques such as a black and white treatment, title cards and music indicative of the era can, by way of nostalgia, bridge the gap between past and present in order to view social issues that are as relevant now as then — namely, homelessness and financial insecurity; social instability and itinerancy; alcoholism and drug addiction — issues that were central to the work of Chaplin and others. In this research, I examine how influential dance was to cinema’s development, and in what ways dance can be employed in contemporary film as a narrative device to explore a character’s inner/emotional journey.

This exegesis asserts that movement was fundamental to cinema’s development, that dance had a legitimate place in film, not just on film. With regard to their etymological roots, dance and film share almost interchangeable descriptions. Paul T. Burns (2010), on his website The History of the Discovery of Cinematography, provides the etymology of cinema as follows: “‘Kinema’-toscope … derived from the Greek word kinema-matos meaning the science of pure motion.” The ‘science of pure motion’ could also be used to describe dance. The Online Etymology Dictionary tells us the word choreography was born in 1789, “from French choreographie, coined from the Latin form of Greek khoreia ‘dance’ … and graphein ‘to write’”. Dance writing and drawing motion are an interesting fit, both in their etymology and as expressed in their filmic partnership at a time of great artistic discovery, expansion, and cultural collaboration around the turn of the nineteenth century.
Some of the earliest films feature dance, such as the “first female on film”, *Carmencita* (Dickson, 1894) and the *Serpentine Dance* (Lumiére, 1896), variously performed on film by Loie Fuller, her student, vaudeville dancer and actress Annabelle Whitford, and others. Fuller was not only a pioneer in modern dance and choreography but also evidenced a keen sense for the nascent cinema, using her stage experimentations with fabric, lighting, and colour to create visual illusions for the camera. Fuller’s performance can be seen to embody early film’s raison d’être—to capture movement (Figure 1). As Erin Brannigan, author of *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (2011), observes, “… the dancer disappears into a play between recognition and abstraction where the only continuity is motion itself” (2011, p. 35). The topics of dance and cinema’s ‘sisterhood’, and film’s inherent need for motion, will be discussed later.

![Figure 1: Portrait of Loie Fuller by Frederick Glasier, 1902](image)

*Empathy Is the Devil* is about Otis, a man who, due to societal pressure to ‘fit in’,
becomes addicted to giving. He regresses into fantasy as a diversion from mounting debt until he succumbs to mental collapse. When Otis seeks help, he is rejected by the very system he has supported through his donations. However, once he accepts society’s rejection and is living as a beggar on the streets, he is finally truly free and finding joy in the simple ‘everyday’.

The majority of the film is set in Otis’ mind. His ideal is the 1920s, according to cultural symbols populated by a shared nostalgia. For Otis, this was a time of camaraderie, where life was simple and problems were shared amongst the community. Although the story is set in a dystopian near-future that is generic, intolerant and insistent, in his ‘ideal time’, Otis is comparatively rich and able to spare money for any and every one in need. Otis is overwhelmed by modern life and cannot control his anxiety, and because he is not a ‘talker’, he retreats to another (in his mind, gentler) time. His inner feelings are played out via dance; and he is alone in these scenes in all but the final dance sequence. In this, the Bread Dance, his wife Julia and another young man join him, indicating that he no longer suffers from the alienation that caused his breakdown. One of the challenges I faced was how to use dance to express the protagonist’s inner self as part of a bifurcated narrative alongside his outer persona; both Otis’ inner and outward personas were portrayed with rhythmic movement, regards his more solitary reflections, actor Dan Crestani’s dance training was stretched to its full capacity (Figure 2).

This exegesis consists of a literature review, five chapters, and four appendices that comprise, among other things, the film’s script. It provides an overview of my research into the history of early cinema and the relationship between nascent modern dance and film. Reference is made to many of the films that influenced my project, including films from the silent era, the ‘golden age of Hollywood’, as well as the recent spate of movies that are embracing early cinema tropes and techniques. Charlie Chaplin’s huge contribution to the
language of silent cinema, namely gesture and movement, will also be discussed, as this informs my project.

![Figure 2: Dan Crestani as Otis, using dance to create character. Empathy Is the Devil (film still) 2016](image)

The first chapter introduces my research and practice background, and reports on the development of the project since embarking on this degree. This chapter highlights the ideas and underlying issues of my screenplay as well as speaking to the process of bringing the film together, and the elements that were vital to its success. These include a desire to further explore movement, as I had been doing with boxing, but working towards the use of movement for storytelling, something that dance can offer in limitless ways. It also covers where the story came from and how it developed.

Chapter 2 explores my research questions, firstly regarding early cinema techniques and how these can be used to elicit empathy today for social themes that hark back to the 1920s and 30s, but are still relevant today. It discusses the decision to use early cinema techniques such as black-and-white and its subtle colour tones, no spoken dialogue, inter-titles, and iris transitions to create a mood of nostalgia, such that the audience might empathise with my protagonist’s reality. Otis finds refuge from his hardships by inhabiting an
ideal past, a surreal inner landscape where people helped each other and giving came easy. I thought it would be fitting to let the darkest parts of the film shine through the lightness and joy of dance, the social comment be heard through silence, and to let the black-and-white treatment offer a temporal distance for the viewer to approach as entertainment as much as a social issue film. Using both dance and early cinema tropes offered me greater scope to touch on challenging themes in a light-hearted way, and to widen my audience outside a strictly dance or art-film niche.

The silent era produced many socially conscious films that are aligned with the themes of my script — those of financial hardship, addiction, and a type of societal control imposed through moral pressure. Working with these ideas, I used silent film tropes and dance to tell an otherwise bleak story in an engaging way.

In this chapter, I consider the shared history of modern dance and cinema, and how modern dance helped shape cinema as entertainment and, more broadly the language of cinema itself, with its universally understood and frequently repeated gestures. Here I discuss the intersection of modern dance and early cinema, how the two were mutually beneficial up to a point, and how dance might still be incorporated into a contemporary film narrative as a powerful means of expression. As can be seen in Dance Films Association’s Dance and Media Timeline (2012), dance was prevalent in and on film from the earliest productions. Dance on film first appears in 1894 with a skirt dance by Ruth St. Denis, followed soon after by various Serpentine Dances from 1896 by Loie Fuller, Papinta, and their ilk. Ballet was first seen on screen in 1895 with footage of Swan Lake performed in St. Petersburg and in 1903, dance is incorporated into film narratives by cinema pioneers Georges Méliès and Edwin Porter, in The Magic Lantern and The Great Train Robbery respectively.

Chapter 2 also addresses the processes adopted by contemporary filmmakers working

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2 This updated timeline was based on a previous version that appeared in Mitoma, Zimmer, and Stieber (2002).
with anachronistic techniques on social issue films, in what has been termed ‘new silent cinema’. Films such as *The Artist* (2011), *Tabu* (2012), and *Blancanieves* (2012) have been worthy references in my quest to make a socially relevant and engaging film.

The non-dance scenes in *Empathy Is the Devil* were influenced by silent era rhythmic movement and gesture, so beautifully presented by luminaries such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. As Dan Kamin, author of *The Comedy of Charlie Chaplin: Artistry in Motion* (2011) explains, “The movement of Chaplin’s films is so carefully composed that it might fairly be said that his films are not so much directed as choreographed” (p. 155). Every scene in *Empathy Is the Devil*, dance and otherwise, was choreographed to give the film a definitive rhythm and a pace. I discuss in detail how the dances in my film were constructed from various filmic influences, from the title of the 1948 Anatole Litvak film *The Snake Pit* to a special effect in Danny Boyle’s *Trainspotting* (1996), and from Chaplin's ‘Oceana Roll Dance’ in *Gold Rush* (1925) to the mesmeric hands of Lutz Förster's dance in Wim Wenders’ *Pina* (2011).

Chapter 3 covers the production of Empathy is the Devil, from the initial idea to adapting the script, casting and further developing the story, to the challenges faced by a first time filmmaker collaborating with practitioners of a different discipline, neither of whom had any experience in the other’s domain. I also discuss the challenge of making a social issue film as a fantasy comedy/drama with dance.

I recount what inspired my film and its title, including its relation to empathy and cinema. Charities often engage fundraising companies to collect donations on their behalf that are sometimes unscrupulous in their strategies, targeting the vulnerable to give long-term pledges they cannot afford. I wanted to highlight this issue without smearing the act and importance of giving to charity, and so I chose to keep the film as light as possible. *Empathy is the Devil* has a message for those who wish to become involved with it, but it can also be
appreciated as a fun film about a man down on his luck who sees the good in everyone.

Chapter 4 explains the four movements—the major dance sequences that bookmark
the dramatic arc of the film. These were scripted physically by the choreographer and
dancer/s from visual references I provided as inspiration. Firstly, I titled the movements, to
offer the protagonist’s state of mind, and gave at least one iconic screen/film dance as a
foundation from which they could build the dances.

The first sequence, titled ‘The Clouds have no Ceiling’, presented Otis’ psychological
situation: that he is naively optimistic, he “walks on air”, and doesn’t spend a lot of time feet
firmly in reality. For how that should be physically represented, I offered the idea of a fantasy
dance that evokes Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and references Gene Kelly’s dance with a
mop in Thousand’s Cheer (1943) as well as Michael Powell’s mechanised doll/dancer who is
torn apart limb from limb in Tales of Hoffmann (1951).

The second dance movement, titled ‘Waking to the Black’, occurs after Otis has been
sacked from his job. He is starting to realise that his accruing debt is his own doing, and that
he needs to “wake up to himself”, as he no longer has an income to support his habit of
giving. The visual reference for this dance was Lutz Förster’s hand dance from Wim
Wenders’ Pina (2011). Although Förster’s dance is whimsical and light, it served as useful
inspiration to represent how Otis can no longer control his hands, they are searching in his
pockets of their own accord to seek out money to give, and this realization is disturbing for
him.

The third movement, called ‘The Snake Pit’, is taken directly from the title of Anatole
Litvak’s film of 1948. Now deep into his addiction, Otis is in a “pit of despair” in
succumbing to a breakdown. I gave no visual inspiration for this dance, instead asking only
that Otis’ attachment to the couch in his living room be the centrepiece, that the dance should
be contained in, on, or around this couch.
‘Negotiating a Comfy Spot in Hell’ was the final movement in the film. This is the scene in which Otis has reconciled with his addiction, deciding that to be generous is actually his nature, and that he doesn’t need money to contribute in life. The visual inspiration for this dance was the “Oceana Roll Dance” (variously titled and initially attributed to Fatty Arbuckle) from Chaplin’s Gold Rush (1925). I chose this dance because Chaplin’s persona was an inspiration for the character of Otis. I also wanted to allude to the metaphor of bread as money, and its role in connecting people as they ‘break bread’. The dance is inspired more by the cheekiness tone of the dance than its choreography. Here my protagonist, Otis, has come a long way in learning that sharing and family are much more valuable than a house and money.

Chapter 5 describes how the mise-en-scène was developed—the past and future ‘worlds’. I then talk about the moody score, and how the film was edited. A key reason that early cinema tropes were used as the foundation for this project was the nature of the protagonist's fantasy life and the surreal landscape that he inhabits. Surrealism was at the forefront of visual art in the 1920s; films such as Marcel Duchamp’s *Anemic Cinema* (1926), Hans Richter’s *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928) and Luis Bunuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) evidence the perfect fit between Surrealism and experimental film, while Surrealist elements were included in narrative films of the silent era, such as the futuristic landscape for Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927). The set for the protagonist’s home in *Empathy Is the Devil*, his 1920s’ ideal, was constructed as realistically as possible, with retro elements such as an old Kooka stove and an art deco lounge. The outside future world was realised through the drawings of Georgina Greenhill and heavily influenced by *Metropolis*.

The score developed over time. Initially, I wanted to bathe the entire film in the Gene Austin version of “My Blue Heaven” (Donaldson & Whiting, 1927) whose lyrics and melody encompassed the protagonist’s happy-go-lucky mindset. However, due to a protracted and
expensive process of rights acquisition, the idea was abandoned late in the production.

Finally, with the assistance of two composers, a songwriter, and two sound designers, the film is much richer for its original music and sound design, as discussed in closing Chapter 5.

In order for the film to be successful, the elements of dance and early cinema had to come together as authentic collaboration, not to imitate but to enliven, such as in the very first days of cinema, when film and modern dance were drawn to one another in mutual respect. My research has led me to understand how each enabled the other to flourish during their nascent years.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This exegesis traverses a number of topics and areas of inquiry. To contextualise *Empathy Is the Devil*, to unpack its significance and to identify the key concerns that have driven its genesis, it is necessary to discuss early cinema and the Hollywood silent film era—especially the social issue films of the time; Chaplin’s work and the silent comedies; early cinema’s connection to modern dance—as well as contemporary silent films from the last decade.

Both early cinema and dance are well covered in literature, but dance in early cinema, and contemporary silent film, are less well-researched. I do not claim expertise in these areas, yet my film and this exegesis can be seen to contribute to knowledge in the consideration and production of dance and early cinema tropes for contemporary narrative cinema.

Other filmmakers’ work are my key sources, while film scholars such as Tom Gunning and David Bordwell have been invaluable to my investigation into early cinema. Gunning (2006, p. 384) coined the expression “cinema of attractions” (in part, a nod to Sergei Eisenstein’s use of the term for a theatre which caused “sensual psychological impact”) (Gunning, 2006) to differentiate films that were made prior to 1906 and purely for the sake of exhibition, in which the story “provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of cinema” (2006, p. 383). With *Empathy Is the Devil*, I hoped to utilise the spectacle of dance for its impact and appeal, and importantly, as a narrative device for the expression of emotion. Bordwell’s blog, *Observations on Film Art*, and a book he co-authored with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985), have provided me with rich historical analysis of early cinema’s techniques and themes.

The employment of ‘trick film’ strategies in *Empathy Is the Devil*, such as intercutting
between a mop and a character, was influenced by the films of Georges Méliès’; for example, *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), *La Diable Noir [The Black Imp]* (1905), and his most famous film, *Le Voyage Dans la Lune [A Trip to the Moon]* (1902). These were influential in their utilisation of surreal imagery and disappearing, or transforming, characters. The original inspiration for the intercutting *Empathy is the Devil’s ‘Mop Dance’* was Michael Powell’s *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), specifically ‘Part 3: The Tale of Olympia’. In a scene as horrific as it is blackly comic, the doll figure, as danced by Moira Shearer, is literally pulled apart and then beheaded (Hall, 2016).

The work of Chaplin in *The Kid* (1921), *Gold Rush* (1925), and *City Lights* (1931) provided direct inspiration for my main character, Otis, as did Buster Keaton’s performance in *The General* (1926), which Keaton co-directed with Clyde Bruckman. Both Chaplin’s ‘Little Tramp’ (Figure 3) and Keaton’s Johnnie Gray evidence an unwavering optimism, allowing these characters to become accidental heroes despite their lack of social stature, wealth, and bravery.

![Figure 3: Charlie Chaplin, eternally optimistic in City Lights (film still) 1931](image)

Along with Chaplin’s ‘Tramp’ persona and skillful clumsiness, whose influence is peppered throughout *Empathy Is the Devil*, specific choreographed sequences from his films provided
inspiration. The ‘globe’ scene from *The Great Dictator* (1940) (Figure 4)\(^3\) and the *ModerTimes* factory sequence (1936)\(^4\) are both meticulously crafted performances of rhythmic movement, and provided impetus for the creative staging and implementation of *Empathy Is the Devil’s* non-dance scenes.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 4:** Charlie Chaplin displays graceful movement in *The Great Dictator* (film still) 1940

Although the similarities are subtle, the final dance from my film, the Bread Dance, has as its foundation Chaplin’s famous ‘Oceana Roll Dance’ from *The Gold Rush* (Chaplin, 1925).\(^5\) For the finale, and indeed the entire film, I decided to use silent cinema tropes, a recognisable character-type from that era, and a black-and-white treatment, as ways to establish parallels between past and present, and to afford a safe distance with which to consider contemporary social issues within a past concerned with similar social ills.

