

Queering Blackpool: An Ethnographic Study

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of
Chester for the degree of Doctor of Education

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November 2019

Declaration

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Signed: H Eadon-Sinkinson

Date: November 2019

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Allan Owens and Dr Paul Moran for their time, patience and guidance over the years.

My Mother and Father both saw me start this journey and their words of encouragement remained in my thoughts and resonated in my sister's advice throughout this process- thank you.

Dedication

For everything that you have done for me and everything you are. Jonathan-
this is for you.

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Summary of Portfolio

This thesis builds on work I have undertaken as part of the Doctorate in Education over the course of the past six years. An aspect of each of the six modules informs the research investigation, some more directly than others, and I highlight the threads that can be traced through the thesis so highlighting some of the key concerns in the investigation from the outset. The summary thus consists of a basic account of each module and the introduction in each of the thread that has been woven into this thesis.

Research Methodologies for Professional Enquiry

An exploration, questioning and positioning myself within an appropriate methodological framework through professional practice and my own understanding drawing on Heidegger (1962) and Husserl (1970) in order to explore phenomenology and hermeneutics.

In this module I undertook an exploration, questioning and positioning myself within an appropriate methodological framework through professional practice, which for me at this time was as a drama educator, working in a secondary school near Blackpool. I examined my own understandings about the study of human cultural activity in the context of a secondary school pupil who had been excluded from their previous school. I drew on Heidegger (1962) and Husserl (1970) in order to explore phenomenology and hermeneutics. A key

insight I gained through Heidegger's work was that we are governed by our own interpretation of the situation that we find ourselves in and that this is decided through our own background or history. By exploring I understood that hermeneutical construction does not attempt to predict and ultimately control a desired outcome; it exists to serve the purpose of exploration of the world in which we individually find ourselves. This informs the way I develop the discussion relating to the data collection in this thesis.

Social Theory and Education

An examination of the work of Freire (2000) as applied to my own professional context. This was strengthened through my understanding of emancipatory education seen through the work of Giroux (1988) and Dewey (1916). As a result of this module, I wrote a paper which was accepted for publication and is included as an appendix. This allowed me to consider Freire's work on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2000) and emancipation in relation to Blackpool as I am describing a marginalised town and its inhabitants and for some of the participants within this thesis, this has led to a form of emancipation through identity and performance.

Creativity in Practice

A construction of an autoethnographic drama to explore opportunities to develop my understanding of performance and autoethnography in a practical way. Within the written component of this module I used Cropley and Cropley's

(2008) extended phase model of creativity to structure my work. By drawing on my own understanding and experiences of Blackpool the thesis became autoethnographic in nature. In presenting the data and subsequent analysis through film, I was aware that through an autoethnographic lens I could demonstrate a personal and intuitive knowledge from knowing the town and through the relationships formed with some of the participants.

Policy Analysis

A policy analysis of the place of drama within the National Curriculum using the work of Ball (2008) and Scott (2010), as well as policy sociology to trace drama in education from its origins through to the present day and its place in the National Curriculum. It was during this module, when I was working with a group of young people, that I started to form ideas relating to performance and Blackpool and this initiated the focus for this thesis.

Institutions, Discontinuities and Systems of Thought

An application of Kristeva's concept of abjection as a way of understanding a specific popular novel and further drawing on Foucault (1978) and Butler (1990) as a means to understand sexuality and gender. I originally applied Butler's work on gender performance to this thesis however, as it is such a vast concept, I felt that it was distracting from my intentions. Nonetheless it shaped my understanding of the participants within the thesis. Through my

understanding of Kristeva's concept of abjection, I was able to develop my understanding and subsequent application of Bakhtin (1984) to suggest that Blackpool has become a place of degradation in the sense that it attracts those that are culturally abject of society.

Abstract

Queering Blackpool: An Ethnographic Study

Helen Eadon-Sinkinson

This research explores the notion of identity in relation to drag queens in the seaside town of Blackpool in the North West of England. What I describe is how this complex form of identity is composed not only from the appropriation and cultural manipulation of gendered tropes, in terms of behaviours, dress, and attitudes; but how identity is also composed from the socio-cultural place of Blackpool within the Northwest of England; and from specific genres of entertainment as they manifest in this sea-side town, which suffers from a high level of deprivation. The research employs qualitative data collection methods to build an understanding of how identity is created whilst exploring the ethnographic structure and representation of the town of Blackpool which is reflected in the analysis of the film through an autoethnographic lens. It becomes autoethnographic as it is my personal reaction to the research. I wanted to analyse my findings in terms of a qualitative visual ethnography and critical reportage, which takes the form of a short film which was an appropriate way to present the visual and socio-cultural representations of the data.

Blackpool's identity has been shaped by its raucous history. Early examples of dancing, drunken behaviour and prostitution at the Raikes Garden in the 1870s are documented by Walton (1998) as well as fairground style attractions and a rising number of cheap drinking establishments to cater for the influx of holidaymakers; all of which were difficult to police. Advertising the resort's entertainment attracted more working-class visitors creating a more down-market holiday resort which continues to this day. The working-class history of the town gives the resort a particular kind of focus. It also means that the town is vulnerable; it is vulnerable to economic market change, problems of poverty, and unemployment. Therefore, this thesis seeks to discuss the question: *how is Blackpool's social history reflected in both the town and drag performance spaces?*

This thesis uses the theory of Bakhtin's Carnival (1984) to highlight certain aspects of the film in order to present the research through an appropriate theoretical lens as well as appropriate supporting literature throughout. I felt it appropriate to use Bakhtin, since even at the level of a superficial joke, Bakhtin's work is located in celebration, freedom, holiday and the superficial preoccupations of historic and contemporary Blackpool. More significantly perhaps Bakhtin was interested in how the world, in these contexts, can be turned upside down, and what it means for order and identity to be essentially forms of performativity, a theme central to my own work around identity and place with respect to Blackpool.

Due to the nature and disclosure of some participants I decided to present the data through the form of a film. Through the initial interview process, it became apparent that some identities needed to be hidden as a means of protecting both the participants and their families as sensitive details were

discussed, however their stories still needed to be told. To both explore and mitigate the problems that I have mentioned, visual ethnography seemed to offer both a solution and an interesting way to convey meaning that would otherwise be lost in text. By presenting the data in this way I am creating characters. This becomes unavoidable, rather like the drag queen performers who create characters, therefore I am paralleling that. By creating the characters that are heard and deliberately filming various aspects of Blackpool, I was able to join both person and place to create a visual means that represents the journey and exploration that I went through as a researcher and which further presents the data, as self and other, in the most appropriate way. When I use the word 'trans,' I am referring to transvestites, transsexuals and transgender people. Throughout this written part of this thesis, I will refer to the visual aspect as 'the film.'

Chapter1: Introduction and Blackpool's History

This thesis relates to the journey and the re-telling of the journeys of specific groups of people within Blackpool and as such it is imperative to narrate a journey of Blackpool's history and the creation of its identity. In a sense, the film becomes a narrated journey both of self and identity as well as of escape. It is a journey, not just of the town and the participants but also my journey as a researcher; as someone who was born and raised in the area, making explicit my experiences. This was a distancing process at times yet nonetheless was a way of creating and experiencing knowledge. It was distancing as I was selecting what to reveal and share through this thesis as a researcher, but it was also distancing as towards the end of this process I changed jobs and moved away from Blackpool thereby creating a physical distance between the town and myself. When I started studying I was working as a secondary school teacher in a school on the outskirts of Blackpool however towards the end of my study and research I had moved into higher education in a place very different from Blackpool in terms of its history, culture and socio-economic status.

Throughout the research process I found myself at the centre of what I was investigating, through the understanding and knowledge of my hometown, trying to position myself and perform as a researcher whilst being a producer of new knowledge. As a researcher I have created a context through which to view the research which is composed through a historic, social and theoretical lens and this created and brought me closer to my subject. It is through a justification of the choices that I have made as well as the articulation of my

interpretation of experience that helped to shape and create this knowledge. Peim (2018) describes his own process of challenging ideas about what research is and its objectivity. This is what I was doing too. Throughout the research process I was challenging and questioning what my stance was, which is inherent within the theme of performativity, either through the role of drag or through my performance as a researcher. However, underneath this there is an aspect which is not performative and that is me and my history and understanding but, to access the data needed for this thesis, it was safer to take on the role of the researcher. Throughout the process there were times where I felt uncomfortable either through the situation that I was in, by exploiting the knowledge that I had come to understand or through exposing aspects of Blackpool that I was familiar with. I felt hesitant in revealing myself and my relationship with Blackpool through the research. This hesitancy was seen in some of the participants too and so the film became a technique which produced a distance as it became a blend of stories and experience. There was a distance as I had an aim in mind, which was to create this thesis, yet at the same time it produced an intimacy and new knowledge regarding my subject.

In this thesis I apply Bakhtin's (1984) conceptualisation of Carnival to the resort of Blackpool as a way of analysing the place and the research participants. Through the discussion and application of Carnival and the Carnavalesque, I suggest that it becomes difficult to separate the seaside resort of Blackpool and the characters that populate it; their identities are fused and become blended. Because of this it is important to understand some aspects of Blackpool's history, and the development of its own identity since it

is relevant to understanding how and why it has become a locus for a trans and drag community; a community which questions the assumed order of hetero-normativity within a working-class holiday resort context. The following provides a perspective on how this came to be.

Blackpool became popular as a holiday destination for the workers of the Lancashire factory and mill towns in which, quite often, the whole town would holiday at the same time whilst the factories and mills closed for servicing and repairs. These holiday periods became known as wake weeks. Previous to leaving their town for a holiday, the workers would have remained in their homes and created their own form of entertainment and celebration. However due to the development of transport and the prospect of therapeutic sea air, coastal towns such as Blackpool became more popular as a working-class holiday destination. What can be seen from the very early part of Blackpool's history is that it has become disconnected from the cultural mainstream, including the assumptions of working class heteronormality culture. Moving popular forms of recreation and celebration of tradition such as the wake weeks from mill towns to the seaside could be seen as a move which separated Blackpool from mainstream culture and sparked the beginning of Blackpool's decay as Bennett (1986, p.138) describes,

...both the traditional [wakes] and newer [fairs] urban forms of popular recreation, under considerable attack in the inland towns at the time, had been displaced to Blackpool beach where they were able to thrive in an excess of unbridled vulgarity.

This resulted in Blackpool's promenade and beach becoming sites of Carnavalesque behaviour due to the concentration of visitors from inland. Bennett (1986) suggests that from the relocation of wake weeks celebrations and disconnection, the carnivalesque 'has constituted the unofficial Blackpool,

the underbelly beneath its constructed image of progress, respectability and modernity' (p.147). This characteristic once established has been a consistent part of Blackpool's history as reflected in Blackpool becoming a seasonal town offering poorly paid transient jobs to those who could not find more permanent jobs elsewhere. This is supported in *Blackpool's Selective Licensing Proposal* (Blackpool Council, 2018) which discusses the growing levels of deprivation, and describes the local economy as, "highly seasonal, with many low-paid jobs. Almost one third of the borough is now amongst the most 10% deprived areas in the country" (Blackpool Council, 2018, p.3). The deprivation is presented in various ways through high levels of unemployment and benefit dependency, "with a highly transitory population leading to considerable inequalities in health and life expectancy which are significantly lower than both other regional and nationally comparable areas in terms of population size" (Blackpool Council, 2018, p.26). Blackpool seems to be becoming even more disconnected and able to become a place where norms are challenged in a carnivalesque way. Presenting this data in a visual way, through the film became more enticing.