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3 A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (nebelppa, 2014).
4 A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (Jensen-Sharp, 2015).
5 A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (sanchopanzavive, 2010).
Kay Sloan and Steven J. Ross both highlight the prevalence of social issue films in the silent cinema era. Sloan’s book *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (1988) is an exhaustive record of silent films that cover issues such as female worker conditions and the union movement, as seen in The American Federation of Labor’s *Labor's Reward* (1925); the suffragette movement, including an amusing British short *A Suffragette In Spite of Himself* (1912), directed by Ashley Miller, in which a pair of cheeky kids pin a 'Votes for Women' sign on the back of an anti-suffragette gentleman’s coat; child labour in *Children Who Labor* (1912) (another Miller film), featuring the line “hunger is a universal language”; itinerant orphans in films such as Chaplin’s *The Kid* (1921); and the issue of loan sharks taking advantage of vulnerable people, with the example of Charles Brabin’s *The Usurer's Grip* (1912).

Indeed, the themes of the social issue silents are diverse: drug and alcohol dependence and the subsequent ruination of families can be seen in Griffith's *What Drink Did* (1909), and Chaplin’s *One A.M.* (1916) and *The Cure* (1917), and immigrants hopeful of a better life in America in *The Immigrant* (Chaplin, 1917). Chaplin imbued as much social and political comment into this and his other early comedies, such as *Work* (1915) (Figure 5), as he did with his later more widely known films, such as *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940).

![Image of Charlie Chaplin in *Work* (film still) 1915](image)

In both *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (1998) and *Movies and American Society* (2002), Ross examines the ways in which cinema can be seen to steer the social and cultural landscape of various eras. Ross argues that movies
were designed from their earliest incarnations to influence people's political and moral codes. Movies, he says, “were never just a medium of entertainment” (2002, p. 1). Rather, they:

...teach us how to think about race, gender, class, ethnicity and politics. And they do so in a way that penetrates our consciousness far more effectively than most things we read or hear in the classroom. (2002, p. 1)

With the recent predominance of social media, movies no longer appear to be the monolith of cultural influence they once were, yet the power they previously held is in no doubt. The silent era is long past, but it still holds sway in the popular consciousness of delightfully nonsensical comedy/ies, theatrical melodrama/s, and political commentaries, whether or not we remember the specifics of each film.

Regarding the shared origins of cinema and modern dance, my key sources are the work of Erin Brannigan, Senior Lecturer in Dance at the UNSW, Australia, and Carrie J. Preston, Associate Professor and Director, Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, USA. Brannigan’s Modern Movement, Dance and the Birth of Cinema (2011) and Preston’s essay “Posing Modernism: Delsartism in Modern Dance and Silent Film” (2009)\(^6\) testify to the evolution of modern dance in its involvement with early cinema.

Both authors agree that the emergence of film and modern dance was synergetic and mutually beneficial. The two nascent art forms engaged as equal partners up to a certain point, but as each discipline vied for significance, film gained momentum as more popular, perhaps in part buoyed by its association with and documentation of the other twentieth century arts and also by its status as investigative tool for the more ‘serious’ pursuits of the sciences and medicine (by way of pioneers such as Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey). Expressing perhaps a hint of remorse, Brannigan speaks of the collaborative possibilities of early cinema and dance:

\(^6\) Preston’s essay became a chapter of her later book Modernism’s Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance (Preston, 2011).
The odd snippet of silent film evokes a time when it was possible for choreographers working in the new fields of Modern theatre dance, and filmmakers working with the new technology of the cinematograph, to crossover with ease in collaborations and experiments. (2011, p. 19)

Loie Fuller, an ex-vaudeville performer whose contributions to early film are explored in Rhonda K. Garelick’s *Electric Salome* (2007), employed light in unprecedented ways in her dance performances, and for her auteur film *La Lys de la Vie [Lily of Life]* (1920). In this film, Garelick asserts, Fuller “did her most significant experimenting, deciding to incorporate film negatives into the scene” (p. 60). Such innovations as placing film negatives “so that the actor’s bodies were rendered transparent, more spiritlike than human… likely represents the first use anywhere of negative imaging” (p. 60). Fuller was also one of the first practitioners to use slow motion “for poetic ends” (p. 60). Her application of light and other such techniques was highly influential to artists in the Futurist and the Art Nouveau movements, yet she is rarely credited for the technological contributions she made to early cinema.

While dance is the foundation for my protagonist’s inner journey, rhythmic movement is the expression of Otis’ day-to-day persona. One film inspiration for this choreographed movement is *The General* (1926). Every scene in this film has a cadence that allows the viewer’s excitement to build with the unfolding of the story.

There is always an expectation with such great physical performers as Keaton that there will be acrobatics and slapstick comedy, and it delivers in spades, but *The General*, with its runaway train and runaway driver (Figure 6), has a wonderful rhythm that drives the whole plot in an unrelenting forward motion. I wanted the non-dance scenes of

![Figure 6: Buster Keaton as Johnnie Gray in The General (film still) 1926](image-url)
Empathy Is the Devil, such as when the charity collector’s adornments present Otis as a clown, and when Otis is accosted by beggars in the street, to have a similar rhythm throughout—to provide the impression that this man is racing to his inevitable demise.

In more recent times, there have been successful partnerships between dance and film that offer equal status to the choreographer/dancer/s and filmmakers. One such film is Mike Figgis’ A Co(te)lette Film (2010), choreographed by Ann Van den Broek. The dance was not designed for film, but Figgis, according to The Huffington Post’s Lisa Paul Streitfeld, “had to cross the line from observer to participant—pushing the dance itself in an entirely unknown direction” (2012). Figgis’ film engages the viewer in the way they would experience it were the performance live, while at the same time giving it a renewed purpose for the screen.

Filmed performances of events such as dance and theatre must have a reason to be flattened; the filming must add something, or, as Streitfeld suggests, change it in some way that gives it value as a film, not relegate it to being a ‘filmed performance’.

While it may be overstating a fact to say there is a genre called ‘contemporary silent films’—Roger Ebert tells us in his review of Blancanieves that “It’s too soon to declare a trend, but...” (2013)—the last ten years have undoubtedly witnessed the return of obsolete silent era techniques, employed in various and interesting ways. Silent Cinema’s Near Silent Comeback by Landan Palmer from filmschoolrejects.com (2013) comes close to labelling contemporary silent film a ‘movement’: “the New Silent Cinema, in practice, refers more to filmmakers’ embrace of a general set of long-abandoned techniques than an accurate redeployment of a former exhibition practice” (Palmer, 2013).

With the critical and in some cases commercial success of contemporary black-and-white and often silent films, including Blancanieves (Berger, 2012), The Artist

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7 The trailer may be seen on Vimeo (von Dongen, 2012).
8 The original review by Ebert in 2012 was reworked in this 2013 piece.
(Hazanavicius, 2011), *Tabu* (Gomes, 2012), *la Antena* (Sapir, 2007), and *Dr. Plonk* (de Heer, 2007), this ‘embrace’ has also encompassed filmmakers incorporating old values or themes into their work to ignite nostalgia in their audiences and to flex their creative muscle within the constraints of a limited palette. In a 2013 interview with *The Guardian*, Pablo Berger, director of *Blancanieves*, says of his work: “for me *Blancanieves* is valid if it only serves as a terrorist act, to remind directors what makes cinema an art form—visual storytelling, editing, music, those elements that were dominant before ‘moving images’ became 'talking pictures’” (Matheou, 2013).

Using early cinema techniques does more than offer a wider range of tools for filmmakers to create a point of visual difference. Virginie Sélavy, speaking with Alex Fitch for a podcast for alternative cinema magazine *Electric Sheep*, notes that something happens to an audience who are required to de-code a film without dialogue: they seem to concentrate more. She argues “the absorption of words through the eye rather than the ear has perhaps a greater effect on the subconscious. The viewer has to rely solely on visual interpretation, rather than cadence, for the meaning of language.” Inter-titles too, with their space and time limits, push the filmmaker to be selective with language. The titles must be concise and clear, and move the story forward. Not so much a replacement for spoken dialogue, inter-titles provide another level of meaning via cues to what has happened, or may happen, information that is not gleaned from the actors’ movements.

Canadian Guy Maddin is a prolific filmmaker who predominantly makes black-and-white silent films. Although making mostly experimental, even art films, he is a filmmaker who embraces the use of old-fashioned techniques.

It just seemed like making movies was like being a painter or a songwriter: you should be able to use any kind of words you wanted, or none at all, or any

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9 Although not strictly a silent film, *Tabu* is not only a nod to F. W. Murnau and Robert Flaherty’s docu-drama *1931* in name, but is also black-and-white, has minimal dialogue, and uses shots such as the camera slowly spinning around a character. According to film theorist Kristen Thompson, this technique was “pioneered in Germany in the mid-1920s” (Thompson, 2013).
Maddin’s love for silent era films is indicated in all his work, but he specifically targets lost films from 1898 to 1936 for his interactive online project Séances (2016). Maddin also directed the early cinema style ballet film Dracula, Pages from a Virgin’s Diary (2002), an adaptation of Bram Stoker’s Dracula that was performed by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.10 (Figure 7) Mike D’Angelo of the AV club suggests that “Maddin made not so much an adaptation of the ballet as just a silent Dracula in which the most charged emotions are conveyed via dancing” (2014). His unique approach to camera and editing take cinema from old to new and back again, and although D’Angelo indicates that the way that Maddin shot the dance sequences did not impress the ballet crowd because he “paid less attention to the

10 See Terror Oriental (2011) for a Youtube video of the trailer for this production.
fancy footwork or the plot than to creating a suitably vampiric mood…” (2014), his *Dracula* can be seen as an exemplary contemporary silent era dance film.

New Silent Cinema has continued to advance in interesting and varied ways, as evidenced by Stephen Page’s 2015 feature-length contemporary dance film *Spear*. Page is the Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, Australia, and a newcomer to feature film. Not strictly silent, the inclusion of some dialogue (about 5%, according to Page), makes it distinctive as a dance film, and allows the work to sit with other contemporary silents as narrative, however unconventional, expressed by characters primarily through dance and gesture more than dialogue.

Another example of cross-disciplinary filmmaking employing anachronistic techniques in a contemporary film is the forthcoming documentary work by Andrew Dominic of Nick Cave’s *Skeleton Tree* album, titled *One More Time with Feeling* (2016). The project began as a document of the album, evolving into a composition of filmed performance, interviews, and commentary. The shape and style of the work grew out of the tragic circumstances that surrounded the recording of the album, the death of Cave’s son Arthur. The film, both black-and-white and 3D, is a deftly handled marriage of old style and new technique. While the film is not silent by any means, it aptly illustrates how contemporary filmmakers are selecting what they need from the past to authentically tell stories of and for today.

The references that make up this literature review have been of value to my research in providing a history of early cinema, its intents and purposes, in outlining what constituted dance’s relationship with cinema at the turn of the previous century, and in flagging what the implications are for bringing silent film techniques back into the fold as devices for filmmakers to engage contemporary audiences. What became apparent during my research was that there is little writing on the value of reintroducing these early cinema techniques to
contemporary film, despite the popularity with audiences and critical acclaim for films such as *The Artist* (Hazanavicius, 2011) and *Blancanieves* (Berger, 2012).
CHAPTER 1
First Steps/Early Thinking

My undergraduate degree was in Photomedia, and I began it while enrolled at Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University), Darwin, then moved to the College of Fine Art (COFA), and finally completed it at Griffith University in 2002, where I then undertook my Honours (2003). My topic of interest throughout my undergraduate years was boxing, specifically women’s boxing, and a 1986 legislation that prohibited women from boxing in NSW either professionally or at amateur level. Although the idea of ‘ladies’ boxing has generally been considered unsightly throughout its history, there has been plenty of fetishisation of women boxers in popular culture, usually involving petite women wearing nothing but bikinis and boxing gloves. The prohibition was finally lifted in 2008, long after I had moved on from this research. I produced some experimental video as part of my final undergraduate Photomedia exhibition and this initiated an interest in the movements of boxing. The video featured a pair of female hands (overtly feminine—long fingered, manicured and smooth), wrapping boxing tape around them, in the fashion boxers do before donning their gloves to protect their knuckles and wrists (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Carey Ryan final undergraduate exhibition (video stills), held at COFA, 2000
I continued research into the theme of the ritualised movements of the boxer with my Honours project, an experimental film titled *Contender* (2003) (Figure 9), for which I examined the punishing regime and repetitious combinations of boxing training. After breaking these movements down and watching them endlessly repeated, I found the fluidity of the boxer in action very similar to the dancer in motion, thus igniting my curiosity in the movements of dance. Although motivated by very different objectives, the boxer and the dancer both engage in a physical language founded on rhythm, and seek to maximise a confined or designated space.

![Figure 9: Carey Ryan Contender (film still) 2003](image)

In considering how these ideas might be developed into doctoral research, I became curious about adaptation and interpretation, and how a work such as a novel, song, or script might become a dance. This was something I had previously delved into (albeit superficially) through experimental film, but not yet through narrative drama. I thought a return to the gestural, to the language of silent film, might be the perfect foil for dance in the telling of an
otherwise ‘straight’ or linear story.

As a starting point for this exploration, I took a script I had written (already conceived as a silent, black-and-white drama film) and elected to adapt it into the mediums of music and dance/live performance. My aim was to learn something of the foundation of each chosen medium; to develop the script further with each iteration; and, with each version, to bring different themes within the script to life according to the respective strengths of each media. The focus of my inquiry was to explore the respective narrative possibilities provided by the mediums of film, dance and music, and the subsequent interactions in the interpretation of my script. Although my script was originally written as a narrative drama, the silent film tropes of gestural melodrama and physical comedy were well suited to my protagonist and his hopeless situation.

After deliberations over logistics, budget, and accessibility, my chosen mediums for the adaptation of one script were:

- An experimental film with music. I had no idea how this would eventuate; I considered it might be creating a film adaptation of existing music, or, if a composer and I worked together, it may be that I would adapt my script to their music, or I could work visually, keeping within the script’s concept, in response to the pre-determined music. The choice was mostly taken out of my hands, as I explain below, and was realised in 2012 as *Empathy – Traces*.
- A live film/dance/theatre performance—a dancer would perform live in front of a silent black-and-white film. Originally, the film was to be constructed from edits of existing silent films, a narrator would present ‘The Story of Otis’, with film clips providing the visuals for the story. The dance sequences would be live, with the illusion of the dancers appearing to dance off screen and onto the stage. Although I can still see this as a workable project for the future, at the time it was not viable within the scope of my
degree, and was ultimately transformed into my current project. This decision was out of my control, as my two leads were unable to commit to a theatrical production, yet were keen to work on a film. I therefore re-adapted the script for film, which was to become this doctoral project, *Empathy Is the Devil*.

An opportunity soon arose in which I was able to complete my first cross-media collaboration. Berlin-based Australian composer Cathy Milliken was invited to create a work for Crossbows Music Festival 2012, a biennial music showcase for small ensembles produced by the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, and I was engaged to make the accompanying film. Over the years, Milliken has gained international recognition as a leading creative director and composer for theatre, opera, radio, film, and multimedia performance. Milliken has worked with composers and conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös and Frank Zappa, and is an honorary member of advisory boards for the German Music Council and the Goethe Institute.

**Empathy – Traces**

*Empathy – Traces* (Ryan, 2012) is a 15-minute film developed as a visual companion for *Traces*, a musical performance devised by Milliken and students from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. As a way of bringing together the elements of film, musical score and performance, three ‘groups’—one based in sound technology, one orchestral, and one film (me)—were given a set of graphic cards/symbols (see Appendix II) as a basis for composition. Working within this set of pictorial rules provided us with collaborative cohesion and offered me the chance to interpret the cards as themes with which to reinterpret my script.

What piqued my interest in this first adaptation was being given the opportunity not to learn the *literal* language of the collaborative medium—to write, read, or play music—nor to
provide a visual source for the music and express it through my language of film but to translate, through the use of a third language, the set of graphic ‘rules’. The graphic cards greatly facilitated my response to the foreign language (to me) of music, using my native tongue of film. *Empathy – Traces* became a multi-adaptation: the musicians used the visual sequences to time their input, while I referred to the graphic cards to visually interpret the soundscape, and ultimately adapted my script into an art film.

Linda Seger proposes in her book *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (1992) that “The adaptation is the new original. The adaptor looks for the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form.” (p. 9). The transition from film script to visual musical accompaniment in *Empathy – Traces* required more of an aural/visual than narrative focus, a concentration on the cadence of the musical sequences, on how the images and music might interlace in bringing to the fore the relevant themes of the story through music, and thereby creating a new ‘narrative’. As Seger further states: “By its very nature, adaptation is a transition, a conversion, from one medium to another” (p. 2).

*Empathy – Traces* (2012b), however, was not simply a one-way conversion, its process was much more collaborative. As I was interpreting the cards/music score for my film, the musicians were adapting to my visual input, changing how and when they incorporated the cards. Yet this process was not without its problems. Without much experience in working directly with musicians, I found that I was frequently left to my own devices. I had to interpret the cards as I saw fit, and was initially given no feedback from Milliken. After countless hours deciphering the graphics and applying my interpretations to the film, I found that I had learned a grammar of sorts; it was not until very late in the process, however, that I was informed of Milliken’s regard for my work, which of course was gratifying to hear. And so despite the collaborative framework of the project, personal interchange was largely absent. Still, whatever it lacked in direct communication, the project
made up for in intellectual stimulation as a thoroughly enriching experience. The empathy with music and performance seeded in this experience informed and inspired further research into the narrative and rhythmic possibility of dance as a grammar for my filmmaking practice.¹¹

**The Road to Empathy is the Devil**

Finding this notion of collaboration stimulating, and inspired by the possibilities at the nexus of music, performance, and film, I decided to further explore the subject of storytelling through movement. I had long been interested in dance and the eclectic partnerships it encouraged (perhaps because of the lack of collaboration between mediums I had witnessed while in art school), such as The Australian Chamber Orchestra’s works with Sydney Dance Company for example *Project Rameau* (2013); the collaboration between theatre artist Robert Lepage and ballet dancer Sylvie Guillem in *Eonnagata*; and filmmaker/musician Mike Figgis’ partnership with choreographer Ann Van den Broek for *The Co(te)lette Film* (2010).

I had been contemplating the idea of making a film with dance for a while, yet it was one performance that confirmed my decision: Sydney Dance Company’s production *We Unfold* (2010) (Figure 10), the first major production for Artistic Director Rafael Bonachela after the retirement of the company’s founder Graeme Murphy. Bonachela, who had previously worked as a guest choreographer and took over the role under bizarre and tragic circumstances (Murphy’s original successor, German-born, award-winning choreographer, Tanja Liedtke, had died suddenly in an accident before she was able to take up the position),

¹¹ I have uploaded documentation of the *Empathy—Traces* performance on YouTube. The first filmed documentation is titled *Empathy—Traces* (Ryan 2012a); the second is my further adaptation of the project, *Empathy—Traces Film*, with re-cut music/sound design (Ryan 2012b).
delivered a work of operatic grandeur. *We Unfold* was intense and dazzling, with strong visual communication. Daniel Askill’s huge video backdrop included a star-riddled galaxy, fire, water, an exploding planet and a hypnotically rotating underwater body. Askill is a filmmaker and artist who has made, among other things, the highly acclaimed movement-based experimental short film *We Have Decided Not to Die* (Askill, 2001). The video backdrop for *We Unfold* was truly imposing, and yet managed to complement and not dwarf the dancers. The work was layered and relentless, perfectly suited to Ezio Bosso’s commanding score *Symphony No.1 Oceans*.

*Figure 10*: Dance, music and film fuse symbiotically in *We Unfold*, 2010

*We Unfold* stayed with me, and the impact of its multidisciplinary synthesis was a strong influence on my decision to explore dance (rather than continue with boxing) as the storytelling device I had been searching for prior to my return to study. *We Unfold* was a truly collaborative work, each medium as integral to the work as the other; the dance, film, and score worked symbiotically. My aim was to make a work as collaborative and engaging as *We Unfold* but with the incorporation of a classical narrative structure. A visual narrative, dance, and music would play equal parts in the creation of the work. This would require
partnerships whereby each collaborator would share the vision of a ‘greater good’, while still maintaining their distinctions and integrity. This was probably a naïve ideal, given my lack of experience in producing such a project.

The challenge was more than just finding collaborators who might share a vision; it was in maintaining communications over the months of rehearsals, long absences in between, and into production. Modern independent filmmaking, unlike theatre, does not necessarily accommodate such a challenge. I needed to find someone who was literate in dance and yet able to place dance into the context of film—to forget the rules of staging a live dance performance. When acclaimed filmmaker Mike Figgis made *The Co(te)lette Film* (2010), he held similar fears: “The challenge with any dance or theatre piece for me is how to convert it into the language of film and video without it merely being a recording of a live theatre piece” (Savage Film, 2010, p. 9). It was important for my project that the film had equal status with the dance and that the performance did not overshadow the narrative.

In early 2013, I approached Sally Wicks, who coincidentally had worked for many years as a dancer with The Sydney Dance Company under Graeme Murphy and with whom I had a connection outside of dance. Initially, I sent her the script and asked if she might be interested in choreographing a few dance pieces, which, as I mentioned earlier, I envisioned as live performance in front of a film backdrop. From the outset, Wicks and her husband Dan Crestani showed much enthusiasm, with Wicks asking Crestani to review the script to see if he agreed it was something she should work on. Crestani read it and said, “I’ll do it!” She explained to him that I was not looking for an actor, just a choreographer; however, on her relaying this to me, I asked to meet him straight away, and as soon as I did, I knew he was Otis. The pair began working on the project as both joint choreographers and principal performers.

The question soon arose as to how best present this collaborative work. The original
objective of juxtaposing live and filmic elements was so as to create visual layers representing the dilemmas facing the protagonist; namely, his inability to secure himself temporally, socially, and financially.

Greg Geisekam, in *Staging the Screen* (2007), describes Dada artist and theatre director Erwin Piscator (1893–1966) as one of the most prolific users of film in live shows. According to Geisekam, Piscator thought that “Film could transcend the individual and demonstrate how the stage action typified a larger historical moment, sometimes highlighting contradictions between the character’s outlook and the movement of society around them” (2007, p. 40). This encapsulates one of the key themes of my narrative: the contradiction between Otis’ outlook and the movement of society around him. My protagonist Otis refuses to consent to living in a society as fast and impersonal as the present, and so he mentally retreats to the past in search of comfort.

As exciting as the prospect of a theatre/film performance was, the choreographers were adamant that they could not commit to a production that would require precise timing, and the hours it would take to achieve that level of performance. They both had full work schedules and a young child; moreover, they desired a challenge that was new to them, and that, ultimately, was film. I conceded that, because of the script’s strong associations with the tropes of early cinema, the potentials of the project might best be realised as film; the devices of past and present and a character at odds with his environment could be well conveyed by purely filmic means. And so began the formal development at the heart of this doctorate: *Empathy Is the Devil.*
CHAPTER 2

Silent Era Films and the Machinations of Nostalgia

Silent cinema, supposedly superseded more than eighty years ago, continues to resonate with viewers. *Empathy Is the Devil* draws on the familiarity of its audience with styles, techniques, and themes from this era of early cinema. Black-and-white film, no spoken dialogue, physical comedy, and melodrama flag and facilitate an exploration of the themes of rich versus poor, the outsider in society, naivété, and addiction. These topics are often tackled in contemporary films, yet silent film proffers a mannered distance from which to safely view perhaps unsavoury topics. Paul Grainge writes in *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (2002) that “Black-and-white creates a quality of pastness in a film that is set in the present” (p.1). This ‘quality of pastness’ was vital for me in bringing my protagonist, his day-to-day fantasy, and his inability to cope in a fast-paced ‘future world’ to life. Situating his imagined home in the depression era allows the viewer to position Otis as an outsider, someone trying to make their way in an increasingly fast-paced and intolerant world—a familiar thematic trope of silent, black-and-white films.

In the absence of spoken words, pathos in a silent film is often heightened, as the viewer is drawn into the diegesis in search of signs and expressions, to discover what those signs may reveal of the emotional lives of its characters. Pablo Berger, director of *Blancanieves* (2012), says:

> I think silent cinema requires more effort from the audience. It’s more abstract. There’s space, there’s room for the audience to make out what the actors are saying. It almost has a surreal element—close to an hypnotic act. You get into another world. I think it’s closer to watching opera or going to the ballet, than watching a film with dialogue and sounds. I would say it’s a sensorial experience. It’s more than an intellectual experience. (cited in Yi, 2013)

As much as I agree with Berger that watching silent film is a ‘sensorial experience’, the
process of decoding gesture into language also requires a degree of intellectual engagement not often asked of contemporary film audiences.

Basing the character of Otis on Charlie Chaplin’s ‘Tramp’ leverages the audience’s familiarity with this classic character, as well as with the themes and political stance of Chaplin’s broader body of work. Audiences continue to embrace the ‘Tramp’ partly because of his baggy suit and funny walk, but mostly because of his image—that of an irreverent, clumsy but ultimately adorable hobo. Chaplin’s work is described in *Hollywood’s America: Twentieth-Century America through Film* (2010) as “powerful social and cultural commentary, rooted in the economic and social transformations of the early twentieth century” (Mintz & Roberts, 2010, p. 53). There is more, however, to Chaplin’s ability to fascinate than his political and social astuteness. Chaplin’s physical humour, performed with balletic prowess, was a perfect fit for gesture-driven silent film. Kamin suggests that “Chaplin’s art is first and foremost, an art of movement” (2008, p. xii), Chaplin was “amazing to watch, a comic dervish, his movements as polished and graceful as those of a dancer” (2008, p. xii).

Movement is not all that was required to round out Chaplin’s characters. Bordwell (2012) suggests that Chaplin “made his mark not only through his dancer-like body but through an encyclopedic array of nuanced facial expressions”. Fortunately for *Empathy Is the Devil*, the lead Dan Crestani is both an accomplished dancer and a very good actor, creating many of his own ‘nuanced expressions’ to great effect. Without these dual attributes, Crestani’s Otis would not have been such a sympathetic character. He created a Chaplin for today.

The initial impetus for a black-and-white silent tragicomic treatment lay in the observation that many of the issues I address in *Empathy Is the Devil* constitute common themes in the earliest films. By employing the tropes of early cinema, audiences are keyed
into themes of financial hardship, innocence, and optimism through familiarity with the subject matter of these early films. Social problem films of the silent era, such as D. W. Griffith’s *What Drink Did* (1909), and many of Chaplin’s films—for example, *The Kid* (1921), *The Immigrant* (1917), and *Gold Rush* (1925)—deal with the same issues that confront our protagonist: addiction, hunger, poverty, and the plight of the outsider, immigrant or ‘other’. Kay Sloan writes:

> [The] muckraking cinema cranked out stories that entertained primarily working-class audiences who could afford the five or ten cent price of admission to the nickelodeons. There, seated on wooden folding chairs, moviegoers watched graphic portrayals of America’s social problems, some of which were part of their everyday lives. (1988, p. 33)

The use of black-and-white as a stylistic choice also brings a clarity to themes: there are two opposite sides—positive and negative, dark and light. Black-and-white cinematography can connote a gritty reality or the optimism and sentimentality of a simpler time. Black-and-white cinema’s historical connection to the Great Depression, an era of intense hardship, can suggest to contemporary audiences a ‘Lynchian’ dreamscape of dark and foreboding tones. In *Masters of Cinema—David Lynch* (2010), Thierry Jousse evokes the “dark, soot-filled atmosphere” of Lynch’s first feature *Eraserhead* (1977). Many of the most celebrated black-and-white films depict dark stories; indeed, an era of film noir cinema portrays tales of corruption and moral decline in shades of black-and-white and grey.

Despite the era of silent film amounting to less than a third of cinema’s history, it resonates strongly with today’s audiences. Since their inception, silent films have consistently featured within the top ten of Sight and Sound’s “Top 50 Greatest Films of All Time” polls (Christie, 2016). Established in 1952 and voted on by critics, film theorists, and industry professionals from around the world, the poll is undertaken once every decade. In the first year, six silent films were included in the top ten. This occurred at a time when ‘talkies’ had already been the standard for two decades. Sixty years later, the latest poll in 2012 boasts four
silents in the top eleven films. Although the domain of cineastes and academics, the poll represents a strong indication of silent cinema’s enduring appeal.

Nostalgic symbols are those that we remember. Their fidelity is not as important as their resonance. It is not whether we recognise something as it actually was, but that we recognise what it connotes from our collective understanding of film genre and cultural history. In a 1992 essay, reposted on his blog in 2016, famed film critic Roger Ebert said of silent film:

I look at silent movies sometimes, and do not feel I am looking at old films, I feel I am looking at a Now that has been captured. Time in a bottle. When I first looked at silent films, the performers seemed quaint and dated. Now they seem more contemporary than the people in 1980s films. The main thing wrong with a movie that is ten years old is that it isn't 30 years old.

Ebert implies that nostalgia is stronger than memory, as nostalgia is an emotion, a feeling of memory. Memory is subjective and unique to the individual and therefore ultimately inaccurate. Historical accuracy is not always essential to fiction film re-creations; rather, the filmmaker often seeks to generate nostalgia by appealing to an audience’s sympathies for a particular era. History itself, or the retelling of past events, is a fluid art; Palmer writes, “If silent cinema was the means by which the early 20th century was depicted and captured via moving images, then… this is how the feel of the 1910s and 1920s can be elicited in these 20th century films” (Palmer, 2013).

The nostalgia that audiences respond to is ‘emotional’ time; not a historically accurate depiction. Susan Stewart explains in her 1984 book On Longing that “Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative” (p. 23). Utilising a black-and-white treatment facilitates a shift to another era in the audience’s imagination. To be able to believe in this diegesis via the employment of familiar tropes and techniques is paramount in generating a sense of familiarity and visual pleasure.

For this project I had two intentions: to work collaboratively with dance and music
practitioners, and use early cinema techniques, to reopen these storytelling pathways to contemporary filmmakers. Silent film was a necessity prior to the late 1920s, now it is a choice, and one that could be more widely used. For Empathy is the Devil, I used the techniques of the silent film era to reconnect audiences with a past that shares many social concerns with today, but there needn’t be a reason. Cinema’s scope will become narrower if we do not offer all the tools from its beginning to draw on if required.

**New Silent Cinema - The Relevance of Yesterday’s Cinema Today**

There have been several homages to early cinema produced within the last decade to varying degrees of acclaim, three of which are of particular interest: *Dr. Plonk* (2007) directed by Rolf de Heer; *The Artist* (2011) directed by Michael Hazanavicius; and *Blancanieves* (2012) directed by Pablo Berger. All are black-and-white and silent. Interestingly, each of these films takes on a different popular genre from the silent era, appropriating the respective techniques to pay homage to their favourite practitioners and the era’s iconic titles.