With the rise of modernity, and the impact on English holiday resorts such as Blackpool, traditional values began to crumble. Values such as working and respecting hierarchical social structures, which were created through the everyday lives of the factory and mill towns, began to erode as such structures started to shift. (Bennett, 1996) Instead, resorts such as Blackpool could be viewed as a place for the marginalised as a result of the resort's decay thereby creating a different culture.

Coastal resorts such as Blackpool construct their identity through their location and the visitors they attract. Traditionally Blackpool could be seen as a pleasure resort but with some constraints as historically workers from whole factories and towns shared the same holiday week as discussed earlier. This resulted in Blackpool epitomising both “hedonism and respectability” (Brown, 2001, p.3) of the working class. It could be seen as a place where the constraints and limitations of everyday life are contained in a place that acknowledges its own sense of hedonism. The working day, the burdens of life are cast aside and as such people are brought together of different backgrounds in the search for an escape from these restraints. This has been manifesting over the years (Walton, 1998). Edensor and Millington (2013) describe,

the extraordinarily diverse forms of pleasure on offer along the promenade, and while the Golden Mile has been transformed by the replacement of small stalls and freak shows by large amusement arcades, the resort still contains many attractions that are similar to those in earlier times, supplemented by novelty shops, karaoke bars and strip clubs. (p.147).

This suggests that Blackpool could be seen as a temporary place of cultural exchange in which spaces are shared in order to relax and enjoy without challenge (Webb, 2005).

Class Difference

Within such a resort, there remained a notion of class difference between the migrating visitors. Blackpool’s North and South Shore areas were dominated by the middle class (but perhaps not gentry) and the resorts leading from these areas, such as Lytham St. Annes and Thornton-Cleveleys, contained

respectable guest houses suitable for such visitors (Bennett, 1986). These smaller and more contained resorts remained within a comfortable travelling distance of Blackpool meaning that people could base themselves outside of the central area but still dip into the excitement when they wanted to; also allowing themselves to be filmed by Mitchell and Kenyon (2004) during the Edwardian period. Such films embraced the working and lower classes who sought thrills above respectability in an attempt to escape work-life constraints. This was with limits though as neighbours, work mates and even bosses were on holiday together in the same place at the same time. Even the notion of carnivalesque at times remained subdued as the ingrained memory of workplace respect was at the forefront, to the extent that the bustling holiday makers observed their regular factory lunchtime and would return to their guesthouses or local cheap restaurants (Bennett 1986).

For entertainers, performing to new visitors every week was a way to connect to a mass audience and is still continued today. This in turn provided a release from the constraints of working life where pleasure and fun were of the utmost priority whilst at the same time acknowledging the presence of authority figures and neighbours as many towns were on holiday together in Blackpool at the same time. Routines from working life could still be observed, for example factory lunch hour times would see the emptying of the promenade as holiday makers returned to their guest houses for their meals. As the popularity of Blackpool as a holiday destination rose, so too did the number of guest houses and hotels. Geographically, Blackpool could have been compared building wise, to many of the industrial towns from which the working-class families came. The landladies who ran guest houses were themselves often from such

towns; many being mill workers who had managed to save enough to venture into business. This led to the stereotypical representation of the Blackpool landlady and provided the source of jokes for both entertainers and postcard humour. Their presence and homeliness helped to welcome the temporary families (visitors) that stayed within the resort. Blackpool was an example of working-class Lancashire at play where people who had saved their hard-earned money came to let off steam (Walton, 2006). This planted the seed for the identity of the Blackpool that we see today. As Walton (2006, p.16) explains, those from outside the resort were at times both,

impressed and appalled by turns at the high-pressure way of life that Blackpool magnified and intensified, as a place for letting off steam, releasing accumulated tensions (and, some thought, acting as prophylactic against revolution), and proudly spending a year's holiday savings in a hectic week (at least, so the enduring legend ran).

This suggested that Blackpool was a resort for adults as those with young families would be unable to afford such a holiday. In turn by creating an adult only environment, the sense of freedom from the everyday might suggest that a licence for a different type of behaviour, would be permitted. However, it could be said that Blackpool created a form of civilisation to mould those holidaying there, as local government institutions were formed to regulate the behaviour both at the seaside and on the transport links to the town as well as looking at the wearing of inappropriate clothing.

Mass Observation

In the years that followed there was a shift in living standards and as such the working class were enabled to buy clothes specifically for their holiday.

This too is observed in film footage of the time suggesting that Blackpool had come to represent both the outlandish and disciplined sides to the Lancastrian working class. This was not the view taken by the Mass Observation that began in the 1930s in which journalist Graham Turner argued that, “Blackpool was at bottom a puritanical place, with the prevailing atmosphere of innuendo a smokescreen for a normative culture of repression and self-control” (Walton, 2006, p.17).

The Mass Observation was a social research organisation which was founded in 1937 by a group of people that wanted to create anthropology of themselves (User, 2015). The team was made up of observers and volunteers who studied the everyday lives of people within Britain. This continued until the 1950s and included detailed study of the people of Bolton (known as the Worktown project) and Blackpool. This comprised of a team of investigators going into a variety of public situations: meetings, religious occasions, sporting and leisure activities, in the street and at work, and recording people's behaviour and conversations in as much detail as possible (User, 2015). However, these observations attracted criticism; Cross and Walton (1990, p.10) argue that these reports fail to offer a “theory of industrial culture,” and reveal a “deeply textured image of a holiday” (Cross and Walton, 1990, p.10). They believe that the workers or holiday makers were seen as a “homogenous mass” (Cross & Walton, 1990, p.10) and that “contemporary social scientists may be disappointed with the paucity of nuance in the analysis of class, age and gender” (Cross & Walton, 1990, p.10). The observed were thus seen not as individuals but as a mass without self-awareness. The observations were also criticised for failing to take into account individuality and circumstance. It

could be argued that the observers saw themselves as above the holiday makers as far as class went; an infamous example of which was when one observer arrived in Blackpool in a Bentley whilst the holiday makers arrived by train (User, 2015).

Working-Class Culture

Blackpool was able to capitalise on its developing culture of working-class difference due to the transition of the wake's weeks, combined with the rise of the importance of leisure within the working classes. Blackpool could be seen as a ready-made platform in which to play out the carnivalesque. Its economic possible realisation by the working class, along with the popular expansion of seaside type holidays allowed for this to happen. People who were attracted to Blackpool as a place of release from often arduous low paid jobs were much more likely to explore difference in culturally challenging ways, because activities, such as gambling and comedy, are about encouraging risk. Edensor and Millington (2013) detail the experience and consumption of this platform,

the rich variety of attractions offered by the world's first working-class holiday resort, a site at which workers from the Northern Britain were released from their everyday factory discipline to feast and drink alcohol, be whirled around in fairgrounds, swim in the sea, cavort on the beach and be dazzled by lighting. Drawn towards the assorted gambling places, pubs, musical performances, comedians, freak shows, fortune tellers, dancehalls, variety shows and more... (p.147).

The Carnavalesque involved turning values and social and cultural hierarchies on their heads and as such this reversal often involved gender roles and the holders of power which were expressed through a riotous spectacle. The application of carnivalesque to explore places and practices of

leisure in a variety of settings has been used by a number of researchers (Cross & Walton 2005; Hubbard 2008; Ravenscroft & Gilchrist 2009; Ravenscroft & Matteucci 2003; Matheson & Tinsley 2016). The carnivalesque is associated with liminal spaces and times such as the seaside and holiday, and as Shields (1990) explains in relation to the seaside town of Brighton, the carnivalesque creates, “moments of discontinuity in the social fabric,” as described above (p.47). These moments create a separation from work, the everyday and the constraints of a hierarchical society (Meethan, 2012). In the suggestion that hotels, a common feature of seaside towns, can offer a carnivalesque space, Morgan and Pritchard (1998) suggest such spaces allow for freedom, escape and release from everyday constraints.

Whilst carnival in this sense involves the inversion of social hierarchies, this form of carnival is exclusively a lower or working-class activity and form of being and situates itself within the resort of Blackpool. Walton (2000) explains that Blackpool, “extended to embrace those of the lower and even the substantial middle classes who put pleasure and fun before the tighter interpretations of respectability” (p. 14), which was seen in, “a characteristic openness and friendliness (but with a caustic tongue when deemed appropriate), and an openness to the rude and the ribald within the limits that unspoken consensus prescribed” (p.14). This gaudy and at times lack of sophistication was witnessed through the drag performances within this research and supports the notion that Blackpool, as a holiday resort, is a place of carnival and I wanted to capture this visually. I am not suggesting there is an inevitability in the drag trajectory of Blackpool, but the cultural, stylistic, attitudinal precursors were being established that would make this transition

more possible. Local government institutions were established as a means of attempting to control and restrain assertive behaviour-behaviour such as noise levels on the promenade, nudity on the beach, and the ill-treatment of donkeys. The working class inverted the social and cultural hierarchies through “inappropriate attire (mufflers, clogs, shawls) and behaviour (smoking clay pipes, spitting, shouting, horseplay, litter and again the inevitable cruelty to donkeys)” (Walton, 2000, p.26).

Given the cultural and historical background of Blackpool, the seaside town became dependent upon sustaining its idiosyncratic identity as a holiday resort, a significant part of which was its carnivalesque component. It became a permanent site for ways of being that reversed or, indeed, in some blatant way questioned social and cultural hierarchies and forms of order and propriety, including the trans community whose permanence is reflected in the development of clubs, shows and venues dedicated to the performative nature of this community. What I wanted to capture, analyse and explore in the film are the sociological and historical lineages of identity in relation to the qualities that I am outlining. The rude working-class origins; the holiday inflection of this environment; the bawdy seaside entertainment, conspire to create a kind of performative identity which is displayed in Blackpool.

Blackpool's history was practised in witnessing spectacle, performance, theatre in ways that were already comic, bawdy, satirical and subversive as described above and as such this contributed to its long-standing reputation for entertainment. From the end of pier shows to the professional shows at The Winter Gardens and The Grand Theatre, Blackpool has entertainment for all ages and tastes. One of the more popular genres is that of the drag or

transvestite show. There are numerous bars and clubs that cater for this form of entertainment as well as providing a space for individuals to explore their identity. I wanted to know and to experience what was happening in these venues as a researcher rather than as a part of the regular audience. This felt voyeuristic however performances of this nature demand an audience; there is a requirement to be watched which creates an intimacy and yet a distance between the performers and the audience. I was also performing my role as a researcher which at times made me feel uncomfortable. Most of this entertainment is found within the bars and clubs within the gay district in Blackpool, yet it is only Funny Girls, (itself born out of the gay district and founded by the owner of some of the bigger and popular gay clubs in Blackpool) at the time of writing this thesis, that is dedicated purely to drag entertainment.

Historically the town has been transformed through economic and sociological forces into the Blackpool that is inhabited by establishments such as Funny Girls. The establishment of Funny Girls displays subversive elements for example; the power of heteronormativity being challenged through dress, language and burlesque, along with the cultural power that this form of place and entertainment represents. However, Blackpool, even its most manifest deprived forms (poverty, drugs, unemployment and high rate of teenage pregnancies) has become a place of safety for the marginalised. This changed form of carnival is reported in the film and is discussed later.