*Dr. Plonk* is a slapstick comedy that is quite clearly an homage to early Hollywood cinema (what Bordwell et al. call the “American Style”) and the silent comedies of Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Fatty Arbuckle, and the Keystone Cops. So much of this film was made according to the rules of the era. De Heer used hand-cranked cameras and a lower frame rate to give the film

*Figure 11: Dr. Plonk uses many Hollywood silent tropes (film still) 2007*
an authentic early ‘look’. He also used black-and-white film, already scratched and aged (as luck would have it), academy ratio and a mostly static camera. The film includes wonderful ‘Keystone Cops’ chases, a scene-stealing dog, slapstick physical comedy, ornate inter-titles, a continuous one-track score, many ‘tableau’ style actor set-ups, overblown gestural acting, and predictable hilarious antics (Figure 11).

*Dr. Plonk*’s stereotypical characters include a hero with a dedicated quest; a portly jolly character (in this case, his wife); and a foolish assistant who is the brunt of everyone’s humour. Certainly, some Méliès magic creeps in with explosions accompanying disappearances such as those featured in *The Vanishing Lady* (1896). There is none of the stark moody lighting or dark subject matter of the European films of the era. This film is typical of Hollywood silent era comedies.

*The Artist* is set in the silent era but is much broader in the application of film techniques, appearing more like a musical or Howard Hawks screwball comedy such
as *Twentieth Century* (1934) or *Bringing up Baby* (1938), while its character dilemma is reminiscent of Gene Kelly and Stanley Donan’s predicament in *Singing in the Rain* (1952). There were certainly romantic comedies during the silent era (most of Chaplin's films could be categorised as such), but it is predominantly the production values of *The Artist* that positions its treatment as post-silent. Although *The Artist* utilises academy ratio, black-and-white treatment, lack of synched dialogue, inter-titles, and the obligatory adorable dog, it presents with a ‘modern’ sensibility (Figure 12). As the film focuses on the politics within the Hollywood film industry at a time of great change—namely, the transition between the silents and the talkies—it is *story* over technique that holds true to the era.

*Blancanieves* (2012) is a European-style melodrama inspired by the likes of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) and F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922). *Blancanieves* is as faithful to the Hollywood silent era as *Dr. Plonk* (2007), and it utilises many of the same techniques (with a rooster instead of a dog for its scene-stealing pet), yet it is stylistically very different. Berger’s film employs what Bordwell et al. (1985) call the ‘International Style’—a mix of German Expressionism, French Impressionism and Soviet Montage (Figure 13).

*Figure 13: Blancanieves* uses lighting and camera angles of the International Style (film still) 2012

The Expressionist style employed in films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) utilised a mise-en-scène of “warped perspectives and fantastically distorted settings”; the
Impressionists were well known for “framings, angles, distorting lenses, changes of focus, slow-motion, and other cinematographic techniques used to suggest characters’ mental states”; and the Soviets used a style of editing incorporating “graphic and rhythmic montage, as well as cuts that sacrificed special and temporal continuity to eye-smiting impact” to interrogate its subjects and challenge its audience (Bordwell, 2010). American-style drama, in contrast, was much more ‘dialogue driven’ in its effort to entertain.

*Blancanieves* employs a mix of these national tendencies to create an authentic International style silent film. Homage is further enacted through thematic tropes with the film loosely based on the Brothers Grimm’s *Snow White*. The heroine, her evil stepmother, an adorable pet (her rooster), and a dashing (although unconventional) hero are all presented in a visually stunning, and faithful (to the era) fashion.

**Putting Dance into Action**

Many of the first films and cinema experiments featured dancing, an association that to some extent can be explained by the popularity of vaudeville, which provided many of the performers for early cinema. Preston (2009) goes further in arguing a synchronicity in their shared modes of expression, suggesting that the genealogy of early cinema and modern dance is inextricably linked. Brannigan concurs with Preston, proposing that the pioneers of modern dance, key figures such as Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, had as much creative influence on early cinema as innovators in the field, such as Louis and Auguste Lumière, Georges Méliès, Thomas Edison and Edwin Porter.

A prominent figure in modern dance around the fin de siècle was François Delsarte (1811–71), a philosopher, teacher and acting coach. Gaining popularity after his death, his teachings embodied a particular style of posing, or ‘Delsartism’, including the mimicry of classical sculptures. Preston observes: “Delsartism established an important modernist

Popular with French middle class women in the mid-nineteenth century, Delsarte’s work gained real traction in America at the turn of the century. Preston places Delsarte at the nexus of early cinema and modern dance, for they “not only emerged at the same time, but they both adapted a Delsartean semiology of gesture, a way of using posed bodies to make meaning” (2009, p. 215).

Another influential movement practitioner of this era was Eugen Sandow, popularly known as ‘the father of bodybuilding’. Sandow began his posing in vaudeville and eventually became a Ziegfeld player. By placing emphasis on the movement around and in between the poses, Delsarte and Sandow were both deconstructing and reconstructing the body in a presaging of motion pictures. These seminal figures, although not directly involved with modern dance or cinema, represent essential stepping stones in the transformation from the static poses of photography to the expressive movement of the nascent motion pictures.

As outlined above, the conventions of early cinema are a focus of this doctoral research project for their ability to engage the viewer by appealing to a collective experience of popular culture, film literacy, nostalgia, and lived history, and to facilitate empathy with the protagonist, his predicament and associated social issues. The medium of dance has been examined for its ability to communicate directly with audiences on an emotive level, and to represent the psychology of this character—his hopes, fears, and delusions.

Although non-verbal communication is evident in acting through facial expression and body language, dance enacts another level of communication that is beyond words, prompting an emotional response. Dialogue usually accompanies acting for the plot to progress, yet dance speaks to the visceral—it goes, so to speak, to the heart of the matter. At this level of non-cerebral communication, themes such as fantasy or the mystical may be
more easily digested than via dialogue.

Author, filmmaker, and choreographer Karen Pearlman is co-founder (with partner Richard Allen) of Physical TV, and she describes the company’s work as being “stories told by the body” in her book *Cutting Rhythms* (2009, p. 98). Similarly, I wanted each of the dance sequences in *Empathy Is the Devil* to tell their own tale, while maintaining continuity within the overall narrative. Mapping my protagonist’s decline through dance asks the audience to empathise with Otis’ inner turmoil, while being entertained by his outer predicament.

Bringing dance into narrative film is not as straightforward as one might imagine, respective practitioners are trained to engage the audience in different ways. Joe Wright, director of *Anna Karenina* (2012), puts it simply: “I had to get the dancers to think about character… and the actors to think about form” (cited in Kourlas, 2012). In actor and dancer Dan Crestani, *Empathy Is the Devil* was granted character and form, resulting in sophisticated movement and great comedic timing.
CHAPTER 3

Empathy Comes to Life

As stated earlier, Empathy Is the Devil was initially conceived of as a silent narrative film with no dancing. The original idea for the story I had in 2005 was simple, and it would have been easy to accomplish, but there was not anything particularly striking about it. At that time, there was no interest in silent film, and when people read the script they would say it was sweet or OK, but did it have to be silent? For me, it had to be silent. Firstly, being silent would allow the hat to have its function as a begging tool (a familiar device of the era); and secondly, being silent would allow the protagonist to be recognised as residing in a world of hardship—the Depression era. It would have been difficult for me to cast and crew a silent film at that time, and without the success of precedents such as The Artist, I would have had trouble explaining my approach to people, so waiting eight years was to my benefit.

The Artist posed its own problems for me though. With a very similar protagonist, and set in a similar era, how could I compete with the high production values of a ‘Hollywood style’ budgeted film? I had to find a point of difference, even if it were small. Even after the decision was made to include dance, and Wicks and Crestani were committed to the project, my ambitions for dance (I am ashamed to say) were limited to its providing a lovely adjunct to the action. It was only after watching the dances come together in all their complexity that I realised how much dance can express and reveal. I feel privileged to have watched the choreographer/dancers in action, building each dance scene piece by physical piece, movement by movement.

Crestani had such a deep understanding of his character, and Wicks has a great choreographic mind, so, together, the dances they created offered a breadth of style, mood, and physicality. Crestani’s ability to straddle inner and outer worlds, the intensity of the former through dance, and the nuances of the outer through acting, make for an extraordinary
performer.

**The Story of Empathy**

It began with a hat. A film competition I hoped to enter in 2005 required the inclusion of a hat motif for all entries. I began to think about hats and their social implications over the past two centuries in the West. At various times throughout our history, certain connotations have been attached to those who have worn particular hats: the gentry mostly wore a top hat, the cloth cap was favoured by youth and workers and only used for sport by the upper classes. The hat was a signifier of status and style; for example, a hat was tipped in greeting—a social grace that does not apply today. Further, there was associated customary etiquette that have waned over time with the general decline of the hat’s ubiquity, such as a hat not being worn indoors. Diana Crane, in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (2000), tells us, “Until the 1960s, a man’s hat, as the most immediately visible part of his costume, was a major signal of social identity and social class. Specific styles were associated with different class strata” (p. 82).

I became interested in creating a story about someone who lived in a self-imposed prison of old-fashioned values, interested in how that person would fare in today’s world, or worse still, a science fiction dystopian version of today. The story would begin with a proud man wearing a hat atop his head (Figure 14) and end with that same hat upturned in his hand, collecting coins as a beggar.

As already described, the story follows Otis, an overly generous man, who becomes addicted to giving. Otis hopes that by pleasing everyone, his life will be simple and happy; he just can't say no. In Otis’ mind, he lives in the past, around the 1920s, at a time when
Figure 14: Otis starts his journey as a happy-go-lucky guy in Empathy Is the Devil (film still) 2016

community members helped each other in times of need until conditions improved. The problem is that Otis doesn’t live in this idealised past, but in a dystopian postmodern near-future. He is always running late, he can’t manage his money, and he has not integrated well at work. The underlying theme of the film is the pressure many of us feel around notions of giving, the guilt in rebuffing yet another charity’s approach. I imagined how such anxiety and guilt might lead to compulsive behaviours and/or addiction. Working within this framework, the scenes were written as stages such as those an addict might experience (or how I imagined these stages to play out): Euphoria, Debt, Denial, Resolve, Relapse, Guilt, Collapse, and, finally, Acceptance. For full script, see Appendix I.

The title Empathy is the Devil is an obvious nod to the Rolling Stones’ 1968 song, “Sympathy For The Devil”. The titles share a cadence, yet, the meanings associated with the words ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’ clearly differ. The song challenges you to “…have some sympathy, have some taste” –to have sympathy for Lucifer’s devastating actions, in causing havoc throughout history. But what exactly is ‘sympathy’? And how does it differ from ‘empathy’? In his article for Contemporary Aesthetics, Cinempathy: Phenomenology,
Robert Sinnerbrink, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Macquarie University, Australia, indicates that the phenomenological arguments about the terms sympathy and empathy are “notoriously contested, with ongoing arguments over their meaning, purpose, and value.” (p.14). He sites Alex Neill in offering the distinction of describing sympathy as “feeling for someone while empathy is feeling with him or her.”(p.8). The term “cinempathy” was explicitly coined for film's unique ability to arouse a specific type of empathy in the viewer. Sinnerbrink offers:

“cinempathy:” a cinematic/kinetic expression of the synergy between affective attunement, emotional engagement, and moral evaluation that captures more fully the ethical potential of the cinematic experience (p.10).

The Stone’s may want you to feel for the devil, but in viewing Empathy is the Devil, my intentions were to place the audience in Otis’ worn out shoes, to have them experience his struggles and frustrations, to feel with Otis.

In Michotte’s Experimental Phenomenology of Perception (Michotte, 1991), experimental psychologist Albert Michotte describes the factors involved in our identification, that is empathy, with the actor onscreen – where “the visual aspect of the actor becomes the external aspect of the spectator's own personality” (p. 215). How this occurs, he tells us, requires a set of conditions that allow the spectator to take themselves emotionally out of their chair and “enter(s) the skin” of the actor (p. 211) —there is a need for an “intense and exclusive concentration” (p. 216) that allows a disconnection between the real world (sitting in the cinema) and the onscreen world. The “primacy of dynamic over static aspects of experience” (p. 216) as evidenced in the actor's gestures, and the cinema experience itself —the dark space, a large bright screen where there is little or nothing between it and the viewer— contribute to the operations of empathy in the audience as they desire to identify with the hero.

A recent film that has evoked empathy emanating beyond the cinema screen, is Ken
Loach’s 2016 *I, Daniel Blake*. This tragic story of a man who becomes unemployed through illness and his subsequent fruitless negotiations with a failed welfare system has moved people on a large scale. Mike Sivier, from Vox Political (November 12, 2016) reports on a “wall of notes” in the Cameo cinema foyer in Edinburgh after the film was screened. The notes were from people who have suffered a similar fate to the title character, and felt as though the film spoke for them. They, in turn, wished to speak out (http://voxpoliticalonline.com/2016/11/12/i-daniel-blake-screenwriter-stunned-by-wall-of-notes-left-by-movie-goers/) Similarly, the twitter hashtag #wearedanielblake provided a platform for people to share their plight; several Foodbank campaigns have also been spawned because of the film. This level of response and engagement with the film is testament to the unique power of cinema in addressing social issues through empathy with character.

The Oxford Culture Review (November 2, 2016) article on the film by James Slattery focuses on the significance of the title, arguing that *I, Daniel Blake*, is a “weighted declaration”, that demands attention. He suggests that Loach evokes empathy from the get-go, “In these three spoken words we refer to ourselves (“I”) and another (“Daniel Blake”) simultaneously, a good exercise in empathy.” For *I, Daniel Blake*, the title and content unite for its purpose. The importance of empathy in the title of my film is to indicate my intentions in casting Otis not as a pitiful character, but as a figure equal to the audience, whose intentions are noble and worthy of understanding, just as he understands the hardship of others and feels obliged to offer his help.

**The Challenges of Empathy**

There were two major hurdles at the outset. The first was how to make a film with dance, given that I had no choreographic experience or local connections to the dance world.
The most important thing for this project in its development phase was to find the right collaborators. Luckily, I found those in Dan Crestani and Sally Wicks. Once we had established that the project would be film only, we progressed very well aided by Crestani’s keen sense of Otis’ character. Partaking in the development of the choreography was immensely enjoyable from the start, and because Crestani and Wicks have a wealth of experience and an extensive repertoire, I was often deciding what I did not want rather than what I did. This was not always a fast process though.

An incident occurred in the choreographic process that revealed the subjective nature of collaborations; I was reminded that everyone can think they have exactly the same perspective on an issue, when in reality it can be quite the opposite, and therefore that ideas really need to be fleshed out fully in preparation. One afternoon, the three of us were discussing the choice of song to accompany The Bread Dance, and Wicks said something like “… but you want something really boppy for that, upbeat and happy, right?” “Not really, no,” I replied. This was a really difficult concept to explain. “Otis has been through the wringer, and he’s come out the other side, still intact. He is still able to give, and he accepts his circumstances, but he is changed.” This was why I wanted the rock song, or something a bit ‘hard-core’, to explain that his resilience has won out, but that he is not indifferent to all that he’s been through. In the end, the edit gave me the answer. In the final take on the final day of the shoot, a few small mishaps occurred: Crestani drops his hat and does a beautiful cover up, not all the moves are completely smooth, and Harry the dog looks completely bored and wanders off half way through the dance. This was the take I chose, the one with the most human aspects to it. So, Wicks and Crestani got their ‘boppy’ and I got my flaws. Everyone was happy and it was the crew’s favourite scene.

The second challenge for me was to make a social issue film palatable. Asking people to sympathise with the rather dire tale of a character who is drained, financially, and
emotionally, by charity companies is a challenge. Before writing the script, I had become
aware of the term ‘charity fatigue’, or ‘compassion fatigue’. There were media reports at the
same time of people being manipulated into giving more and more to all sorts of charities;
some of them having little relevance to the concerns of the donor or their community.