It is not a coincidence that the decay and the marginality of Blackpool as a town, means that it is peculiarly sympathetic to communities who have a similar experience of being marginalised. Because of the sympathy within the

decay, there is an enormous poignancy about Blackpool and the touching, beautiful relationships that it sustains between otherwise marginalized individuals who have struggled to find a place to belong elsewhere and as such, the film explores the place and the people of Blackpool. Given these factors, it became increasingly clear to me that I wanted to explore how this history was reflected in the performative drag and trans scene that Blackpool was famous for.

As acknowledged at the start of chapter one, when I started studying, I was working as a drama teacher in a secondary school on the outskirts of Blackpool. My initial focus for this thesis was going to be the young people that I worked with in preparation for the Northern Beat Project in Blackpool which formed part of a GCSE performance. The project has since ended due to financial reasons. The Northern Beat project was run by Lancashire County Council and The Lancashire Police. Year Ten students in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre schools were invited to create, develop and produce a fifteen-minute piece of drama based on that year's topic which was identity. Previous topics have included social media and drugs and alcohol. These productions were watched by a judging panel made up of different agencies related to that year's topic and six schools are selected to enter their work in a Showcase evening in a theatre where the short-listed schools competed against each other to win a monetary prize. It was intended that the performances could be fed back into the participating schools, either as an assembly or in the case of the school where I was teaching, the Life Skills lessons. In doing this I hoped that through the performance, the young people in school would relate to their peers' performance and understand the themes explored within the performance. I

had been involved in previous entries to the competition and had become interested in the behaviour and relationships formed within the groups of students as well as how they interpreted and subsequently devised a piece of drama based on that year's topic.

It was in preparation for an entry on the theme of identity that I became aware of and started to focus on one individual who was involved. I started to view the drama sessions as well as the project, as a place where consideration of identity was valued in comparison to work in regular timetabled school sessions and this began to shape the focus of my research. There was a moment in rehearsal that became highly significant in which the particular individual revealed a desire to be other than self. At first these revelations were contained within the supportive environment of the drama group but after a while the individual started to share with others within their social circle in Blackpool as well as some teaching staff. This sharing included showing video footage of them performing their other self. They had created a YouTube channel and had uploaded the videos for others to view as a means of expressing the identity that they had created. I had been a part of this individual's journey as they began to discover and create their identity which had started within the drama process leading up to the Northern Beat competition, with the competition performance being used as a platform to share their identity.

In my personal journey as an academic, I moved away from the secondary school and into the Higher Education sector. I was no longer working with the young people in the school in Blackpool and so I needed to refocus my research. The performativity of my previous role as a teacher and my personal

history as a resident close to Blackpool was ending but this did not stop my feelings of curiosity, loyalty and belonging; I still wanted to explore identity and Blackpool. My doctoral studies led me to become more interested in the sociological dimension of performance and I found myself moving away from the practice of it myself with young people whilst recognising the possibilities for me to explore and learn through this. I had become intrigued by the exploration of identity of the young person in a Blackpool school as described above and so I started to look at other ways in which the performance of identity occurred within the town and my focus shifted towards the identity of drag queens in Blackpool.

Chapter 2: Related Research

It is through a comprehensive literature review of similar work that I found there to be little ethnographic research within the North West of England on the sub-cultures described above. The majority of research is either of a medical, historical nature or based solely on queer theory whereas this research focusses on a working-class seaside town that has been shaped by its social history. As such, I have chosen to weave appropriate literature throughout this thesis rather than dedicating a specific chapter to a literature review as a way of exploring and supporting my own research. I was drawn to a piece of research by Middlehurst (2013) in which he employs mixed-methods to advance the understandings of present-day male to female transgender people within Manchester's Gay Village in an attempt to enhance the international knowledge of transgenderism and whilst this is important, it differs to my research methodologically which is focused on a smaller, seaside town with a working-class history. Manchester itself can be seen as a thriving, cosmopolitan and also economically vibrant city whereas Blackpool could be viewed as the opposite of this, as can be seen visually in the film. Middlehurst's study is about rights, identity and the political right to be within the community whereas this research on Blackpool is about performativity and history in relation to what is happening now which shows deprivation but also heroism in the face of socio and economic decline and this is also shown in the film. However, this research remains important as it situates the subjects within the urban environment of Blackpool and adds to the research of trans and drag identity within the North West of England.

Middlehurst's (2013) research presents itself as an investigation of social interaction of male-to-female transgender people, mostly those who are cross-dressers/transvestites, who socialise in Manchester's Gay Village. The research could be described as participatory action research as Middlehurst is situated within the process as he is part of the social culture of the Gay Village and therefore was able to draw on a much larger number of participants over a longer period of time whereas in contrast I was an outsider trying to find a way in to the sub-culture of Blackpool and as such was limited with both participants as well as time. Both Middlehurst's (2013) research and my research are important as they identify and highlight sub-cultures within the North-West of England and explore the challenges and experiences faced within sub-cultures. This emphasises the need for research to be conducted which looks at both people and place.

The incomplete academic knowledge on current transgenderism, particularly transvestic identities, has been recognised by representatives of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the UK Government Home Office. These deficient understandings comprise transphobic discriminations. (Middlehurst, 2013, p.10).

This is further reinforced when Middlehurst (2013) states, "The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) document the *Trans Research Review* (Mitchell and Howarth, Autumn 2009) has highlighted incomplete research about contemporary trans people in the UK" (p.9).

Preoccupations with determining appropriate gender identities, even within the context of communities that challenge such constructions, has never been far away. For example, Brake (1976) is anxious to tell us that previous research on European transvestites suggests that although perceived as homosexual, most transvestites are heterosexual (Brake 1976). Although it

could be said that society is becoming more accepting of gender equality, for example the legalisation of gay marriage, in reality people identify themselves through gender. It is through this gender identity that social construction is formed. Whilst this it might be important to look at sexuality and rights, this was not something that I chose to do within my research. Crawford (1992) believes that such categorisation is a way of seeing and creating differences between men and woman. Therefore, if the boundaries of these gender rules are crossed i.e. if a man chooses to dress as a woman, then social norms are broken and there may be consequences.

This concept is evident in Butler's (1990) explanation of gender being a performative construction in which gender-queer and transgender people are viewed as symbols of resistance in which gender and gender roles are mimicked through the act of drag and transvestism. Butler (1998; 1990 and 1993) and other gender theorists, including de Beauvoir (1974) and Foucault (1978), are important and are significant in helping me to understand some of the issues, particular around performativity, to give them centre stage in this study would be to miss what I am most interested in, which is the way that the characters in my ethnographic study and my film are shaped by and become part of the unique context of Blackpool.

Chapter 3: Method and Methodology

Overview

Prior to starting this research, I had previously attended the venues described however for the data collection I attended Funny Girls six times over an eighteen-month period as well as visiting smaller bars such as Pepes, The Tipsy Cow and Peek-a-Booze once for each venue. After each visit I made field notes. I attended Blackpool Pride for three consecutive years and had visited Blackpool to observe on six separate occasions during which time I took photographs, video recordings and made notes after my visits. These visits ranged from two hours to four hours at a time although there were many other unrecorded occasions when I visited the town for other reasons.

There were seven participants involved in this research. Six Face to face audio recorded interviews, lasting approximately two hours each time, conducted with three participants prior to which telephone conversations had taken place. The rest of the participants were interviewed over the telephone with audio recorded interviews ranging from 10 minutes to an hour in length depending on the participant and their availability. In her research on drag queens and identity, Greaf (2016) selected eleven participants yet only interviewed them once, "in order to focus on the information from my fieldwork and interviews" (p.4). Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) used "intensive, open-ended, semi structured interviews with eighteen drag queens," (p.166) in their research on drag queens in Miami. This was a larger number of participants compared to my study however, there were two researchers involved in the

Miami study which was conducted in a larger geographical area. In contrast, Brown (2001) used visual research methods, life-history analysis, and field observation with one participant in his exploration of gender performance and gay masculinities. He offers no reason why one single participant was used but yet his case study is rich in detail and intimacy which might well have been lost if more participants had been involved. This was another reason why I selected my participant number as I too wanted to foster relationships that would provide me with intimate knowledge and understanding. Fusch and Ness (2015) state, "What is data saturation for one is not nearly enough for another. Case in point: ethnography is known for a great deal of data saturation because of the lengthy timelines to complete a study as well as the multitude of data collection methods used" (p.1408). They continue by explaining that "rich data is many layered, intricate, detailed, nuanced, and more" (p.1409) and this can be achieved through a small participant number. This view is also supported by (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012) who argue that a large sample size does not necessarily produce rich data and that the appropriate number of participants should be selected by the researcher for the purpose of the study.

Drag in Blackpool

Within this section I give a detailed description of some of my experiences within the drag scene in Blackpool as a means of data collection and reflection. I was interested in being part of and recording how the carnivalesque was realised in the context of contemporary Blackpool, and the deprivation that it

has now largely become characterized by. In particular I wanted to understand what this meant at the level of personal being, and this was one of the reasons why I chose to conduct a case study as I was able to highlight the personal in relation to a form of cultural being which exists in the deprived margins of our society. In a similar way Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) and Panapakidis (2012) also describe people and place in their ethnographic study of drag which helps to conjure up a visual understanding as well as a personal reflection of their research. It is also a way of introducing the reader to the research and therefore is important. However, the use of solely using case study and ethnography became problematic as a means of exploration, as I felt that there were multiple voices coming through the research including my own as described in the descriptions below (Brewer, 2000). There was a conflict emerging, which can be seen in the change of tense. There was a struggle in trying to research and investigate my home town thereby instigating conflict of myself as I was reporting my findings, and this is sometimes seen in the shift of tense where my voice becomes more prominent. In a sense the interrogation of the research becomes an example of post-industrial carnivalesque.

Prior to starting this research, I had attended Funny Girls and other bars on social outings. During the research period I attended Funny Girls six times over an eighteen-month period as well as visiting smaller bars such as Pepes, The Tippy Cow and Peek-a-Booze. It would have detracted from the experience to have made notes and would have perhaps made me not so inconspicuous to the other revellers and so I recorded my reflections when I went home. It is important to note that many bars within Blackpool host drag

nights on an ad hoc basis thereby making it difficult to give an accurate number of drag entertainment venues. Some of these bars are exclusive to men, for example The Man Bar and The Growlr Club, so I was unable to attend or comment on the performances held there.

Funny Girls is housed in a former cinema and the exterior now has a white art deco style frontage with pink florescent lighting, yet it remains similar to the cinema with the billboards outside advertising the shows as well as the steps leading into the venue. It is reminiscent of the earlier entertainment venues of the town and as such links the past to the present and shows how Blackpool's history has an impact on its present. The pink and white of the exterior made the building visually prominent and the colours were like the rock confectionary which Blackpool has become famous for. It is an architecturally beautiful building which had been camped up to entice its audience in rather like Blackpool itself in the sense that it was about front thereby adding to the aspect of carnival. The bright lights added to the feeling that you were about to be entertained through performance and evoked a feeling of expectation and added to the sense of performativity.

I stood outside and watched the people entering the venue, there were couples and groups of people out celebrating hen nights and birthdays no doubt similar to the earlier groups of holiday makers going for an evening's entertainment. Upon entering the reception area, which was bawdily carpeted, there were several members of staff taking the entrance fees. The style of the reception area foreshadowed the entertainment that was about to unfold in so much as it was garish and brash and although it had probably cost a substantial amount of money, it felt cheap. This juxtaposition is another

example of Blackpool's cultural aspect. Some people had booked in advanced and were checking their names off a list; I had not and so I paid my fee and walked into the main performance arena where on the way the compere Zoe was talking to people and gauging the audience for the night. I felt obtrusive as I was there to observe and research-not to join in on the night out, yet I needed to make myself inconspicuous, so I too was dressed up for a night out to blend in with the audience. I was performing a duality of roles; researcher and audience member.