For the most part, it appears charities do great work to raise awareness of their cause,
and to provide support and services for those in need, and yet negative reports keep
mounting. Around the time I was writing the script, an ABC TV 7:30 Report segment
“Charity doorknockers preyed upon poor outback community” (2014) was aired that revealed
charity fundraising companies (in this case, Aida working on behalf of Bush Heritage)
signing up people living in Yarrabah, Far North Queensland, a town with 80%
unemployment, to unaffordable monthly debits.

This is not the only report of a charity's wrongful acquisition of funds; however, my
interest is not to expose fraudulent practices. Rather, it is to comment on the social
phenomenon of charities pressuring people to give more and more, and our emotional
response to these appeals. I have observed a low-lying level of guilt that people feel whether
they give or not. Tim Burrowes’ article in Mumbrella, “Do Charities Realise the Damage
Street Fundraisers Do to Their Brand?” (2014) speaks to this, but what is really interesting
are the comments below in response to the article: almost every commenter agrees that they
feel guilty and threatened by charity fund-raising people. A full discussion of the issues
around the functioning of charities in contemporary society is beyond the scope of this
exegesis, yet a simple search came up with many articles trading on these anxieties and
capacity for guilt (Eisold, 2010; Bennett, 2011).

As stated, the dilemma I faced was to make an engaging film about a delusional
outsider, an addict who loses his mind and his livelihood and ends up living on the streets.
My thinking at the time was to make a silent film with dance, using comedy to create an
appealing character and dance to empathetically explore the tragic elements of the story. Through comedy and tragedy, both homage to a cinema of the past, and commentary on contemporary issues might be achieved. But nothing is that simple. Making this film was a protracted process of exploring movement, reading about and watching countless hours of silent film, engaging collaborators, writing, rewriting and rewriting again, shooting the film and then breaking it down again in the editing process — the deconstruction, reconstruction and finally... construction of a film.

There was a third challenge I was unprepared for that was not evident in pre-production: a breakdown of communication between Wicks and myself. This began to surface on the first day of shooting and steadily declined from there. Ultimately, it was caused by a lack of experience on both our parts. This was my first drama production and after meetings with Scott Kimber, Director of Photography, and Jesse Phomsouvanh, my 1st Assistant Director (AD), I became aware that the schedule was tight; there really was not much room for error in the five-day shoot.

We had many setups and shots to get through each day, including two exterior locations in Paddington and New Farm (plus one exterior at GFS), which weren’t too far away, but still involved travel and setting up; six green screen scenes that required a lot of specific lighting; and five interior sets, that were, at least, in the same location of the Griffith Film School (GFS) sound stage. This was a difficult shoot and we required every scene on the shot list. My inexperience showed in not making it clear to Wicks that once the schedule was finalised, adding shots would put pressure on everyone. Swapping shots could be done if there was time, but experimentation in that tight a shoot would have required someone with much more experience than mine to keep it contained.

Wicks’ inexperience became clear in her eagerness to continue workshopping long after we had made final decisions of how the dance sequences would play out. She was also
resistant to rehearsing the drama scenes, preferring to use our rehearsal time for creating the
dances. I believed the rehearsals should be for tweaking, not creating, but, aware of Wicks
and Crestani’s time limitations, I allowed this, hoping to push through, when I really should
have been clearer about what locking the shots really meant.

Another mistake I made was in assuming Wicks, as choreographer, would understand
that when filming began, I was in charge of the overall film. The rehearsals had been very
free, (a short example of the collaborative nature of the choreography, a discussion between
Scott Kimber, Wicks and myself is on YouTube) (Ryan, 2013), and I had no intention of
interfering with the dancers’ creative process. However, running a set full of people doing
props, hair and makeup, lighting, as well as organising extras and the numerous other tasks
involved requires focus and adherence to (at least a healthy respect for) the schedule. When I
snapped into ‘on’ mode from the first day of shooting, Wicks thought that I was ignoring her
and deliberately rebuffing her suggestions. This became more of an issue the next day, and so
I sat down with Wicks on the third day to explain that I can only make the film I can make,
not her film for her. In retrospect, I think if I had better communicated the process of
filmmaking and how a set was run, we may have avoided a lot of this tension on set. I
mistakenly assumed that Wicks would understand that a film is much greater than its parts,
and that my focus had to be everywhere and on everyone, not just on herself and Crestani, as
it had been during our rehearsals. Despite the tension, without their focus and dedication, the
dances would not be as beautiful. Wicks and Crestani are passionate about their craft and I
appreciate their perfectionism, so I think that what we lost in cordiality, we gained in the final
product.

*Empathy Is the Devil* was always intended to be an experiment in collaboration; the
significance of each collaborator’s contribution to a film cannot be overstated. Wicks and
Crestani have now both seen the film and are really proud of it. Their approval of, and pride
in, the end result is important to me personally and professionally, and because of their continued commitment, despite our differences, we were able to realise the film. Creative personalities will inevitably clash in collaboration. The important thing is to focus on the work as it is happening, and only be as open to possibilities as time allows. It is a privilege to work with others in such an intense process, but a balance must be struck between creativity and remaining on task, on time. I was lucky to have a very sharp AD on set in Jesse Phomsouvnah to keep the schedule moving.
CHAPTER 4
The Four Movements of Empathy

The intention of including dance in *Empathy is the Devil* was to leverage its unique possibilities as distinct from acting, to ask dance to do what it does best; that is, physicalising emotion and establishing between viewer and character a sense of directness and sensorial immediacy. In providing my choreographers references as inspiration for *Empathy’s* dance sequences, I looked to iconic dances from films that I love. These were selected not just for their beauty as screen dances but for their means of expression, and ultimately for my film, to exemplify how dance might communicate the frenzied landscape of my protagonist’s interior world. I call the four dance sequences of *Empathy Is the Devil* ‘movements’ as they are self-contained; each dance has its own story that, when strung together, map the inevitable disintegration of the protagonist’s mind.

Movement 1—The Clouds Have No Ceiling or (The Mop Dance) Timestamp: 02:15

I titled this movement *The Clouds Have No Ceiling* because I wanted to convey Otis’ optimism and his ‘head in the clouds’ sensibility. The dance is inspired by Gene Kelly’s routine for the song “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” in George Sidney’s *Thousands Cheer* (1943). This scene was chosen not only for its acrobatic display and technical brilliance but also for the way in which dance is used to communicate levity within a somewhat bleak situation (Figure 15), enacting a refusal to kowtow to social norms. The Hollywood
musical experienced a revival in the 1930s and 1940s; “The coming of World War II saw a resurgence in its popularity and in 1944, Hollywood produced 75 musicals, making it the most popular genre of its day” (Browne & Browne, 2001, p. 560). *Thousands Cheer* provides an apt reference, as the protagonist in *Empathy Is the Devil* is looking for the same “opiate” (Browne & Browne, 2001, p. 560) from the horrors of life that the American people found in musicals during the war period.

*Thousands Cheer* presents a reluctant army private who is mucking around and dancing while he and his fellow grunts are supposed to be sweeping and mopping floors. He is an outsider and non-conformist, and, in feeling undervalued, dances and goofs off during work time as his respite. In the chosen scene, Kelly is letting the audience in on the joke. He fuses the domestic—a mop and a broom—with a rifle, a weapon of war. Making these objects interchangeable presents the topic of war in a comedic way, rendering it temporarily harmless; the over-riding message is that wartime can be fun, freedom can be had, and girls can be met.

![Figure 16: Dan Crestani as Otis the dreamer in the Mop Dance, Empathy Is the Devil (film still) 2016](image)

The *Empathy* mop dance establishes Otis as a dreamer (Figure 16), as someone who is
living on a knife’s edge of reality. The protagonist not only lives out his mundane experience in a fantasy world of another time and place, but his aspirations also belong to a bygone era. In *Empathy*, Otis’ ‘domestic’ fantasy life is situated in the camaraderie-filled Depression era, while his ‘glamorous’ fantasy life is based in the 1940s era of the delightful musical, in which Fred and Ginger dance their cares away and Gene Kelly turns navy mopping chores into a joyous acrobatic tap dance.

Kelly takes control of an environment foreign to him by including the soda fountains found in a typical American diner in his dance, effectively highlighting the familiar and making fun of his situation. The emasculating domestic chore of mopping the floor is translated into leisure and irreverent behaviour, perhaps to displace the fears associated with the reality of war and post-war anxiety. In *Empathy*, Otis indulges in a similar displacement. He has been hiding his ‘giving’ habit from his wife Julia and wishes her to be as playful as he, effectively, to bury her head in the sand as he does. However, with the same rude awakening in which Kelly is brought back to reality by his snappy sergeant in *Thousands Cheer*, Otis’ fantasy is broken too by a clearly distressed wife.

There is an underlying foreboding to Kelly’s dance. He laughs and jokes around but when the dance ends he is still at war. Similarly, Otis is trying to escape his own realities—his charitable and somewhat gullible nature is stripping him of his role as breadwinner and master of his domain. He can no longer provide for his wife, he is unable to manage his time, he fails to assimilate with his workmates, and he is confused about his place in society. I think the tone of Kelly’s dance exemplifies an effective way of conveying a man at odds with his surrounds and finding refuge in a tenuous optimism.

The intercutting of a mop and a ‘glamorous’ Julia was used to evoke a sense of Otis' encroaching madness and to show that he is capable of deeper levels of fantasy that can be triggered by the superficial incident of a mop falling into his arms. Otis is yearning for a
romantic marriage, like in the old movies. What begins as an indulgence soon descends into deep-seated fantasy wherein Otis is Fred Astaire and Julia is Ginger Rogers. This sequence might have been inspired by any one of Fred and Ginger’s numbers, but for me it was the “Cheek to Cheek” sequence from *Top Hat* (1935) (Figure 17).

![Figure 17: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire dance Hollywood glamour in Top Hat (film still) 1935](image)

As mentioned earlier, I had wanted to evoke the doll scene from Michael Powell’s *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) for this scene, as the frenzied editing would have suited the ‘Mop Dance’ perfectly. This was not to be, as the amount of choreography required for the sharp intercutting to work—one full sequence for mop, one full sequence for ‘Fred and Ginger’—was deemed too time consuming and difficult to achieve. Viewing an example of the Mop Dance choreography in rehearsal (Ryan, 2016b), one can see that the result is more a hint, or a nod, to the doll scene from *Hoffmann*. The choreographers decided to simply use Astaire and Rogers as inspiration rather than refer to any particular dance piece in crafting work with a sense of that time and the glamour of that period. A delightful dance piece resulted that, through movement and setting, successfully evokes the motifs and machinations
of Otis’ escapism (Figure 18).

**Figure 18:** Sally Wicks and Dan Crestani dance Hollywood glamour in *Empathy Is the Devil* (film still) 2016

**Movement 2 – Waking to the Black (The Hand Dance)  Timestamp: 05:48**

The Hand Dance was devised to demonstrate the dislocation between his body and mind that Otis experiences when he has vowed to stop giving. He now struggles to keep his hands out of his pockets—he is desperate to give. The dance expresses the conflict between the guilt he feels for not keeping his promise to his wife and his inherent need to give. He feels weak, and climbs the walls in turmoil. Otis recognises that his addiction has cost him his job and that he now has a serious problem, and yet somehow he still feels he can control his impulses and keep his addiction to himself. He resolves to work this demon out of himself without outside interference.

Lutz Förster, Pina Bauch’s collaborator and Artistic Director of her company Tanztheatre Wuppertal, performs in Wim Wenders’ film *Pina* (2011). I selected his piece as inspiration for this scene due to its mesmerising and somewhat claustrophobic quality. One of the reasons for this is Wenders’ use of the mid-shot. Originally, we had planned to film this
dance in a similar fashion, cropping out the head and the legs, to film just the torso (Figure 19).

As the choreography came together and we discovered our location with its chequerboard floor tiles and white walls, it became apparent that it would be visually powerful to include these local elements; they became part of the story. And so a wider shot was adopted. The wall acts metaphorically in building the drama as we see that Otis is literally starting to ‘climb the walls’. The chequered floor is reminiscent of a game—Otis is the pawn of his addiction, and the spotlight signifies inquiry—the world has receded and Otis must answer his own questions about his habit. Lutz’s dance is whimsical and light yet has a dark undertone; his hands, like those of Otis, are searching, longing for something.

I titled this movement *Waking to the Black*, as it captures Otis beginning to feel the pressure of time and money. He has found no way to control his urge to give. I wanted a real itchiness to this piece, the beginnings of his realisation that there *is* a problem and he must keep his hands out of his pockets, as that is where he gets his fix, and yet he is struggling to do so.
Filming this dance was one of the most profound lessons in recognising the difference between live performance and film. Watching Crestani in the act of the dance (Figure 20), in that space, with its stained walls and chequered floor, the scene was electric. We all felt it; about a dozen of the crew, crammed into the small space of the men’s toilet at GFS, were all silent, mesmerised. Scott Kimber, the cinematographer, suggested a series of shots—close ups, different angles etc.—to create drama for the dance, but Wicks and I were adamant that this dance needed no tricks.

Figure 20: Dan Crestani in the Hand Dance, Empathy Is the Devil (film still) 2016

A few months later as I was editing this scene, I was dumbfounded. This wonderful dance just looked so flat. Although the scene works well, and the music provides enough tension, I wished I had listened to Kimber and gone with the extra shots. Karen Pearlman recognises this in her 2009 book Cutting Rhythms. In test screenings for Richard Allen’s Thursday’s Fictions (2006), which she produced and edited, Pearlman recognised the spark of the live performance that is very difficult for the camera to capture, as: “the screen flattened the movement energy that was apparent and legible in live dancers” (p. 102).
Apparently, I was so taken by the live performance that I was not concentrating on how it would look when flattened out on the screen. This realisation prompts great admiration for the skill of filmmakers such as Mike Figgis. With *The Co(te)lette Film* (2010), Figgis was able to capture the drama and energy of the dance filmically, by really getting the camera among the dancers, and in effect, entering the dance.

After trying many tricks—speeding it up, cutting frames out, adding frames from other scenes, trying effects and filters—I found the slow push-in brought the tension that I needed. Next time, I will listen to the cinematographer and go with varied shots, and make sure I watch the footage back on a screen, on set, but away from the energy of the actor.

**Movement 3 – The Snake Pit (The Lounge Dance) Timestamp: 06:51**

‘The Snake Pit’ is a reference to the title of a 1948 film starring Olivia de Havilland and directed by Anatole Litvak about a woman who is assigned to a psychiatric institution. The ‘snake pit’ was the wing of the asylum to which the most severe, or unlucky, cases were destined. The scene from the film that best conveys this ‘pit’ is shot from above, zooming out slowly to reveal a seemingly infinite abyss.\(^{12}\) Similarly, I wanted to convey that Otis is fighting to stay out of the pit, represented by his lounge, but that his addiction is dragging him down—he has a tenuous grip on reality and is struggling at the precipice.

Another inspiration for this dance was Danny Boyle’s 1996 film *Trainspotting*, which also explores themes of addiction. In one scene, the main character Renton, played by Ewan McGregor, takes a shot of heroin and falls backwards onto a rug on the floor. Renton then turns to the camera and it appears that he is being swallowed by the rug as he sinks through

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\(^{12}\) A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (Stone, 2016), timestamp 1:47:00–1:49:24.
the floor, floating into the soft warm world of the drug high.\textsuperscript{13}

Because Otis experiences his need to give on a physical level, his refraining to do so causes withdrawal, such as a drug addict experiences. For the lounge dance, I encouraged the choreographers to use the lounge with Otis in, on, under, or around it but never to lose contact with it. The lounge has a grip on him; he wants to escape but it keeps pulling him back. This dance shows Otis breaking down in a safe place—at home, on the lounge, in his 1920s fantasy world where he is supposedly king. And yet, losing his job, letting his relationship unravel, and not being in control of his impulses have caused him to finally break down. He is not emotionally equipped to handle the stress and so he succumbs to mental collapse and consequently, madness.