In order to access knowledge and information I needed to perform the role of researcher. It became important to construct as rationale as to why I claim myself, as a researcher, was performing self. Goffman (1959) argues that people act or perform a variety of roles or identities depending on the situation and uses a dramaturgical framework to explain. Goffman (1959) argues that social interaction in this sense can be viewed as a theatre in which actors, supported by scripts, costumes and props, perform different roles for an audience. The observers are the audience who interpret information about the actor by the things they say, how they behave and their appearance. This suggests that identity is socially constructed and is performed within societal roles and through interactions.

Goffman (1959) uses the areas of the stage to further his concept of identity performance with the front stage area being the place in which the performance takes place whilst using "expressive equipment" (p.19). This equipment, such as scenery as well as personal characteristics, helps to provide information to the audience as to the role the performer is laying. In my role as I researcher I tried to hide my props such as a voice recorder in

order to neutralise my identity and appear more friendly. I was challenged and I felt uncomfortable at times as I had not previously performed the role of researcher in my hometown. I was also aware that in interview situations, I was giving my audience or participants clues to the role that I was playing, through my speech and mannerisms. How I performed as a researcher in that situation was different to how I was on my visits to the clubs. I had to blend in and so therefore deliberately chose to dress in appropriate clothing and behaved in a similar way to the other people who were there for a night out. My 'props' such as a notepad and pen were left at home to help me blend in. The audience members at the clubs were viewing the same performance as myself yet I was there to interpret it for the purpose of this thesis therefore in a sense I was presenting a backstage performance in order to blend in with the rest of the audience.

Performance therefore becomes a useful lens through which to view the identity of myself as a researcher as well as the participants within this study. Goffman (1959) argues that roles are shaped by the actor, the reaction of the audience, and partially by the context within which the role is performed. This suggests that identity can be viewed as a type of constructed performance. However, Gutmann (2003) argues, "to say this, however, is not to say much more than that genes and physiognomies do not determine our social identities" (p.120). Hall (1996) believes that identity and subsequent interpretation is not fixed and can change and evolve depending on situation as well as external influences. This fluidity helps to support the claims that I was performing my role as a researcher as at times I found myself in an interview situation and had to adapt to the participant in order to glean

information yet at other times I was still performing as a researcher whilst trying to blend in with an audience at the drag clubs. I had to adapt and evolve according to my environment in order to experience it.

In her discussion of ethnography, Charmaz (2004) explains, “much qualitative research goes around the topic rather than into it. Rather than offering an incisive analytic interpretation of the experience as lived, qualitative studies often offer a description that defines it as observed—from a distance” (p.980). Instead the researcher should adopt the practices of the studied world in order to be immersed. This suggests a form of performance must occur in order to fully access the ‘studied world’ and is reminiscent of Goffman’s (1959) researcher identity which lies somewhere between their former identity and one which has become embedded in the researched setting so much so that the researcher could leave their academic identity behind. By entering the phenomenon of the research setting the researcher can discover the experiences that are significant and make them visible. Charmaz (2004) explains that in doing this there can be feelings of ambiguity but that this should be embraced as a way of uncovering hidden meanings and a deeper understanding of what is being researched. Spry (2001) explains, “The researcher, in context, interacting with others becomes the subject of research, blurring distinctions of personal and social, self and other” (p.710). This resonated with my own situation as a researcher as I became further immersed in the research setting. My personal history and knowledge of the town of Blackpool as well as the relationships that were being formed led me disseminate my understanding using autoethnography as a construction of self. Spry (2001) describes the autoethnographic text as emerging “from the

researcher's bodily standpoint as she is continually recognizing and interpreting the residue traces of culture inscribed upon her hide from interacting with others in contexts" (p.710). The self-reflexive nature of autoethnography invites the reader to question and reflect on their own construction of self and interactions with others (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The use of autoethnography is given further acknowledgement within chapter three of this thesis in the data collection discussion.

I knew from the conversations with a participant that Zoe was looking for information to bring into her compering for the night, for example, if anyone was celebrating a particular event, she would mention this or, indeed, if anyone had engaged in conversation, she might make a point of referring to them in the evening's performance thereby creating an intimacy with the audience whilst performing her identity.

The concept of the participant performing their identity on stage is a conscious act as Goffman (1990) describes, "...our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality" (p.30). Lawler (2014) explains that often we try to make the invisible visible in order to give prominence to our role or identity and this is what was happening on the stage in *Funny Girls*. The participant was performing her identity which is an unavoidable process needed to be part of the social world and occurs as a result of social situations (Goffman, 1959). In another sense, the self is created through social interaction, personal history and experience and different aspects of it are revealed according to the environment that we find ourselves in. The environment and performative nature of *Funny Girls* allowed the participant to reveal and perform an aspect of her identity. Goffman (1959)

argues that character and subsequent identity is something that is achieved rather than being innate; it is done and achieved through a series of performances. There was a slope down into the standing area and which was crowded. Directly below the decorative proscenium arched stage there was a bar which was being tended by drag queens and transvestites. It was clear that there was a distinction between the two as the drag queens were heavily made up with an almost comedic look about them with padding and make up around the breast area whereas the transvestites were much subtler in their appearance. I noticed that one of the transvestites had breasts and this added to the speculation that the owner sometimes loans money to his staff for gender enhancement surgery. I felt almost perverse noticing this, but I was there to observe and record what I saw. I wanted data for my thesis, yet this felt exploitative. I was performing my role as a researcher whilst acknowledging my own personal feelings. One of the participants had explained that some of staff had breast implants and a few had or were undergoing sex-reassignment surgery, and this had given me intimate knowledge that I had now become aware of. They also explained that some staff and regular customers had chosen to live as women whereas others only dress in drag at the club where there was an audience which highlighted the performance theme running through this research. They were able to reveal their identities through performance within the safe confines of the club.

This is an example of how carnival in this context is one that has only limited power, in that it relies upon being a commercial enterprise. It must entertain, conform to certain expectations, and observe certain procedures: it is performative. Therefore, a division occurs between spectator and performer.

This split between observer and performer is a metaphor which could be applied many aspects of this research both generally but also at the personal level making the use of case study appropriate as it explores the very challenging personal, broken journey of the participants within the study as told in the monologues in the film. The trans monologue describes the performed trans identity at Funny Girls, where within the confines of this arena the participant can challenge through carnival, the establishment that brought him here.

The audience was made up of a variety of people including couples and groups who were there to be entertained and some who were there to perform their identity. Behind the standing area there were two seating areas which were serviced by drag waiting on staff. The people in this area tended to be sat in groups and from the balloons and badges, it was evident that some were celebrating birthdays and hen nights and had clearly tried to dress up for the occasion. This added to the sense of carnival which was occurring within the place. The lighting in the audience had an artificial orange tinge to it which dimmed when the performers took to the stage. There was an expectant feel to the atmosphere and when Zoe the compere walked to her DJ area, the crowd clapped and cheered. I felt happy too and safe and enjoyed my time there. Zoe, who was dressed in a short blue dress with a beehive styled wig and elaborate make up and jewellery, welcomed the audience and mentioned people who were celebrating different occasions before playing a few songs.

The extravagant appearance of Zoe enhanced the excessive and performative situation, and this is also seen at the end of the film. Most of the songs were quite camp, for example ABBA, and the audience sang along and

danced. Looking around, as well as the groups of women and couples, there were also groups of men and one or two transvestites blending into the crowded audience which substantiated the claims stated earlier. Yet there was a cohesion within the audience which suggested that Funny Girls was a safe and celebratory space thereby supporting the values of carnival. It was also a mirror image of Blackpool in the way that it is made up of different groups of people joining together in a gaudy, spectacular setting. The club represented Blackpool's working-class history and subsequent identity as it allows people from different backgrounds to join with transient communities to celebrate in revelry.

Zoe was playing a character and had transformed, not just in a visual way, but in the sense that she was able to do things through performance that could not be done in everyday life. Through her performance on stage was able to perform her identity. She could heckle her audience, swear and make obscene remarks without fear of retribution which impacted on the audience who were laughing and participating in the camp atmosphere behaving in ways that would be unacceptable and lack sophistication in the everyday and yet matched the earlier descriptions of wake town weeks in Blackpool; she could take risks. The carnivalesque backdrop of the drag performance allowed and enabled the performers and audience to create alternative idiosyncrasies of themselves.

Throughout the research process I noted some overlapping at times with the terms, transsexual and transvestites and these terms often appeared in literature relating to the study of drag queens and transgender people; however, each group is distinct. I was asked by a participant to make it clear

that there is no clear link between the drag queens and transgender people within the research that I conducted; they are related by the fact that this study is situated within the town of Blackpool and both trouble established practices and ideologies of hetero-normativity. This research looks at drag queens to explore how they challenge the assumptions of pre-defined gender practices through expressions of deviance within a seasonal working-class town.

Zoe introduced the performers to the stage and there was clapping and cheering as the main performer, Betty Legs Diamond, came onto stage with an entourage of other drag queens and male performers. They performed one set at a time, and this included songs from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *My Fair Lady* (1964). The make-up and costumes were elaborate and over the top and were in keeping with the performances. Throughout the performances, Betty Legs Diamond was sexually suggestive and bawdy at times, but this again added to the atmosphere in the audience. The attitudes and performances witnessed on stage were representative of Blackpool in the fact that they were kitsch, camp and illuminated brash glamour.

In between the stage performances, Zoe played songs and interacted with the audience by mentioning people and inviting requests to be played. I watched as one audience member climbed the steps to Zoe's DJ box to request a song, as I had seen others do, however this person must have said something that Zoe did not like as she quickly took to her microphone and mildly ridiculed the audience member who laughed it off before joining their friends. Again, this mirrored the rude working-class nature of Blackpool. The atmosphere felt happy, excitable and safe. This might be because people had come out to have a good time and be entertained but also because some of

the nature of the staff and performances, as in it was made up of drag queens, gay men, transvestites and quite possibly people who were transitioning thereby allowing for a safe space for the audience. The closeness of the stage and audience invited a merger of celebration and frivolity. This view is supported by Rupp and Taylor (2003) who viewed drag performance spaces as places to challenge conventional notions of gender and sexuality. Through the performances, gender was expressed and at times ridiculed but this was only possible because of the environment which created an intimacy that allowed for this and allowed for the celebration of queerness.

As mentioned earlier, there are many bars and clubs within Blackpool that host drag evenings and so I ventured into a smaller club called Pepes Bar. I had previously visited this bar on a few occasions as a teenager with older friends and I remember feeling intimidated by the atmosphere in the bar but not knowing why. I felt uncomfortable and out of place, as if I did not fit in. I do not remember seeing anything that made me feel like this, I just remember the feeling of wanting to move on to another bar. On reflection this might have been because I was not familiar with and had not previously experienced the gay scene in Blackpool and this was known as a gay bar and I was an outsider. I knew that I wanted to go back as a researcher but also, I wanted to challenge my personal feelings. This particular venue has been closed down on several occasions due to various reasons including change of ownership and plumbing problems; it last closed in July 2017 and has not opened again since. This reflects the decay within the resort which is visually represented within the film. Pepes was very different to Funny Girls, it felt almost tacky and seedy and not somewhere that I would wish to stay for a long period of time. Where

Funny Girls was about performativity, front and the need to be watched, Pepes was far less commercial with no front; it was the everyday and there was no need to be watched. This shows the limitations of the power of carnival and instead highlights the concept of marginalisation within the town.