The choreographers and I discussed the final scene from Darren Aronofsky’s \textit{Requiem for a Dream} (2000), which depicts each of the main characters, in different places and situations, curling into the foetal position. Each of them is alone, on different paths (none of them good), yet they find themselves in the same position, as if connected on a

\textbf{Figure 21:} Dan Crestani using his hat for protection in the Lounge Dance, \textit{Empathy Is the Devil} (film still) 2016

\textsuperscript{13} A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (violet2890, 2011).
metaphysical level.\textsuperscript{14} We wanted the lounge dance scene to have a similar impact by showing Otis vulnerable—spent, broken down, and curled up on the lounge in the foetal position with his hat over his face, in an effort to completely block out the world (Figure 21).

\textbf{Movement 4 – Negotiating a Comfy Spot in Hell (The Bread Dance) Timestamp: 10:40}

While the Hand and Lounge Dances are designed to express Otis’ inner turmoil, the Bread Dance presents the reality of his outer persona. We can see that he is living on the street and has little beside an old suit and a packet of biscuits in the pocket. His wife has managed to salvage the teapot from home but other than that, they are living on a park bench.

This dance is inspired by Charlie Chaplin’s ‘Oceana Roll Dance’ from \textit{The Gold Rush} (Chaplin, 1925) (Figure 22).\textsuperscript{15} In the scene, Chaplin is waiting for the girl of his dreams and her friends to come to dinner on New Year’s Eve. They are dancers at a dance hall, aspiring

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image22.png}
\caption{Charlie Chaplin does the Oceana Roll Dance in \textit{Gold Rush} (film still) 1931}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{14} A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (you are filth, 2013).
\textsuperscript{15} A video of this scene can be found on YouTube (sanchopanzavive, 2010).
to make it rich with the men whom they meet at work. Regardless, they are out of Chaplin’s beggar/thief class, and he is a fool in their opinion, but he is naïve and optimistic about finding love with a nice girl. He daydreams while waiting for them that he is delightful company and they are laughing with and not at him. He uses bread rolls from the dinner table to do his dance. As bread has symbolised money at different times, I thought that we should use it in the dance to signify Otis’ situational poverty but also his optimistic wealth.

The Bread Dance is a celebration of Otis making peace with his true giving self. He has struggled so hard with the conflict between his personal want (to give) and his financial need (not to give) that he succumbs to an emotional breakdown. And now, in this final scene, when a stray dog comes along, sharing comes naturally to Otis. Moreover, when the boy, a stranger, also shares with the dog, Otis knows he has found kin. A passer-by drops a stick of bread on his hat and Otis’ instinct is to share this fortunate gift. The bread is broken and passed between the three, now bonded as family. At the end of the dance and close of the film, when Otis’ share of the bread is stolen by a beggar, he merely shrugs, knowing that giving and receiving now come easy; during the credit roll, Julia shares her portion with him and all are happy.

It seemed important to include Otis’ hat in the end of the story. He is now a beggar, getting by with an upturned hat. At the end of the day, he collects his earnings and puts his hat back on his head; he is back in charge of his (albeit humble) domain.

Wicks and Crestani choreographed this dance to be a joyous end to the story (Figure 23). Otis has faced his demons and is resolved in the realisation that he must accept his habit of giving as a positive attribute. He knows that to change his ways would put him back in a reasonably comfortable life but that such an existence would ultimately be soulless if he could not help others. He is risking his future employment prospects and his sanity, but he cannot leave his true nature behind. Otis has control over only one thing in his life—his
integrity—that he will not compromise, even if it means living on the street.

Figure 23: Dan Crestani, Sally Wicks, and Cam Whitten in Empathy Is the Devil (film still) 2016
CHAPTER 5

Emathy's Filmic Dimensions and Collaborations

To bring Empathy Is the Devil to the screen involved six months of rehearsals, a five-day shoot, and two years of post-production including marketing (Figure 24). My crew and I had to create the story’s near-future setting, as well as its imagined past, requiring a total of five interiors, as well as green screen for six scenes, and three exteriors. None of that time was misspent but it was still an extremely ambitious project for someone with very little directorial experience. The edit and score fed off each other throughout post-production, growing in unison as the story was built and rebuilt, as each new piece of music was sourced, composed, or abandoned, which happened several times. I believe my ignorance and optimism pulled us through some of the time, but the fact that I had experienced professionals as Heads of Department on the film gave this film a sophistication I would never have achieved alone.

Figure 24: Empathy Is the Devil poster 2016
Mise-en-scène

From early on in pre-production, I was lucky enough to have Georgina Greenhill, a highly experienced production designer of feature films and series television, helping with the look of the film. We needed five distinct looks: Otis’ 1920s style house, basically a lounge room, turned into a ballroom; the outside world, a dystopian near-future, which we had very little time to design, so we shot on green screen in order to get pick-ups later; the psych ward; the office bathroom, where Otis performs the hand Dance; and the other-worldly, almost celestial, office of Otis’ boss.

There was discussion between the Heads of Department about making the scenario very theatrical; the inspiration for this was Wright’s Anna Karenina (2012). While there are so many sumptuous elements to this film, it is Wright’s reflexive approach to the overt theatrical staging that was of potential relevance to our production. Anna Karenina was set on a stage, with actors playing actors often waiting in the wings, creating an embedded diegesis that hints of Anna merely playing out her tragic fate in a fashionable society of flexible moral codes.

In order to comply with copyright this image has been removed

Figure 25: Joe Wright’s complicated set ups for Anna Karenina give an intimate view of the protagonists 2012
We thought that revealing the set would give the audience an intimate, voyeuristic view from which to observe Otis’ unravelling. As filming approached, I decided against it for two reasons. Firstly, we could not get the camera high enough to give the audience a bird's-eye view of the sets and action. It would need to be strapped to the rigging and therefore static, which was anathema to our ideas of flow and rhythm guiding the film; we wanted the camera to be moving/dancing with the players. Secondly, although the film is surreal in many ways, there was not any dramaturgical justification for showing that we were on a set. The technique worked for *Anna Karenina* on various levels, not least in showing that Anna always felt scrutinized (Figure 25). The novel is also a much-loved text that many have seen performed on stage as a play, an opera, or a ballet—this familiarity allows for, even begs, such conceits. I found throughout the process of making *Empathy Is the Devil* that some ideas work and some are less successful, but having those ideas and the creative collaborators to work through the subsequent challenges are what makes a project come together in a complete and ultimately satisfying form.

We used a set previously designed by Greenhill and built by Cornelius Van Den Boogen for GFS cinematography workshops. It is versatile and had enough of an ‘olde-worlde’ feel to provide a great foundation for Otis’ lounge room, most of which was thematically based on a cross between the production team’s memories of their grandparents’ homes and various silent film sets. The lounge had to be the focus; the rest was composed of

*Figure 26: Georgina Greenhill’s set that was built for Griffith Film School’s cinematography masterclasses*
props for further references to the era (Figure 26). The scenes for the outside world were shot on green screen, except the very first and last shots, the most realistically staged scenes. These bookends show us that the protagonist begins his journey alive to his surroundings and happy enough, and ends in a similar mindset of contentment, albeit in a very different physical space.

Because we were expecting to shoot extra footage for the futuristic scenes, I had been scouting locations in Brisbane, which I eventually abandoned as nothing looked like it would match the footage we had, nor the worlds we wanted to create. Soon after the shoot wrapped, I met with Greenhill to discuss how we could go about creating the futuristic backdrops. I asked her to imagine how someone from the 1920s would see the future. She suggested drawings, which I thought would be an excellent way to represent the madness of Otis’ point of view of a surreal dystopian 1920s’ futuristic landscape. With realism done away with and Metropolis as inspiration, Greenhill came up with the hand-drawn backdrops that work beautifully in providing the viewer insight into Otis’ skewed vision (Figure 27).

The third important set piece was the boss’ office. Mr. Charleston, Otis’ boss, is a futuristic overlord. According to the tickertape in his office, he owns Charleston Enterprises, Charleston Holdings, and more, connoting his monopolisation of the future. In the script, Charleston is a regular and reasonable man with an office accessible to all. However, as
production progressed and I began to collect set pieces—a bonsai plant, a jeweller’s eyepiece, a toy robot dog, and horns for his chair/throne—he became a distant man. We then decided to make his office seem vast and daunting. I also wanted this scene to be in colour, to make the boss’ world so different from Otis’ and to highlight the stress of the situation. Georgina suggested a backdrop of clouds and sky, which fit perfectly his newfound God-like status, having an office so far up in the clouds that Otis is nauseous in the lift on approach. Elements like these were worked out fairly quickly, and fit easily into the script.

I wished to mix colour and black-and-white throughout the film, achieved so successfully by great filmmakers such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Woody Allen, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorcese, as a demarcation between the past and future. After test screenings, I had to agree that it was not working visually so I asked the colourist to desaturate the scene. I ended up leaving a little bit of colour and one bright flash (Figure 28), a point of view where the boss looks at Otis through his monocle, to suggest that only the boss can ‘afford’ to see in bright colour, due to his wealth, status, or just a snazzy lens.

The final set was the psych ward. We made do with furnishings that were already in the studio space, and my brother modified a bed as an important set piece. At this stage, we were nearing the end of the shoot; the budget and time were against us, so everyone contributed to make the scene as surreal as possible. The art department were available, adaptive, and inventive—a great team.

With regards to film treatments, I tried to incorporate enough ‘silent’ features to
nourish the audience’s feel for the era, while avoiding any superficial approaches that might cheapen a much-revered style. Black-and-white and silent were achievable with the equipment available to us, but we did not have the finance or the know-how to use celluloid film and a hand-cranked camera. I did try adding scratches in the editing process to date the film, but it really did not suit. In discussing the merits of academy ratio versus 16:9 widescreen with my cinematographer, I thought it would be perfect to cut between the two for future and past demarcation, but Kimber thought that swapping between them with bookends of black to signify the ‘past’ scenes would look terrible. I concurred and we stayed with widescreen. A year later, I saw Wes Anderson’s *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), which is set in various eras. Anderson uses three aspect ratios to depict the different eras: 1.85:1 for the 1980s, 2.40:1 for the 1960s (very wide), and 1.37:1 for the 1930s. Not only was I unaware of the change at first (it certainly did not offend), but, once accustomed to it, I felt that it enriched the story, providing a real sense of each era via the respective academy, widescreen and extra wide. I regret at least not trying it in my film.

Figure 29: *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, (film stills) 2014


The Edit

*Empathy Is the Devil* was two years in post-production. This may seem excessive for a 12.5-minute short, yet this film, with its various perspectives and time frames, presented so many options, and many were tried. I spent some of that time going back and forth with the
colourist, and waiting on feedback from supervisors and others, but most of it was spent alone in an edit suite. I welcomed the feedback I received, as it is a long and lonely process, but in the end, the decisions were mine; I had to understand and absorb the suggestions, and, after trying them out, decide whether they should stay or go.

As stated, the ultimate goal was to make an engaging ‘message’ film. As much as I rearranged the scenes in that effort to engage, in test screenings during 2015 (at the time it ran over twenty minutes), it was just not sitting well with people; they were not excited by it. Coming from an experimental film background, I was used to long contemplations and repetition on screen, approaches that were not relevant to this story. Moreover, the advice I received often felt like I was being steered into making a silent era film. *Empathy Is the Devil* was intended as homage to, not a direct copy of, silent film. People have certain ideas about silent film that usually include sepia or a dustier black-and-white, not the crisp, high-contrast finishes that I find appealing. Then there are film scratches, which I tried and did not like the look of, iris transitions, and, of course, inter-titles. The last two I was happy to include, as they help transition the scenes, with the titles keeping the story afloat. The inter-titles were the most challenging, as I started with many, and some were long, as with many silent films. I was strongly advised against this, and my supervisors were really helpful in getting the information onscreen in the most efficient way.

I also tried different tempos, speeding things up and slowing them down, to emulate the high and often uneven speed of films produced by hand-cranked cameras, but after repeated viewings, decided that a lot of the beauty of the sets and dancing was lost, so I returned to the shoot speed of 25fps, bar the Clown Dance scene, where I sped up Otis’ twirls.

I was lucky to engage a very experienced colourist in Lauren Carter. I wanted a different look for every new situation that Otis found himself in, and accordingly, provided
Carter with a visual treatment to work with. I have placed the initial document I sent to Carter in Appendix IV. Of the various tones I required for the black-and-white, I requested warm and yellow or brown tones for the 1920s’ home scenes, blue and cold for the future, green for the scenes where madness takes hold such as the Lounge Dance, and I really wanted the Mop Dance to have a ‘silver screen’ look of silvery black-and-white. The software that Carter uses, da Vinci, did not read the files as they were, so I spent several days renaming and adding metadata to each file. To save time, it is advisable to engage a colourist early, ask them what their workflow is, and implement that prior to editing.

After many edits and much feedback from media professionals, people with no industry background, and children, I believe the film has an easy-to-follow narrative and is engaging for any demographic—a far cry from my experimental work of the past.

The score

Very early on in the rehearsal phase, I decided upon the song that would be the basis for the soundtrack, the 1927 Gene Austin version of “My Blue Heaven” (Donaldson & Whiting, 1927). To me, the song epitomised how Otis felt about his situation, his fondness for, and comfort in his home prior, and even during, his breakdown. I wanted to employ three versions of the song: the Gene Austin version for the beginning when Otis is carefree and happy; another dark and grittier interpretation for the final scene when Otis has been through hell and back; and a final softer, folkier version for the end credits.

With this in mind, my composer Liam Malby began making versions of the song and I started to seek out copyright. Clearance was complex as the song is in the public domain in Australia and related territories, but if I wanted to send the film to international festivals, some countries still had copyright over it and others not. After protracted dealings with one half of the original owners, I decided the terms were too constricting, besides, the second
owner still had not replied months later, so we had to continue without the song. By this stage, Malby had moved on to other commitments and two beautiful versions, performed by Andrew Pennay and Alan Boyle, had to be abandoned.

Time passed and Luke Goldfinch came on board as composer. He and I spent a good deal of time discussing influences, from Hitchcock to Chaplin to TV’s *Breaking Bad* (2008–13); he was keen to compose the main score and incorporate music that would later be included. I already had some great sound design from Jesus Donato-Lopez (whom I had previously worked with on *Empathy – Traces*) for the Lounge and Hand dances. I then had the good fortune of meeting Elle Croxford of Brisbane’s post-production facility Cutting Edge, and through her, was put in touch with musician Tyrone Noonan (formerly of Brisbane band *George*). After a long and lively conversation, Noonan agreed to make three versions of a song inspired by “My Blue Heaven”.

Noonan made his own megaphone so that he could get an authentic 1920s sound for the first version, and wrote perfectly suited lyrics. The song speaks of Otis’ optimism and whimsical approach to life, with lyrics such as “Life is like a golden box of candy cane, to give away” as well as his inability to foresee the future, or register the urgency of his dilemma: “I live for today”. The result was three variations of an original “On a Wing and a Prayer” that bookend the film, and chart Otis’ journey principally through tempo changes.

I really wanted to use a Django Reinhardt–style song for the Clown Dance. Not wanting to spend any more time on a futile search for copyright permission, I used my networks to see if anyone from Brisbane would compose a song with that kind of sound. Sound designer/audio mixer John Bosak knew someone who loves Reinhardt and was interested, but too busy around the time, so he sourced a few copyright-free songs, and the one I liked in particular was “Floor Dance” by Craig Riley. I sped it up to give a frenzied effect and think it suits the scene perfectly, so, once again, the compromise was the right
Goldfinch’s score is full of melodrama, comedy and, with the help of Bosak, includes some great audio touches worthy of the silent era, when live musical accompaniment was prevalent. The term ‘silent’ is in fact a little misleading as the ‘soundtrack’, improvised or pre-composed, was integral to the effect on audience, and most silent era films were presented with this musical accompaniment.