The clientele was different to that of Funny Girls and the club was perhaps trying to replicate the success of Funny Girls. It was mostly made up of older gay men with a few locals and holiday makers quite possibly enticed in by the cheap bar prices. No one was particularly dressed up in comparison to the audience at Funny Girls. There was a lack of performativity.

Looking around, the small venue was quite darkly lit with gold material around the bar area with a few tables and chairs scattered around near a small dance floor. There was a DJ booth which was manned by a drag queen called Crystal Candyfloss. In comparison to Betty Legs Diamond and Zoe, Crystal Candyfloss was quite gaudy and obviously male in gender but with the addition of a blonde wig, short yellow dress and almost clown like make-up for the performance. The drag queen played song requests before introducing another drag queen who performed a set with a duck puppet. Again, although mildly entertaining to myself, I felt that it was more of a gay bar than a drag venue as most of the audience were male and I felt uncomfortable and out of place. I felt I was there as a researcher and so perhaps I did not blend in and this made me feel like I was exploiting the situation for my own needs. Where Funny Girls had been a place of celebration, Pepes was of disintegration and cheapness which created a feeling of almost sadness, neglect and the need to escape. These feelings are revealed through the characters within the film as they discuss their journeys into Blackpool before arriving at Funny Girls.

At one point I went to the toilet and it was clear that there was a problem with the plumbing and drainage as it smelt bad and there was damp on the walls and the floor was wet. As I went into the ladies' toilet two men came out of the cubicle which did not necessarily make me feel uncomfortable but made me feel that I was perhaps encroaching into their space and club and so I left shortly after. I felt that as I was performing as a researcher I was in conflict about what I was doing. I was there to report what I saw. There was no place for me there, there was no need for an audience and I felt that I needed to get out; that I did not belong.

This was an example of 'otherness' but in the sense that I was the 'other' (de Beauvoir, 2010) and this was a contrast to my experiences at Funny Girls where I had blended into the audience and felt comfortable. It might have been because Pepes was a predominantly gay bar with drag performances and by exploring this further I would have to explore Blackpool's gay scene which would have detracted from the focus of this thesis, but yet it remains as an area of interest for future research. This was also noted by Brown (2006) in his own research on drag, "Professional drag performance developed out of and still primarily exists within a gay nightclub subculture" (p.2). As described earlier, there are many bars and clubs in Blackpool that host drag nights (most of which are gay bars and clubs) but only Funny Girls is promoted as being a drag performance venue.

In a sense, Funny Girls has become almost touristy as in it caters for parties who pre-book their tickets and its shows change according to the season whereas a lot of the other bars provide varying degrees of entertainment often on an ad-hoc basis. The interiors and entertainment at Funny Girls and Pepes

attract different crowds. Where Funny Girls is flamboyant in both entertainment and design, Pepes was dark and a bit seedy, almost in an attempt to keep the tourists out. This concept is shown in the film as it shows places which are open and welcoming of the public and tourists and yet other darker spaces in which tourists would not want to venture. This supports the notion of carnival and its limitations of power, how this has created a marginalised culture in Blackpool through its working-class identity, which is both celebratory and yet sometimes has a distinct sadness. Where Funny Girls is the carnival, Pepes is the everyday decay.

Methods

This research was initially undertaken using case study as a useful construct in order to understand how identity is created within the town of Blackpool with focus on the perspective and actions of the subject being studied (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). I wanted to explore the personal in relation to the very performative nature of the Funny Girls trans community in Blackpool and that this informed how I began to think about the film and how it should be constructed. Because of my experiences within the two clubs, the participant interviews and my own personal knowledge of Blackpool, I wanted to present my findings as a visual construction of not only the journeys undertaken by the participants but also examples of the celebration and decay within the resort.

A case study method was originally employed as an appropriate tool for gleaning information for this research as it allowed for observation to take

place and I felt that this was necessary as at times I became an observer of people and behaviour outside of the participant remit as shown within the film. Case studies can be seen as a study of a particular system; however Yin (2009, p.289) argues that, “the boundary line between the phenomenon and its context is blurred, as a case study is a study of a case in a context and it is important to set the case within its context (i.e. rich descriptions and details are often a feature of a case study).” I wanted to understand how the personal has been shaped, and sometimes ‘staged’ by a larger but marginalised culture in Blackpool.

As the thesis is about both person and place an ethnographical theme was embedded along with an autoethnographical account as a means of sharing experience and interpretation in a more naturalistic way. I was able to note that the language indicated the performative nature of drag and that it is located in a specific time and place. An example of this was when I was interviewing a participant in their home and they were telling me about their experiences as a drag queen and although there were occasions when their drag persona slipped into conversation, this was subtle when compared to their language and bawdy performance on stage within *Funny Girls*. Examples such as this were the reason that my methodology worked, as it helped me to understand the specific meaning of certain things by understanding the broader scene; again, the descriptions of the personal struggles seemed far removed from the celebratory atmosphere during the Pride celebrations.

The ethnographic nature of this thesis is a composition of data collection methods involving social contact and observation to support the representations of experience (O'Reilly, 2005; Willis & Trondman, 2002). I

wanted to learn from my participants and to understand, “what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different” (Spradley, 1979). Therefore, the methods that I employed supported the presentation and explanation of the culture and location that I experienced. The description of the data collection below is an aid to the visual aspect of the film.

Data Collection

When I started the data collection for this thesis, I was immediately drawn to Blackpool’s biggest drag venues: Funny Girls. I had been told by a participant that Funny Girls was the town’s first official drag club and was originally promoted as a transvestite bar that advertised for staff who were gender illusionists. Currently people pay an entrance fee to watch the performances. There is an option to pay more for a table which provides a waiting on service or people can chose to stand at the bar, socialise and watch the entertainment. I knew that I could have paid my entrance fee like everybody else and observed what was happening as a means of data collection for this research but felt that this would have lacked depth and understanding. Yet to speak to the workers within the venue was, at first, a major hurdle due to the fact I had approached the owner to request such interviews only to be met with no response. Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) were faced with a similar problem in their research on drag queens in Miami. They explain how, “as white middle-class heterosexual (and non-crossdressing) women who collected and

interpreted the data, we are both outsiders to the world of drag” (p.8). I experienced a kind of division between those who were permitted to have access to the personal, and those who were part of the audience therefore I needed someone who would vouch for me in order to traverse that barrier. As stated earlier, I was easily able to access the performative nature of drag as an audience member where there was little differentiation between the spectator and performer in the guise of carnival but had no access to the personal and every day.

It was through a chance conversation with a friend, Kevin, who told me that he knew some of the performers at Funny Girls, that I was finally able to make a connection. I met with Kevin informally in a local pub on two occasions during which he told me he described his experiences of Funny Girls and the relationship that he has with Blackpool. Kevin helped to arrange a telephone conversation with the participant which proved to be the starting point within this research. Through these brief initial telephone conversations over an eight-month period a form of relationship was created. In the same way that Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) “came to develop close relationships with some of (their) participants, fostering rapport, trust, and candid conversations,” (p.8) so did I which resulted in being invited to the participant’s house to meet with them.

I was not sure what to expect before meeting the participant as I had watched him perform numerous times within the venue of Funny Girls and experienced their sharp wit and elaborate presentation however I was met with a well-presented middle-aged man in an immaculate home in Blackpool and it was if they were two different people. During our two-hour conversation he told me

about his background and how he came to work at Funny Girls. At first the participant seemed almost closed within the conversation, not offering too much detail but as the time progressed there seemed to be a connection made and conversation flowed. This suggested a duality of personalities; the closed conversation could be compared to the serious every day aspect of carnival whereas I had witnessed the unbounded and brash within the setting of Funny Girls. There was a distance between us and I felt I was there performing my role as a researcher whilst the participant was hesitant to reveal information that I wanted to know. Yet again, I needed to cross a temporal barrier. I allowed for the natural conversation to be participant led to avoid any awkwardness and potential manipulation of the data (Gramsci & Forgacs, 1988). I found it interesting that when the participant was talking about their drag queen persona, they slipped into some of the mannerisms and voice albeit subtly and it was through these nuances that they were revealing themselves to me. We both discussed the town of Blackpool and different venues and I believe it was through simple connections that the invitation to Funny Girls was made. There had been an intimacy created between the participant and myself. I was invited to spend the evening with the participant as he prepared for an evening's performance. I met the participant at the stage door of the venue and was escorted to his dressing room. We had arranged to meet early so that I could enter without being seen by the other staff as the manager was not receptive to people other than the staff being backstage.

Entering backstage there was a communal area. As the night went on it became apparent that it was for the use of the other drag queens and performers. The participant explained that he was the only one to have his

own private room which was small but contained hanging rails, shelves, a small bathroom as well as a dressing table, lights and mirror which was adorned with notes and photos. The room felt theatrical with the costumes strewn around and the smell of make-up heavy in the air. The participant had brought in a chair for me and explained that again he was happy for me to audio record the conversation. I was also allowed to take photographs within his dressing room throughout the evening. Although I had not originally intended to use photography within the research, on reflection this became the starting point for the idea of sharing the data through film as it told the story of the participant transforming in a visual way. Audio recording the conversation was important as I felt that by taking notes I might lose observational moments and would struggle to take photographs at the same time. It would have also brought attention to the fact that I was there as a researcher and created a subconscious barrier. I also felt that it added to the naturalistic style of conversation as if I had had to pause to make notes, the flow of conversation would have been disrupted and I did not want to miss any detail; I wanted to immerse myself within the place and research. I wanted to be part of what was happening and by making notes I felt that I was putting a barrier between not just the participant but the whole ambience and myself and this would have made me an outsider to the situation. I used the same audio recording method with the other participants within this research. The audio recordings and photographs became vital tools in my reflection on the data for the thesis. They also added to the informality of the conversations and allowed me to listen back to the captured experience (Miller & Glassner, 2004).

There were a number of times when the participants asked for the audio recorder to be turned off as they divulged information that they wanted me to know but did not want recording and including in this research. This was data of a sensitive nature and I respected the request as I needed to remain ethical throughout. Throughout the entire process I recognised the need to be reflexive and it was of paramount importance to adhere to ethical principles, as well as issues of selectivity, power and authorial responsibility. For example, confidentiality was an ethical issue as this was an especially sensitive area that could have had huge implications for some people. I understood that there were a range of sensitivities associated with this area and ethical issues were always put before research interests, yet I wanted to include as much as I could whilst being mindful of the ethical issues such as adhering to participant confidentiality and not including information that was disclosed in confidence. This was an example of crossing into the private and helped to shape my understanding of a broader scene forcing me to review the presentation of data.

These ethical dilemmas challenged me and so I blended the participant stories together to create two characters who would describe their experiences of drag, transitioning and their relationship with Blackpool. But the characters were of my creation, of my understanding of the participants and their journeys and their relationships with Blackpool and therefore I was intertwined with them too. Through the presentation of the characters, I was able to share my understanding and knowledge as a researcher whilst glimpses of my personal self-crept in. The characters were a way to exhibit an intimacy of knowledge whilst at the same time creating a distance in order to protect the participants

and myself. In a sense, the monologues became a form of ethnodrama (Miller-Day, 2008; Saldaña, 2011). Saldaña (2011) describes ethnodrama as the written script which consists of,

dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation, field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings (p.2).

The monologues had drawn on my, "field notes and interview transcripts and/or completed research reports and transform(ed) the data into a performance" (Sallis, 2007, p.8). Ethnodrama can be used to "present and represent a study of people and their culture-ethnography" (Saldaña, 2011, p.2) and this is what I had done. The blending of methodologies allowed me to create multi-layered voices and experiences (McCall, 2000) and, "interrogate the meanings of lived experience," (Denzin, 1997. p.94-95). I felt that this supported the performative theme of this thesis and added to the description and explanation of the data supporting the notion that that life can be viewed as a performance thereby making the monologues and subsequent film, an appropriate way to tell the real-life stories of others (Bakhtin, 1993; Geertz, 1973). I was also performing as a researcher about a place that I know and the people that I had come to know which allowed me to create a distance, like my film, but also served as a way of gaining knowledge and approaching intimacy. In the same way my film does this too.

Returning to the dressing room, the participant continued to get ready for that evening's performance and I felt that they were changing and becoming their on-stage persona; this was revealed to me in the both the voice and viewed in body movement. The man that I had met with originally had transformed himself into a hyperbolic woman. It was this process of transformation that

fascinated me. This process is revealed in the photographs at the end of the film and captures moments that were deliberately performed by the participant as well as moments in which he was unaware and reveal a more intimate and personal aspect.

During the evening, connections had been made to other people who I could speak to, both drag queens and transgender. Again, telephone conversations took place before I was able to meet with the suggested participants. I felt that the telephone conversations were important as they built up trust between myself and the participants and they proved to be invaluable when two participants chose not to meet with me but instead allowed me to continue further conversations over the telephone. However, one participant who had worked at Funny Girls before transitioning did agree to meet with me and so I met with her on two separate occasions at her place of work.

In a similar way in which I had encountered the first participant, I felt that I was met with a degree of apprehension by this one too. I was worried that the conversation would be brief, and I would not get the information that I wanted which made me feel like I was there to almost exploit the participant for the purpose of this thesis. It felt like I was intruding. I was taken upstairs to a private counselling room above a drug and sexual health centre and this felt quite stark and sterile in comparison to the elaborate setting of Funny Girls and indeed the littered streets of Blackpool outside. This in itself was a juxtaposition as we were in a place that acknowledged the hedonism of carnival and yet at the same time tried to assert some authority over it.

Initially I was concerned that I was intruding on this participant's time whilst I was performing as a researcher and this made me feel slightly embarrassed

at what I was doing. At first the discussion seemed to be stilted but again I allowed it to be participant lead whilst allowing part of myself to come into the conversation which resulted in the sharing of information as well as shared knowledge about the town of Blackpool as a melting pot of entertainment and identity. The participant presented herself in casual office wear which seemed a far cry from the elaborate costumes at Funny Girls. The participant was keen to discuss her story as well as the work that she was doing in the area which further prompted me to look at the town of Blackpool and its creation of identity as well as the data from the participants. The conversation was again audio recorded and I felt that this was an unobtrusive way to create a rapport and sense of intimacy with the participant and encouraged a free-flowing conversation rather than having to pause to make notes (Gibbs 2007).

It feels almost sterile to say that I simply collected research data; I felt that it was more than this. I was allowed to be part of their world for a short period and I was welcomed in to the personal. There were several occasions in which explicit personal information and stories were shared as mentioned earlier and I was asked to keep this out of the thesis. Some of the personal information made me feel sad whereas other parts made me feel happy and I knew that I wanted to share these feelings that I had experienced. This information was not used within the presentation of data however it had influenced my understanding of the participants involved and as such defended the need to share the data in a sensitive way and so supported sharing the collected data through a creative piece to blend the stories against the visual prominence of Blackpool.

Viewing Blackpool

Throughout the thesis I refer to Blackpool as the town in which this study is situated however it is important to locate precise areas within the town in which filming and direct reference occurs. Visibly the promenade is given prominence at times however the areas of Talbot, Bloomfield, Claremont and Tyldesley are highlighted through both the film and discussion in relation to areas of deprivation as well celebration. For ethical reasons I have localised these areas rather than deliberately naming the particular roads out of respect for the residents, to resist generalising whilst at the same time providing reference for the reader.

As well as the drag bars, I attended Blackpool pride during 2015, 2016 and 2017, and some of the footage shown in the film is from Blackpool Pride 2016 and this is discussed later on. During this period, I spent time walking around Blackpool town centre taking in the atmosphere and making observations regarding the place and the people. I walked around the tourist sites as well as exploring areas just a few moments away from those sites which might go unnoticed by holiday makers and are often avoided by locals. These particular areas, just moments from the bright lights of the Golden Mile, made me feel sad. The boarded-up guest houses and homes in the Bloomfield area would have once been bustling buildings, freshly whitewashed in preparation for the holiday making hoards and now they were relics of their former glory. Needles and syringes strewn around land where children played scared me yet

somehow, I accepted that that is what happens and is routine for some people despite intervention attempts.

On one occasion, in the Claremont area, I saw a group of men dressed up as smurfs who were drunk, obviously out celebrating and had wandered away from the centre. Observing them at first was a funny spectacle as they staggered around the pavement shouting to each other about which pub they were going to next however this turned to feelings of sadness. There was, what appeared to be, a homeless man sat on the street in a sleeping bag in a doorway of a boarded-up hotel. I thought he might be homeless as he had a sleeping bag and carrier bag next to him. One of the giant smurfs proceeded to urinate right by the homeless man and he did not move or react as if it was something that he was used to, and this made me feel sad that neither person acknowledged the other's existence. The giant smurfs turned back and headed to town.

Sometimes I caught the bus into Blackpool town centre to deliberately observe the town and its people; on other occasions I grabbed opportune moments when visiting the town for other reasons. I walked around the exposed and busy parts of town as well as the quieter, more hidden places. I watched and recorded my observations when I got home. I wanted to experience the town as I knew it, as a local, whilst remaining unnoticed as a researcher. Sometimes I sat with a drink and just watched what was happening around me. I did this officially over a year however, unofficially I had been doing this a lot longer. I began to reflect on how I could draw the people and place of Blackpool together. I wanted to expose my feelings about Blackpool, the desperation and decay alongside the celebration and

entertainment yet I felt concerned about doing this as I felt that I was betraying my town; a town that I know, and I still felt a sense of belonging to. I wanted to share my intimate knowledge and experience of the town and the participants whilst enabling a distance to protect. It was through the visual data that I had collected at Funny Girls as well as my observations of Blackpool that I was led to look at a way to include these within my thesis to create a purposeful meaning of the rich, diverse and chaotic social occurrences that I had experienced and wanted to represent (Pink, 2012).

I turned to visual ethnography as an important research tool in studying culture and as a means of cultural representation. I wanted to capture the working-class nature of Blackpool as well as its performativity. This also supports the theme of drag performance as a visual construction and transformation (Tewksbury, 1994). Ethnographic research therefore becomes interwoven with visual images and socio-cultural representations (Pink, 2012). This method was also used by Brown (2006) in his study of drag performance, gay masculinity and sexuality in which there are photos and description of his participant dragging up for a performance in which there were similarities to this research however this is set within the context of Blackpool. Visual ethnography is wide-ranging and can include the production of photography and film and their subsequent analysis (Banks & Morphy, 1997). The use of photography within ethnographic fieldwork purports the notion that the researcher is creating a visual trace of reality as it captures what was happening at that time and within that space. This is seen in Cooper, Cook and Bilby's (2018) case study which looked at resident's opinions and emotions on brothels in Blackpool to discuss sensory urbanism. By observing

what is happening around the area of the photograph, through either widening the camera lens or through film, the researcher can create a narrative of the situated social life and its interactions which is what I did within this research. I created the film as a way of explaining. However, the creation, the film, is different to the experiences and knowledge; it is my interpretation and so therefore it creates a distance. It is through this artifice that I was able to gain knowledge and approach intimacy both within the film and myself.

I chose to film areas of Blackpool, both of a tourist nature and those areas which often go unseen and unnoticed yet still shape Blackpool's identity. Within this research, consent had been given to use the photographs seen at the end of the film which showed the performative side of carnival in *Funny Girls*. I had considered using the photographs as an aid to description throughout this written part however I felt that doing this would not re-create the story and experience that I had encountered and would not show the areas of deprivation as well as celebration. I felt that it was necessary to present the data visually as a way to guide the viewer and reader through the joining of person and place and this was an important factor to consider when editing the footage too. I was aware that the choices that I made with the editing were a result of my understanding of the town and so I chose scenes and places that I believed would support the theme of the thesis. Therefore, the film became a combination of both my own journey as a researcher and self and the participants' journey too. I sought help in the actual act of filming, as I did not have the equipment or skills, as well as in the editing of the footage. The filming took place over three days and one night with the footage of Blackpool Pride taken on the day.

It is evident that my study is epistemologically biased due to my personal history and knowledge of Blackpool. This is given explanation and prominence, particularly within the discussion of my data collection and the film where I explain how I chose to deliberately include examples that reinforced the study which was made possible through my local knowledge and proximity.

Conquergood (2002) discusses the scholarly dominant way of knowing as a “distanced perspective” (p.146) in which observation is made and at times this is what I did but I also immersed myself through “intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection” (p.146) in order to foster relationships and thereby generate valuable data. In relation to performance ethnography Conquergood (2002) explains, “Between objective knowledge that is consolidated in texts, and local know-how that circulates on the ground within a community of memory and practice, there is no contest” (p.146). The intricacies of gesture and language may well be lost through distant observation and text and this was another reason for creating the film as a visual means to avoid omitting knowledge and detail. The ‘local know-how’ that Conquergood (2002) describes is something that I had and chose to use within this research, but it also prompted the sense that I was exploiting my local knowledge by deliberately highlighting areas of deprivation.

Ethnography provides the opportunity for researchers to consider the relationship between their field site and their subjects (Rabinow, 2007). Critical perspectives of ethnography discuss the authority of the ethnographer and highlight ways in which there might be an unequal power relationship between the researcher and participant, for example if the researcher’s priorities take

precedence over the participant's needs (Kelley, 1998). However, (Venkatesh, 2012) favours ethnographic proximity as a way to gather valuable data which otherwise might go unnoticed and if often brought to the forefront because of subjectivity. Other qualitative research methods that favour proximity include interviews. Rogan and de Kock, (2005) argue that shared understanding can disrupt the imbalance regarding intimacy which can be problematic during interviews. Mannay (2010) discusses the use of photo-elicitation, mapping and collage production during her research with participants who not only lived nearby but were also part of the same social circle thereby positioning herself as an insider in order to subjectively elicit data needed for the study. In the above discussion of other qualitative research approaches that privilege proximity and subjectivity, I am acknowledging that I have approached this study of Blackpool from a particular lens and that it has epistemological bias.

Pink (2012) explains that photography and video are becoming more commonly used within the field of ethnography as reflexive representation of ethnographic knowledge, social interaction and experience thereby acknowledging that such methods are no more subjective or objective than written texts and as such may become more important than the written word. The use of film helped to show the traversing into the personal as well as the public celebration. Banks (2007) supports this opinion for two reasons: the first that images are omnipresent within society and therefore consideration of the visual could be included in the study of people and society. Secondly, by studying a collection of images or visual data, some form of sociological insight might be offered that is not available in any other form. I felt that this resonated within the presentation and analysis of data within this research. What I mean

by this is that by using visual methods within this research, the viewer is visually transported to places of reference and they are able to see Blackpool as a place. This along with the narrative helps to support and reveal an understanding of the sub-culture's process of identity creation which is further supported by the series of photographs at the end of the film. It also highlights the autoethnographical lens as I am presenting a Blackpool that I know and see. I am allowing the viewer to encounter the data by transporting them visually to Blackpool, they are being exposed to the experiences that I encountered.