Goldfinch composed a score of humour and pathos, so suited to the film that it equals the visuals throughout, while maintaining a life of its own. It is a striking contribution to the film. When asked about how the score came together, Goldfinch commented:

Most of what I did was purely reactionary. The lack of dialogue gave me the opportunity to create something that was really upfront and almost took the place of dialogue in terms of articulation. The characters are highly animated, and I wanted the music to be dynamic enough to respond with their frequently shifting moods and expressions. I wanted it to really jump out when Otis was overwhelmed by the imposition of those around him... which he frequently was! A string arrangement was the most appropriate choice given the silent era style and my aforementioned intentions. An exception to this was the interpretive dance scenes; I wanted Otis’s darker introspective moments to weigh heavily in contrast to his more melodramatic everyday tribulations. For me, the abstract composition work by Jesus Lopez-Donado in these sections already exemplified his inner turmoil, so I really only needed to add a few touches of sound design to highlight the impact of Otis’s contortions on screen. (personal communication with the author, 2016)

Goldfinch relished having the freedom to create an entire score very much in the ‘silent’ film style, emulating an improvised soundtrack, with all its features and exaggerated sound effects. In the end, the audio ‘team’ of Goldfinch, Noonan, Donado-Lopez, and Bosak created a beautiful soundtrack of value to both *Empathy Is the Devil* and their own professional practices.
CONCLUSION

A film undergoes many changes from script to screen; there are plot points, sequences and ideas that do not make it through to the final cut. There were scenes for *Empathy Is the Devil* that were either shot and later deemed unnecessary or were abandoned just prior to the shoot, considered too complicated given budget and time constraints. The skill of my collaborators resulted in a film that I believe honours its component parts of narrative, dance, and music. Without one of these elements, it would not be as engaging, comprehensive or coherent.

Despite what did not make the final cut, the achievements of *Empathy Is the Devil* as a research project did not differ from its original intent, which was, firstly, to reinvigorate the supposedly anachronistic cinematic tropes of black-and-white silent film in an effort to portray social issues that connect the present with the past. Such tropes might assist in connecting the viewer with a protagonist whose subjective reality is rooted in a ‘delightful’ past and whose addictive tendencies put him at odds with the demands of the present day.

Creating empathy with a protagonist based on the identifiable character of Charlie Chaplin’s ‘Tramp’ was vital to the project’s success, especially in regards to eliciting empathy for social themes harking back to the 1920s and 30s that are still germane. Dan Crestani’s portrayal of Otis is one of sympathy and comedic dexterity, which Chaplin applied, both subtly and overtly, in all his films. Crestani managed to express the wonderment, joy, confusion, and determined playfulness that I had imagined in my character, utilising dance and movement to tell a story rhythmically.

The success of the silent films made over the past ten years provides evidence that early cinema techniques offer a useful set of tools for telling socially conscious stories related to the past. More needs to be written about the use of these techniques and their value to
contemporary film. The films *Dr. Plonk* (2007), *The Artist* (2011), *Blancanieves* (2012) and *Tabu* (2012) all make comments about the past in relation to the present. By employing supposedly anachronistic tropes, these films allow their audiences to connect with themes and sensibilities that remain current today, while celebrating a nostalgic past prior to full colour and quadrophonic sound.

Further, a key objective was to examine how dance, with its foundational connection to early cinema’s preoccupation with the body in movement, might play an important role in realising the narratives I set out to explore, by giving the audience space to interpret the protagonist’s inner reality through gesture and movement, rather than via a dialogue-driven, didactic approach.

This exegesis offers a practitioner’s perspective on working across different mediums and the difficulties and ultimate reward for engaging with, and respecting, the methods and strictures of other disciplines. Recognising the influence that modern dance had on silent cinema, particularly through the writings of Carrie J. Preston (2009) and Erin Brannigan (2011), I felt that it was appropriate to combine the two art forms for my project in an attempt to offer the viewer an alternative way into the story. Using silent film conventions allowed me to place the protagonist in another time; employing dance to represent his inner journey allowed me to place the protagonist in another (emotional) space.

Although the worlds of dance and film share a similar genesis, they are singular disciplines with distinct rules, grammars, and processes put to variant purposes. What brings us back to that genesis, that coupling of their beginnings, is their complementary ambition: to express interior realities, the sometimes inexpressible of the everyday, and to evoke an emotional response beyond the limits of a rational understanding generated by dialogue and naturalistic performance. Dance might employ dynamic moves and moody lighting, film its extreme close-ups and musical crescendos, yet both use the embodiment of character via a
physical performance to stimulate in the audience the desired response, that of interest, engagement, and empathy.

Another major aim of this endeavour was to employ a collaborative approach to such cross-disciplinary filmmaking. It was important to leverage an equal contribution from the disciplines of film, dance, and music. In the final film, each of these mediums blend to make a seamless whole, yet effort was made in the collaborative process to assure that each discipline would maintain their distinction in contributing as stand-alone elements; for example, Noonan’s song “On a Wing and a Prayer” and the four dance movements.

The research for this project grew out of the experience of making it—an experience that has extended with the film’s afterlife. As a filmmaker, I, like any other, covet the Cannes Film Festival. According to Time magazine, the festival was conceived in defiance of the Venice Film Festival and Mussolini’s “personal, political interest in the cinema business” (Ronk & Rothman, 2015). Cannes has been running since 1946 and represents, to this day, a benchmark for film excellence. The Griffith Film School has a continuing presence at the Cannes Film Festival, showcasing a slate of films for the past six years. Empathy Is the Devil was selected along with graduate and masters films for the 2016 GFS Showcase Screening at the Festival’s Short Film Corner. Bernard Bories, founder of the Festival des Antipodes, a well-established (18 years in 2016) and highly regarded film festival based in Saint Tropez, France, attended the screening and chose Empathy Is the Devil as an Official Section for the Festival des Antipodes, 2016. Bories wrote that he found the film “unique and surprising but also deep and moving” (personal communication, 2016).

Again, on the strength of my Cannes involvement, I was interviewed by We Are Moving Stories, an online resource for filmmakers; the interview is in Appendix III. Film critic John Bennett from The Movie Waffler, a popular film review blog, wrote about the film: “Empathy Is the Devil is a graceful, witty film that smoothly blends an homage to a stylish
cinematic past with a gently satiric vision of the future” (personal communication, 2016).


In November 2016, *Empathy is the Devil* took out the award for ‘Best Film by a Young Filmmaker’ at Noosa International Film Festival in Queensland, Australia. It was also screened in competition at Speechless Film Festival 2017, in Minnesota, USA on 25th March. Also in March 2017, the film was included in the dance conference *Bold: Celebrating the Legacy of Dance*, held at the National Library of Australia. My choreographer Sally Wicks was invited to speak about her work on *Empathy is the Devil* and the dance pieces I offered as inspiration for her and Crestani’s choreography for the film. *Empathy is the Devil* has also been selected by GFS to represent the school’s drama category at the 2017 CILECT congress in Zurich, Switzerland in October, and the film has recently been announced as a nominee for the 2017 BIFF (Brisbane International Film Festival) Centurion Short Film Award. These selections, opportunities and responses evidence the many routes that this film continues to pursue, and the ongoing nature of its research inquiries.

If, as Garelick (2007), Preston (2009), Brannigan (2011), and others have noted, dance was essential to film’s early development, and as Pearlman (2009) suggests, the timing and phrasing implicit in dance offers much to editors of today’s moving imagery, then it is my hope that this research project has contributed in some way to a deeper understanding of the narrative possibilities engendered by a collaborative approach to the synthesis of film and dance. I hope this investigation will also contribute to research into the importance of early cinema, in an effort to broaden the expressive palette for contemporary filmmakers by reinvigorating the tropes of silent black and white film.
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Podcasts


Song

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

The Script

THE CONTENTS OF THIS DOCUMENT ARE PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

EMPATHY IS THE DEVIL

by

CAREY RYAN

8TH DRAFT AUGUST 2013

© Carey Ryan, May 2005

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1 EXT A STREET DAY

Shot from above we see a man wearing a suit and a 1920s fedora hat striding down a suburban street. We hear the song My Blue Heaven. The camera swoops down on the top of the hat and holds for a few seconds.

Front on MS of man, OTIS, late 30s, with a pleasant, gentle face walking down the street. He has a bouncy gait and is whistling along to the song. We see another man, a NEIGHBOUR, hosing a flowerbed in the front yard of a house. He looks up and smiles at Otis. Otis tips his hat to the man.

Shot from above of Otis as he approaches a gate. He enters; spinning as he turns to close the gate, does a little dance, picks a FLOWER from the garden and walks to the front door of the house.

CUT TO:

2 INT A HOUSE DAY

Otis returns from work through front door and as he goes to hang his hat, he knocks over an upturned MOP that was perched next to the doorway. The mop falls into Otis' arms like a lover. He places the flower into the mop as if placing a flower into his wife's hair.

CUT TO:

3 INT LOUNGE ROOM/A BALLROOM NIGHT

This is Mop Dance Sequence titled THE CLOUDS HAVE NO CEILING. The dance is inspired by the Gene Kelly mop dance from 'Thousands Cheer'. We see Otis' fantasy - he and his wife JULIA (a sweet looking woman who could be a grown up version of Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz), as glamorous 'Fred and Ginger' types.

My Blue Heaven swells as Otis sways and dances around the room. The sequence is inter-cut between Otis and the mop - and Otis and Julia dancing around the room. A chandelier appears and they are dancing in an imaginary ballroom.

At one stage he drops the mop to dance with a LAMP on a stand. Otis gives the mop a tango dip to replace it in its BUCKET, and as pulls it out we see his wife Julia in his arms, hair dripping like a mop. CU of Otis, he blinks.
CUT TO:

4 INT OTIS'—LOUNGE ROOM LATE AFTERNOON 4

Otis looks concerned. Julia stands before him, tears streaming down her face.

OTIS
What is it darling?

Julia looks distressed and pushes a stack of crumpled LETTERS into his chest. From over Otis' shoulder we see him flicking through various overdue notices from charity companies. Green Pieces, Pigs for Peace, Born Free, Tomorrow - Tibet, World Hearing, Wildlife Lovers. First slowly and calmly, getting more frenzied as the pile continues until he is throwing them in the air. There is a KNOCK at the door. Otis forgets the bills and answers it. It is a person collecting for charity. A RAVENOUS LOOKING MAN with a sweaty face, puffing. He looks familiar to Otis.

CHARITY KNOCKER 1/MAN
G'day I'm Gary. I'm collecting for the 'Blue Heart, New Heart' Appeal. Can you spare some change?

Otis reaches into his pocket. He laughs.

OTIS
Sure buddy. It's funny you know, you remind me of my boss. He's always after something too.

Otis hands the man some CHANGE. The man looks quizzically at Otis, snatches the money and scurries off. Otis closes the door and returns to his wife's woes. As she opens her mouth to speak there is another KNOCK at the door. This time it's a WOMAN with a huge frozen smile.

CHARITY KOCKER 2/WOMAN
Hello my name's Jenny. I'm with the City Children's Hospital. We're having an open day on Sunday...

Otis reaches into his pocket and hands the woman
money. They smile. He closes the door, still half feeling good about himself until he sees his wife's face.

Julia looks distraught, her hair tousled and make-up smudged. She is on the verge of hysteria.

    JULIA
    Otis, I know you like to help but you've got to stop giving in to these people.

She puts her foot down. CU of foot.

    JULIA
    NO MORE CHARITIES!!!

We follow Julia as she moves to the kitchen behind her and opens the cupboards. They are bare. She's crying.

    JULIA
    We can't afford to eat.

Otis moves toward her. He holds her and shakes his head.

    OTIS
    No more. I promise.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Otis looks up, completely distracted. He moves straight to the door and opens it. In desperation Julia leaps in front of him and SLAMS it violently in the charity collector's face. Otis is shocked; he jumps back and stares at her, aghast. She returns his stare with gritted teeth.

FADE TO:

5   INT  SAME HOUSE—LOUNGE ROOM   DAY    5

Otis is lying on the lounge staring at the ceiling. He looks depressed. He picks up a bill from the floor and glances at it, letting it fall back to the floor. Finally he rises and mumbles to Julia.

    OTIS
    I'm going out for a walk.

She sticks her head out from the kitchen.

    JULIA
    OTIS. Leave your wallet here honey.
He takes the WALLET from his back pocket, drops it on the coffee table and leaves.

FADE TO:

6  EXT  CITY STREET  DAY  6

Otis is on his way to work. He is seen leaving the Blood Bank. He stands tall - adjusting his tie, obviously feeling very proud of himself. A BLOOD BANK ATTENDANT'S HAND reaches out and slaps an "I Gave Blood Today" BADGE on his jacket. Otis gives the person a devilish grin.

BLOOD BANK ATTENDANT
Are you ok?

OTIS
(tapping his inner elbow where they took the blood)
Never better!

The hand offers 2 PACKETS OF BISCUITS wrapped in cellophane. Otis gestures no thanks. The hand insists he take the biscuits. Otis relents and pockets them.

On the street several people collecting for various charities accost him. This turns into the Clown Dance sequence. He buys a NOSE, a COLLAR, a FLOWER, some BADGES. Every time one of the STREET COLLECTORS pin something on him he has a reaction, like he's getting a fix. They twist and turn him and he is in a state of ecstasy as he pulls money from his pocket and hands it to them. The town clock CHIMES and it snaps Otis out of his altered state. He looks at his WATCH and realises he is running late for work.

OTIS
Oh my whiskers!
I'm late!!!

There are clocks and watches all around him. He starts to run through the city streets wearing everything he has purchased. Otis arrives at his destination red faced and looking like a clown.

CUT TO:

7  INT  OFFICE  DAY  7

A SMARMY OFFICE WORKER, impeccably groomed, looks Otis up and down, sneers and points towards a door. On the
door is a SIGN, it says: MR CHARLESTON. Otis sheepishly approaches the door. It looms large; from Otis' point of view we see the corridor as if leading to a gallows, (vertigo shot). Otis quickly looks back to his CO-WORKERS for support. They are busy preening themselves and looking perfect. Otis moves to knock at the door but it is already open and he falls through into the office in his clown get-up. Mr Charleston reprimands him for being late. It is apparent this is not the first time.

MR. CHARLESTON

Otis, what's going on with you?

Mr Charleston points and looks quizzically at Otis' ridiculous garb. Otis smiles and dismisses it, shedding the additional garments and items as he speaks to the boss.

OTIS

Silly charity things, you know how it is. I'm very sorry Mr Charleston, I've been sucked in in the past but those days are over.

Otis gestures that he will be on time and straight down the line from here on in.

FADE TO:

8 INT OFFICE BATHROOM LATE AFTERNOON 8

This is the Hand Dance Sequence titled WAKING TO THE BLACK. Otis is starting to feel the weight of time/money pressure. He has no way to control his urge to give, it has become an addiction. The dance is inspired by Lutz Förster's hand dance from the film 'Pina'.

Otis is in the bathroom washing his hands. He starts scrubbing obsessively and wringing his hands. He falls back against the wall and is in another space-white walled with a black-and-white checkerboard floor. It is surreal. Otis is battling with himself to control his behaviour, trying to make his body do as he has promised and leave his hands and pockets alone. Finally he pushes himself out, his conflict unresolved.

CUT TO:
Otis is on his way home and is solicited by a BEDRAGGLED BEGGAR. He is determined to change his ways.

OTIS
Nup. I'm very sorry mate. I can't help you.