As ethical considerations remained the utmost priority at all times throughout the research process, I had to carefully consider how to use the data that I had collected. I did not want simply to describe what I had been immersed in. Rather I wanted to create an audio and visual representation of what I had encountered; to present the participants and to make the data more visible (Denzin, 1997).

After discussion with the participants it was agreed that I would collate the data from the conversations and observations and create two monologues to represent the two groups of people. I did this as a way of ethically exposing the shared personal information through my own interpretation which in itself became a performance. By engaging in an alternative form of data presentation through the creation of the monologues, I was attempting to engage the viewer and invite them into my experiences whilst allowing for personal reflection and interpretation (Denzin, 1997). In her work with women living with Aids, Lather (1997) mixed the participants' stories with her own interpretation to present narrative accounts. Such a presentation of data and

its analysis, in this instance, takes on a form of autoethnography. Foster (2002) created a play which detailed the breakup of her marriage and reflects her research findings and at times was tinged with sadness rather like the characters in my film.

I felt that this thesis, through my own understanding and experiences of Blackpool naturally adopted an autoethnographic nature. In presenting the data and analysis through film, I was aware that through an autoethnographic lens I was demonstrating and encapsulating a personal, intuitive knowledge, deriving from a knowing subject situated in a specific social context, allowing for the examination of the self, identity, emotions and experiences as relational and institutional stories affected by social and cultural structures (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

The written aspect of the thesis took on a similar approach. Goodall (1998) explains,

good autoethnography strives to use *relational* language and styles to create purposeful *dialogue* between the reader and the author. This dialogue proceeds through close, personal identification—and recognition of difference—of the reader's experiences, thoughts, and emotions with those of the author. (p. 7).

Through the creation of the monologues within the film, the personal narratives are layered and holistic connecting physical, cognitive and affective experiences and thereby demonstrate a rich description of the research and its analysis (Kearney, 2003). This prompts the viewer to accept that I, the researcher, was very much a part of the situation and environment being described; the researcher is also the researched (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). In support of this, Langellier (1999) explains that our experiences are not just stories, they are lives and “embodied stories” (p.208).

As I was re-telling the stories I felt that it was appropriate I read the transgender monologue. The drag queen monologue was read by Kevin as he knew some of the participants and I felt that he could give voice to this. The monologues set against the backdrop of various scenes within Blackpool not only demonstrated but analysed the data that I had collected through the use of visual ethnography which had become an appropriate method to apply to the research.

McGuigan (1997, p.2) emphasises the fact that it is important to remember, “the methods should serve the aims of the research, not the research serve the aims of the method.” This suggests that researchers should be led by the participants and so act reflexively when selecting appropriate methodology, which within this research incorporated a specific technical approach, promoting the interweaving of images and identity within everyday life in order to make them meaningful in experience and presentation. This has not always been the case as Pink (2012) explains that historically ethnographic uses of the visual were open to controversy in the debate as to whether such data collection methods were too subjective and unrepresentative. However, Collier and Collier (1986) explain that methods such as film and photography become an observation of reality within research. Yet within my own research the visual is not simply an observation of reality; I had become part of the process. It was a construction of the reality that I experienced. I was engaged in a process in which I was ethically conjoined with my participants throughout the study and so through the film, a protective distance was created which also provided an intimacy of knowledge.

Pink (2012, p.19) suggests that visual representation of the research may “unexpectedly become part of an ethnographic project that is already in progress,” and I found that this was the case within this research as originally, I had not intended to present my data and subsequent analysis through the film. By employing visual ethnography, these images become a narrative of the data. Such images become interwoven within narratives, identities and cultures (Pink, 2012). I felt this was very much the case within my research. I had spent time with people as they had told me their stories about their lives within Blackpool which at times were laid open and raw. By simply describing this I felt that the nuances of being would be lost in interpretation however by drawing on the stories and reflecting on my place within the research I felt that I could share the construction of which I had been part. I chose to film areas within Blackpool that attract the tourists and which people that have been to the resort might remember. However, this was not enough as there was a lack of visual decay and so some of these places were deliberately captured and revealed within the film in order to aid the contrast of carnival and decay and this is discussed later within the thesis. The photographs at the end of the film were used to show the re-creation and performative aspect of gender identity of the drag queens in Blackpool, which set against the music, added to the notion of being and becoming and again, is discussed later.

Images, such as the ones within the film, become contingent on how they are situated and used to produce knowledge. Crotty (1998) discusses ethnography as an approach to interpreting and representing culture and society. It does not claim to present a truthful account of reality but instead offers a version of the researcher’s reality that remains loyal to the context in

which the knowledge was produced through reflexivity whilst questioning the right to represent other people. Therefore, reality becomes subjective and we should look at the relationship of the researcher and participants that produce a negotiated view of reality. After conducting visual ethnographic research and through the production of photographs and video, these visual texts and the process of producing and discussing them with the participants become part of the researcher's knowledge and this is exposed in my film.

Geertz (1973) focused the idea that an ethnographer's duty is that of explaining culture through 'thick description', which provides detailed knowledge of how people feel, think and perceive their world and as such visual ethnography can be seen to offer this as a research tool for providing such a description. This is done within the film as a visual means. These descriptions should promote detail, meaning and structure through interpretation which is a difficulty facing anyone from one culture representing another accurately and meaningfully, as opposed to thin description which can be seen as misleading; providing a limited account of an aspect of culture. I faced and recognised these difficulties whilst acknowledging that I too was part of the research, as discussed earlier, and presented a creation of my interpretation of the research through the film to give structure and an ethical depth in the presentation and justification of my findings.

The researcher should be able to identify structures and as such complexly layer them to present the interpretations and subject them to interpenetrated readings. Geertz promotes the, at times difficult, concept that an ethnographer must present their data through a thick description which is made up of commentary and subsequent interpretations which was my aim through the

creation of the film. This is important as I faced difficulties in wanting to present my understanding rather than simply explaining the culture into which I had been immersed and so the idea presenting my data through film became appropriate.

There were several challenges that I encountered one of which was in the creation of the trans monologue. As I was representing several stories within the one character, “to inform listeners about a particular cultural work and what it’s like to live in it” (Saldaña, 2011, p.100), I had to make sure that all the participants were happy with what I had created. Although the participants wished to remain anonymous, and by joining the stories and experiences together this was one way to aid anonymity, when I presented the monologue one participant commented that they had expected only their story to be told. I had to explain again how this was a creation of several people in to present the culture into which I had been immersed and so by conjoining the stories into one monologue I was able to do this. After discussion this particular participant understood what I had done and why but then later challenged the use of some of the footage of Blackpool as they felt that it showed the resort in a bad light and I understood this as in a way I felt that I was being disloyal to my birth town however I felt that it was important to show the contrast within the town as it supported the carnival theme.

The creation of the monologues and the film allowed me to, “closely examine how we and others experience life, and to shape those moments into new aesthetic forms that bring us closer to notions of what is real and what is true as we individually and collectively construct them” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 213). Again, I explained why I had chosen to show such images as I was attempting

to show the reality of my own understanding of Blackpool as a place and this was accepted (Saldaña, 2011).

In order to create an adequate thick description, Geertz (1973) outlines key areas within ethnography. It should firstly be an interpretative practice in which meaning is given; it is not enough to simply present the data as this does not describe the culture. Ethnography should produce codes for decoding what is actually occurring and social discourse should happen as the subject of interpretation. Geertz (1973, p.20) advises that the interpretation of data is limited as to what the participants tell the researcher therefore the thick descriptions come from extrovert expressions. He continues by explaining that such ethnographic findings describe local truths and behaviours in so much as researchers view the specific details within a contextualised setting and as such this becomes the thick description.

Throughout this research, I was aiming to be reflexive by acknowledging that I, as researcher, am part of the research process and as such have lived within the 'habitus' (Bourdieu,1977) of 'self' and participant 'other.' Reflexive research acknowledges that I have my own history, my own 'habitus' and this will become interwoven in the dialogue and subsequent interpretations that I draw from it; it is just that. It is my own interpretation, an interaction of the conjoined self and other. This interpretation allows a certain degree of disguise for me as a researcher. Through this process, I have attempted a construction of reality through the film which shows the interaction between the participants and myself through the characters' monologues to highlight my own interpretation of the research. I recognise that my history and prejudices are embedded within this research and that it is essential to understand this (to

the extent this is possible) within the interpretive process and this is seen through an autoethnographic lens in the presentation and subsequent analysis of the film.

Blackpool on Screen

Earlier within this thesis, I have described early representations of Blackpool through film and therefore I feel that it is appropriate that I describe how Blackpool has lent itself to the entertainment of others through both television programmes and as a location for film before moving on to discuss my film. Examples include *Hindle Wakes* (1952) which tells the story of working-class Lancashire mill girls on holiday in Blackpool and then in 1993, *Bhaji on the Beach* explored modern social beliefs of a group of British Punjabi women. More recently Blackpool provided a setting for *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016) where many local children appeared as extras. More frequently though, Blackpool has appeared on the television through various programmes including '*Blackpool*' (Bowker, 2004) in which the town, according to (Cloarec, 2017) is depicted as "...the epitome of "kitsch" with inverted commas..." (p.2). This programme was based on the bid to bring a super casino to the resort which was later rejected. It follows the story of Ripley Holden and his family whose dream it is to own a casino hotel. Walton (1998) stated that Blackpool is "the world's biggest and brashest working-class seaside resort," (p.90) and this is depicted through the setting and focal points that draw in the working-class masses. Cloarec (2017) describes Blackpool as

being, “built as a collage of eclectic borrowings,” (p.2) before drawing the connection of Blackpool Tower and the Eiffel Tower. He later links Coney Island to the Pleasure Beach as a comparison of a borrowed structure. The Pleasure Beach entices crowds in with its promise of the tallest and fastest rollercoasters, the likes of which have been shown through the media, for example in the video to Simply Red’s Fairground song (1995).

Returning to the television series, *‘Blackpool’* (Bowker, 2004) showcases some of the resorts attractions to highlight the carnivalesque of the town. An example of which is the promenade and the many gaudy amusement arcades which litter it. The programme draws attention to brashness of the electric flashing signs and lights that draw in its customers to gamble their money which is typical of Blackpool in real life. Walking past the arcades the bingo callers and side stall owners, reminiscent of the early descriptions of Blackpool, jockey their way into enticing in holiday makers strolling past whilst the surgery and fatty delight of the candy floss, rock and fish and chips assault the nostrils of their potential consumers. The programme also picks up the venue of *Funny Girls* which as well as being a key focus within this thesis, has showcased the performers in 2005 on the *Royal Variety Performance*.

The programme *‘Blackpool’* epitomised some of the attractions for holidaymakers and this was further enhanced through the recent television series *Bargain-Loving Brits in Blackpool* (2017) in which viewers followed the holiday escapades of a variety of people looking for low cost entertainment within the holiday resort. The viewers were also introduced to a number of seasonal workers such as an ice cream vendor and a fish and chip shop worker, who described the struggle to make money. What was interesting was

that a number of location shots were actually of the nearby town of Lytham St. Anne's. This might have done with intention as Lytham St. Anne's is viewed locally as being more upmarket than Blackpool. Although the programme included footage of some of Blackpool's attractions, it did not include many as it was focused more on the workers and holiday makers. In the same way my film includes some of the town's attractions, it does not necessarily make them a prominent visual theme as it is about the people and general place of the resort rather than a showcase for its attractions. Yet these attractions are showcased through media and show how Blackpool drags itself up for the entertainment of others.