Another approaches him. This time an OLD MAN. He is being worn down. He says

OTIS
Sorry mate.

But a third beggar approaches him, a WOMAN WITH A PRAM who reminds him of his wife. He gives in. As he hands some change to the woman the other two beggars become incensed. Otis feels fear and starts to run. The beggars hurl abuse and start to chase him. One of the beggars catches him and takes his hat, using it to aggressively beg for money. Otis snatches back the hat and flees. CU of Otis running as if on the spot. Like in a nightmare he cannot outrun his pursuers. He is sweating and clearly frightened.

FADE TO:

This is the Lounge Dance Sequence titled THE SNAKE PIT. Otis' mental state is in rapid decline. His addiction has become critical and he is having physical withdrawals. Otis is on his lounge in the foetal position, writhing and scratching, in incredible pain. He cannot work or manage his life in any way. Throughout the dance Otis sheds his jacket, tie, shoes, shirt... his compulsion to give is such that with nothing left, he will give the shirt off his back. The light changes from day to night to day.

FADE TO:

TITLE
FIVE DAYS LATER

CUT TO:

Otis looks terrible. His hair is standing on end; he
is unshaven and wears a dirty singlet. Julia looks distraught. She is holding a letter from Mr Charleston. We see the words "regret" and "terminated". She drops the letter and approaches the lounge.

JULIA
Otis! We need to get you some help.

Body rig shot of Otis as he is moved. We watch him in close up as the world spins around him.

FADE TO:

12 INT PSYCH WARD DAY

At the reception Otis is reeling, clearly losing his grip on reality. Otis looks at a sign on the reception desk that reads NARROWMINDS LUNATIC ASYLUM. In a panic he turns to Julia, she gives him a gentle smile. He blinks and turns back, the sign reads NORTHWINDS CLINIC ADMINISTRATION. Two patients in the waiting room are rocking forward and back, dressed in suits and heels but wearing straightjackets. They fascinate him, as if he is trying to recognise them. He looks away and when he looks back, the reception area is empty.

CUT TO:

13 INT PSYCH WARD DAY

Otis turns and sees a NURSE dressed like a fantasy figure being wheeled into reception on a bed. The bed is being pushed by a DOCTOR who looks like one of the patients he had just seen in a straightjacket, and an ORDERLY. Otis quickly looks back to the chairs and sees the two patients. One leans over and pushes the other over on to the floor. As Otis spins around to tell someone, the Orderly takes him by the hand. Otis thinks this is the garden-watering neighbour he greeted a week ago. The Nurse, who looks suspiciously like one of the charity collectors who knocked on his door, spins off the bed, fluffs up the pillow and pats the bed, calling Otis over with her finger. Her eyes are dark and she looks ravenous. Otis is terrified. He shakes Julia, who is retrieving something from her bag. When she looks up Otis points and they both see a clean-faced smiling nurse, beckoning them over with her finger. Julia takes Otis by the elbow, as he looks very faint. She smiles at him and he is somewhat
calmed. Julia and the nurse converse, as Otis is droopy at reception.

**NURSE**

... there’s just a few forms...

Otis springs into action, pulling an ostrich feather quill from his pocket and searching for an inkwell. Julia giggles and takes the iPad from the nurse, who smiles gently at Otis.

As Julia fills in the form Otis takes a breath and appears calm. He looks up at the nurse who is again dressed as a fantasy figure and has a deadpan expression. She winks at him and his jaw drops, he is too terrified to move. He blinks and the smiling nurse returns.

Otis puts his arm around Julia, she snuggles into him. He feels safe again. The nurse hands the iPad back, smiling.

**NURSE**

You do have private health cover?

Otis and Julia look at one another. They shake their heads. The nurse turns cold and snatches back the iPad. She shakes her head looking up at them with disgust.

**NURSE**

OUT!

With a straight arm she points towards the exit. The orderly walks them to the door. A dazed and confused Otis and Julia, heads down, walk towards the exit. Otis takes a look back to see the fantasy nurse snarling at him and laughing with the doctor.

FADE TO:

14 EXT THE STREET—SOMETIME LATER DAY 14

Otis is sitting on the street wearing the BADGES, NOSE and COLLAR he has purchased for charity. His FEDORA is upturned in his hand. He is now a beggar. There are a few COINS in the HAT. He has a vacant stare.

A STRAY DOG approaches him. Otis pulls out a PACKET OF TWO BISCUITS that have been in his jacket pocket since the day he gave blood. He takes one biscuit and folds
the packaging over the other and returns it to his pocket. He breaks the biscuit in half and gives half to the dog who gobbles it up. He is just about to take a bite of his half and the DOG BEGS. Otis cannot resist and gives his half to the dog. They stare at each other. The dog settles down next to Otis, who gives him a pat and smiles to himself.

A SKINNY HOMELESS YOUNG MAN approaches. He leans down to pat the dog. Otis offers him his other biscuit. The young man takes it and shares it with the dog, who is now enthusiastically begging. Otis shakes his head, realising the young man is as big a sucker as he. A passing man who looks like Otis’ ex-boss drops a baguette of bread next to Otis’ hat.

OTIS
Hungry?

The young man closes his eyes and nods. He is clearly starving. Otis gestures for him to join them.

FADE TO:

15 EXT STREET DAY 15

The Bread Dance titled NEGOTIATING A COMFY SPOT IN HEL. The dance is inspired by the Charlie Chaplin Bread Roll Ballet, from the film ‘Gold Rush’. The handing around of the bread between Otis, Julia, the young man and the dog becomes a dance that binds them as a family. They dance as the credits roll and each of the characters does a ‘bread move’.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

THE END
APPENDIX II

Empathy - Traces

Brief by Cathy Milliken - 2012

“Traces” - afterglow, remains, vestiges, memory-
7 Cards and 5 optional Cards for the realisation of a silent film based on the musical graphic ‘score’ cards for “Memorial”.

The film—a silent visual composition—can be realised by one person or a group. The film should use the postcard graphics as a score/set of instructions and inspiration for the realisation of the cards and their transformation. The entire film should last no more than 15 minutes. The film is to be based on the 12 musical graphic score cards for Memorial. There are 5 line graphic cards and 7 music and text graphic cards.

Each line graphic card should be at one time the focus of the entire film—resulting as mentioned already above in five “movements”. Any ‘score’ cards can be revisited at any time although there must be a slight transformation or abstraction from before, hence the title “Traces”.

The 5 line graphic cards are the main score cards for “Traces” which should result in five main identifiable situations or be in a musical sense—five movements. As well there are 2 additional “must use” cards. These “must use” cards are the music and text graphic score cards nos. 6 and 7 which must be used in whichever way desired. The use of the other music and text graphic score cards nos. 1-5 is optional.

All cards were created from images of personal effects photographed amongst rubble in the Tohoku area during a visit in October 2011, facilitated by the Tokyo Wonder Site, Japan. Memorial is a tribute and in memory of those who lost their lives in the Tsunami and Earthquake in the Tohoku region, Japan in March, 2011. Cathy Milliken ©2012

The following is my treatment of Cathy Milliken’s brief.
The ‘Rules’ (by Cathy Milliken)

Card 1 - Stability/ Instability

A man in a suit stands proudly, content in his world but as changes occur he becomes increasingly unsteady. The ground shifts from under him. He becomes confused and distressed by his ever-changing surroundings.

Card 1 is treated in scenes 2 and 3
Card 2 - Water

Water is a recurring theme and is flowing from different directions. It is layered both in front of and behind other cards, becoming a character along with the suited man.

Card 2 is treated in scenes 2, 3 and 4

Card 3—Subconscious/Conscious self

The man rotates in the one spot. Happenings occur around him but he rarely changes expression except when overwhelmed by water. The subconscious accepts while the conscious resists. With every revolution comes a new environment.

Card 3 is treated in scene 3
Card 4 - Chaos/Acceptance

Light dances on the screen with no predictable rhythm. The light and water are connected and one influences the other but they are separate entities from separate sources. We cannot control how our environment influences us.

Card 4 is treated in scenes 1 and 4

Card 5 - Money/Time

Money passes through the hands and is always moving away. Here the banknotes represent the ephemeral nature of both money and time. The money clips are both slow and fast, so there is no way to judge how long your money, or your lifetime, will last.

Card 5 is treated in scenes 1 and 4
APPENDIX III

Interview with We Are Moving Stories

Logline: Kindness can be so cruel

Length: 12.5 mins

Director/Producer: Carey Ryan

Carey Ryan is a writer/director from Australia. Having a visual focus, and a background in photography and graphic design, her first films, Contender (2003) and Empathy Traces (2012), were experimental. Empathy Is the Devil (2016) is her first narrative short.

Looking for:

Film Festival Directors to showcase Empathy Is the Devil on the film festival circuit

Producers to work with in the future

Journalists to give Empathy Is the Devil media coverage, and open a conversation about its themes and issues

Funders: self-funded

Made in association with: Griffith University

Release date: Screening as part of the Griffith University Showcase Screening at Short Film Corner, Palais G on Wednesday 18th May 2016 from 11:30–1:30pm.
Congratulations! Why did you make a film called *Empathy Is the Devil*?

I was thinking about how a lot of the time we feel terrible about things that we can't change, particularly other people's circumstances. So as the film evolved from a simple idea that a guy starts his story proudly wearing a hat on his head, and ending it with the hat tipped up as a beggar, and all this happening purely because he was generous beyond his means, I thought... we all need empathy to live in a civilised world, but how much? And it kinda had a nice ring to it, like the Stones' song “Sympathy with the Devil”.

Imagine I'm a member of the audience. Why should I watch this film?

It's gorgeous! The dance sequences are wonderful and the story is socially relevant. Issues of the past are being replayed and it offers the chance to view the past through a nostalgic lens, giving the audience an enjoyable way to see the truth.

How do personal and universal themes work in your film?

Addiction, homelessness, debt... these are all universal social problems. I wanted to make an important film, but an enjoyable one. That way, people can choose what they want to take away from it, it's in their hands.

How have the script and film evolved over the course of their development and production?

It was always written as a silent, Chaplinesque type film, but once the idea of dance was introduced, and then the choreographer/dancers came on board as the stars, it really evolved. The ending changed a few times, and certainly there were more scenes shot than we used, but all in all, the basic premise remains.
What type of feedback have you received so far?

A lot of people have spoken about what Empathy means to them. I've really enjoyed it. If it provokes thinking about empathy, and the similar issues of the past and today, we've done our job.

Has the feedback surprised or challenged your point of view?

The feedback so far has been great. As the protagonist's inner journey is played out in dance, this isn't the easiest film to grasp, yet, everyone seems to get it so either the audience is particularly savvy, or only film literate people have seen it, I'm not sure. Either way, I'm delighted with the audience reception so far and hope it continues.

What are you looking to achieve by having your film more visible on www.wearemovingstories.com?

As a female writer/director, I would like to engage with media that champions women in film. If the film is popular, it's a win win. My film also addresses social issues, and I think that We Are Moving Stories, and the agenda you have, is an appropriate fit.

Who do you need to come on board (producers, sales agents, buyers, distributors, film festival directors, journalists) to amplify the film's message?

I have been the producer until now, but that's not really my expertise. I would love a producer to take this film and give it the life it deserves.

It would be really great if Film Festival Directors were to embrace this film—and I would love Empathy to have a great festival run. It's a film that should be seen and heard on the big screen. There are so many audio nuances, and the camerawork is so lovely, that, although the themes are clear, the big screen really shows it off.
What type of impact, and/or reception would you like this film to have?

Obviously... Bravo! We have a great film and I would love the audience to enjoy it. I would also love all the people who dedicated themselves to this project to be recognised. Most of them volunteered their time and expertise, and the result is there. We just need people to see it!

What's the key question that will help spark a debate or begin a conversation about this film?

Why do you give? Everyone does something, whether it be direct debit pledges, coaching a kid's soccer team, or helping someone with their bag at a train station. I would like people to think about that. Do you do it because it's the right thing to do in our society? Because it gives you pleasure, because you'll feel guilty if you don't? Because you don't want to think about your own problems, so giving to others allows you to remove focus from you?

No one needs to share it; I'd just like people to think about it. A friend once told me that he couldn't remember who he was donating to, there were a few causes, and he knew he cared about those, but he was so busy, he took no pride or pleasure from doing it, he just did it. I think life would be more satisfactory if we thought about it, and even thanked ourselves for doing it, privately of course!

Would you like to add anything else?

As part of the promotional material for the film, we made some 'Empathy' money boxes. The idea behind it is you fold the box into shape, fill it with coins and give it to whomever you choose. The boxes are tiny so we're not talking big bucks here, just a little help. The idea behind it is autonomous giving.

Put the act of giving back into the hands of the donors and let them decide who to give it to. This isn't to stop people's monthly or yearly pledges of a decent size, it's just a reminder that giving is a good thing, it makes you feel good, and for individuals in need, it really doesn't need to be much.

I would also love it if people told their stories on our website, of who they gave their moneybox money to and why.

What are the key creatives developing or working on now?

We have a few projects on the boil. One is called The Boxer Inside. It's a Frank meets Rocky, with a touch of Anomalisa, kinda crazy mix I know. It's a film about identity and the question of how much control we have over our own. Each scene is a recreation of an iconic scene from a classic film, mostly boxing films like Rocky, On the Waterfront, and Raging Bull.

We have a few others, check out www.sumiproductions.com to see what we're working on. We would love to have some producers on board.
APPENDIX IV

The Visual Treatment of Empathy

Colour palette for Lauren Carter (Colourist)

Otis lives in a dystopian near-future, depicted by pencil drawings. The idea is that we see the world through Otis’ eyes, so, although he actually lives in a real future, the way he sees it is, as someone living in the 1920s may have imagined the future. Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) is the influence for these backdrops.

Because the future world is cold to Otis, I want to tone it blue or cool, but for his home, the place where he feels safe, warm and friendly tones. Not to the extremes of Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000), but it was a consideration before the shoot. I also like the [https://web.archive.org/web/20100316021948/http://www.dga.org:80/news/v25_5/feat_soderbergh.php3](https://web.archive.org/web/20100316021948/http://www.dga.org:80/news/v25_5/feat_soderbergh.php3) interview with Soderbergh about the colour choices (below). Not that I have too many characters for the audience to keep up, but so far, viewers have found the mind-time jumps confusing, and I think the visual tone can really aid with temporal shifts.

“The issue of how to distinguish the three stories visually arose about and I decided for the East Coast stuff, tungsten film with no filter on it so that we get that really cold, monochrome blue feel. For San Diego, diffusion filters, flashing the film, overexposure for a warmer blossomy feel. And for Mexico, tobacco filters, 45-degree shutter angle whenever possible to give it a strobelike sharp feel. Hopefully those distinctions would be enough to bring you back into each story line after you cut to somewhere else and come back. Then we took the entire film through an Ektachrome step, which increases the contrast and the grain enormously”. (Hope, 2001)
Below are some other colour influences for inspiration

*The Artist*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixqr8D7J_Kc

This looks to me like it’s toned brown but on the reddy side of brown. Warm but not yellow. This might be the look for the home scenes.

*Tabu*

This is also beautiful photography but a little too red for me.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoelUhjVXas

*Blancanieves*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HanTDiiZLpg

This one is crisper and greeny. Cooler, to add to a sense of foreboding, kinda sickly in parts.

This would be good for the encrouching madness.

Even though it’s not b&w, I think the green tone of The Matrix is so unsettling.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMbexEPAOQI

I am trying to find the best example of ‘Silver Screen’. Really crisp contrasty b&w, but has a real sparkly silver to it (my apologies if I am getting a bit too highbrow technical here) (fat chance). Busby Berkeley dance scenes are the best example I can think of right now.
Gold Diggers of 1933

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r3KdTL6mjk

More Busby

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIO9y1xMPIA