One such way is through the programme *Strictly Come Dancing*, in which a highlight of the show is when the contestants perform at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom (Live Blackpool, 2017). It is seen as an achievement for the contestants to make it through to the show which is televised from the tower where they grace the prestigious sprung dancefloor which was home to the original series in the 1970s. The ballroom itself is a mecca to dancers from across the world and is spectacular in design with its Wurlitzer organ that rises from underneath the floor. The costumes worn by the contestants create a sense of campness with the sequins, sparkle, makeup and flamboyant outfits. However, behind the façade of twinkling lights, glitter balls and fish and chips lies a different side to Blackpool as recently documented on the controversial 2012 Channel Four programme '999 *What's your Emergency Blackpool*,' in which viewers saw a town with a drug and alcohol problem and generally bad reputation.

The nine-part series provided an intimate look at Blackpool through the eyes of the emergency services. The series dealt with issues that plight the town, ranging from anti-social behaviour to drink and alcohol misuse and there was a focus on people who were on benefits as well as the lower paid working-class. This image is supported with statistics related to the town. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of Blackpool (2018) states that, "...Blackpool has high levels of alcohol related harm (health, disorder, violence) for the size of the population. The health and wellbeing of the community and local services are strained" (p.1). These claims are supported the Lancashire Constabulary's information regarding crime statistics for Blackpool town centre (2018) in which it states that anti-social behaviour crime made up over 25% of the crime figures between 2017 and 2018. More worryingly is that over 69% of the crimes committed result in no further action being taken. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of Blackpool (2018) goes on to discuss how although the alcohol industry within the town supports the local economy through employment, "...paradoxically 105,000 working days a year are lost in Blackpool due to alcohol misuse, at an estimated cost upwards of £10.5 million per year" (p.1). The report continues to explain that, "The wards in the centre of the town which experience higher levels of deprivation also see the highest prevalence of binge drinking" (p.3).

It was these areas that was shown on *999 What's Your Emergency Blackpool*, only moments from the Golden Mile and main tourist areas and attractions. Some of these areas were also shown within the film. Disturbingly, the report claims that regarding alcohol mortality, "Some indicators show Blackpool is the worst in the country, including alcohol-specific mortality for

males, mortality for chronic liver disease for all persons and mortality for chronic liver disease for males” (p.3). Some of the scenes shown in the programme were hard hitting as the emergency services discussed the impact that alcohol, drugs and deprivation have on the town and its people yet as a local, although upsetting, it was not surprising. This is further highlighted in the analysis of the film. Yet despite the focus of the town’s problems, Blackpool remains as a popular coastal destination and will now doubt continue to appear on television and film as a means of entertainment.

Chapter 4: Discussion of The Film

Carnival

It is through the Carnavalesque lens of Bakhtin (1984) that I attempt to describe certain aspects of the film. I deliberately captured focus points which I believed supported the concept of carnival within this thesis; places which might be familiar but also areas of the town which go unnoticed. I edited the footage to support the words that were being spoken in the monologues with deliberate pauses in scene to allow for the reader to reflect on the spoken word and view. Bakhtin's conceptualisation of Carnival has been used strongly within the field of drama, theatre and performance. Prentki (2013) uses Bakhtin to explore the carnival element within Shakespeare's drama whereas Bristol (2014) draws on Bakhtin to study the nature and purpose of theatre as a social institution.

Although Bakhtin's description of Carnival is associated with medieval times, I am positing the notion that Blackpool, as a place, can be seen to epitomise the notion of carnival and carnivalesque. I am not attempting to analyse the data from the participants as this has been done through the creation and performance of the monologues and photographs within the film, instead I am inviting the reader and viewer to take a closer look at the town in which these groups of people inhabit. I believe that the film shows two sides to Blackpool; the one that visitors are familiar with regarding the attractions and the other side, situated within half a mile of the attractions showing the reality that many people in Blackpool situate themselves within but often goes unseen by

visitors to the town. I felt uncomfortable in deliberately filming and including scenes from the neglected areas of Blackpool as opposed to filming and including happy families enjoying a day out at the local attractions. I felt that I was betraying my hometown, but I believed it was necessary to film and include the scenes to support the themes. I was leaving the town of Blackpool behind to start a new job in a new place; I was leaving the town that I knew and had observed and filmed. Not only did I feel a sense of betrayal, I also felt that I was exploiting the town by deliberately choosing to film in certain areas that would highlight the deprivation and decay in the town. I selected the ignored, concealed and marginalised and through the deliberate construction of the film and the narrative within the thesis I made them perceivable.

Bakhtin views the event of the carnival, common throughout European history as a form of celebration (Storey, 2009). He views the carnival not as a performance in which there is difference between the spectator and the performer but instead it is lived in by both groups. Bakhtin believes that the carnival is an event in which all rules, inhibitions, restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended, and especially all forms of hierarchy in society (Storey, 2009). He saw the carnival as being liberating in the sense that for a short time the church and state had little or no control over the lives of the revellers at the carnival. In fact, he saw carnival times as a way of opening up public discourse and for the allowing and creating of new ideas.

Bakhtin's (1984) approach to Rabelais' texts and subsequent concept of, "the folk culture of carnival humour" (p.84) is analysed through a historical context and historical influences. The term 'carnavalesque' is applied not only to

carnival in relation to the feast days and festivals of the Middle Ages but also to the practices and behaviour that nestled alongside such as spectacles, parodies and marketplace language. Through *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin (1984) defines carnival as being a time created through life and play where anything, which does not cause harm, is permitted and celebrated usually through the presentation of excess. Excess is portrayed in the world that I look at and is presented in the film and thesis through the excess of deprivation, sexuality and identity which overflows the confines of what is understood to be a normally ordered society. This prominence of the excess made me feel embarrassed about revealing it. However, Burke (1978) identifies carnival as containing three major themes; food, sex and violence, which challenges Bakhtin's approach. Whilst Bakhtin describes feasts and banquets and sex which can be found within the context of the grotesque, he plays down the theme of violence. Rather more Bakhtin subsumes this theme under the grotesque through activities of debasement which can be seen for example in the "slinging of excrement" (p.148). This suggests that Bakhtin uses symbolic rather than actual physical violence in his analysis. The carnival nature of the drag scene that I examine in this thesis is also one that embraces symbolic violence.

Carnival is seen as a type of performance but one that is communally lived through the diminishing of barriers allowing for multiple and diverse voices to be heard and the creation of a new temporal order. It is difficult to give a precise definition of carnival and even Bakhtin (1984) is keen to express, "... in its narrow sense carnival is far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning. This word combined in a single concept a number of local feasts

of different origin and scheduled at different dates but bearing the common traits of popular merriment” (p.218).

Situated in medieval celebrations, carnival temporarily overthrew hierarchy thereby creating an experience of an equal social space. According to Bakhtin (1984) this collective experience or body is never complete but is constantly changing and renewing. It is a form of utopian freedom and festivity offering an alternative revelation through play and the dismantling of hierarchical barriers which become replaced with equality and freedom. This happens through a collective body of the people which is a lived experience and ever changing and becoming. There is emphasis on the whole person and their basic needs as opposed to the dominant suppression, “As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (Bakhtin, 1984. p.10). Bakhtin (1984) explains how, “The men of the Middle Ages participated in two lives: the official and the carnival life. Two aspects of the world, the serious and the laughing aspect, coexisted in their consciousness” (p.96). Society at the time was itself split into two opposing groups; the people and the ruling class. Celebrations were situated within the official or unofficial realms; the people and popular culture being located within the unofficial. This popular unofficial realm could be described as oppositional in the way that it celebrated the incomplete, the grotesque and images of transition to create an alternative to the official imagery. An example of which was the Feast of Fools in which there

was an election of a mock bishop followed by street processions and a mock mass, bawdy songs and feasting. Burke (1978) describes this feast as a perfect example of the “literal enactment of the world turned upside down” (p.192). However, Hirschkop (1986) criticises Bakhtin’s optimistic social force of carnival arguing that it should include a model of socio-economic power to illustrate the impact of the ruling classes and the power of the Catholic church. Whilst it is important to acknowledge this power it is also important to remember that through festivity and carnival, the power of hierarchy can be debased and distorted making it potentially temporarily irrelevant.

Carnival is rooted in the celebrations of medieval folk culture and although this understanding can be used to examine more recent times, Bakhtin (1984) argues the notion of carnival in its origins of folk culture has declined, “...carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negotiation is completely alien to folk culture” (p.11). Such traditional carnival spaces have transgressed into the opposite of their original intentions. Today carnivals are dictated by government, local authority and hierarchy and what was once seen as celebratory behavior and language is now dismissed or viewed in a negative way; an example of which is swearing. At first Bakhtin seems to oppose the use of carnival as an equivalence in more modern occurrences as he believed that everything is a product of a particular place and time however recognising this, it is still possible to apply elements of the theory of carnival to the modern day whilst acknowledging that these elements have been transposed and diluted in comparison to their original descriptions which is what I have done through the film and written thesis.

Bakhtin (1984) believes that carnival permeates its way into other aspects of life through free expression and emancipation, "As a special phenomenon, carnival has survived up to our time" (p.217). Although the style and origin of carnival has died out, "Carnival is a well-known festivity that has been often described through many centuries" (p.218). Therefore, it is appropriate, "to use precisely the epithet "carnavalesque" in that broad sense of the word" (p.218).

The carnivalesque is seen as both the description of the carnival phenomenon and the spirit of carnival translated into literary form. This is seen through Rabelais in which the comedy, exaggeration and shapeshifting which fills this book becomes a prime example of carnivalesque and grotesque literature. Bakhtin believed that carnivalesque literature and carnival, tore apart oppression and opened the way for imagination and emancipation. Sociologists and historians however take the concept of carnival and use it to demonstrate the possible transgressive elements within social and cultural practices and to an extent this is what I am doing too through the discussion of the film through the four main characteristics of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin (1984) identifies these as: free interaction between individuals, which would not normally take place outside of the carnival; eccentric behaviour is permitted where individuals are allowed to behave in an uncensored way; there is a collapse of binary oppositions; events that can be seen as offensive or that challenge the norm and mock authority are acceptable within the carnival and as such become carnivalesque imagery (Bakhtin, 1984). The characteristics of Bakhtin's (1984) carnival are evident within this thesis with examples including the description of the history of Blackpool as a holiday resort and the film showing the celebration of the Pride festival. The written

descriptions of the different drag spaces that challenge and mock the norm and the characters within the film demonstrate the pertinence of Bakhtin's (1984) theory to my work.

Dialogism

Bakhtin's work focuses on historical, cultural and social texts, for example Carnival is discussed through an analysis of Rabelais' text (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin believes that such texts should not be interpreted and understood through a modern lens but should be acknowledged in their own space and time to situate them in context. In the same way the discussion of the history of Blackpool that I provided is not there as a comparison to the Blackpool of today; it is there to situate the town in context and unravel the thread of carnivalesque behaviour. Bakhtin (1984) argues that being is unique and is a unified event; we exist alongside others and are constantly changing. This theme is revealed through the characters' stories in the film and is reinforced through the photographs at the end of the film. We each exist in a particular space and time (much like the historical texts that Bakhtin analyses) and are constantly in dialogue with each other and the world around us.

Through *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1984) offers a number of concepts relating to voices. One of these central concepts is polyphony meaning multiple voices and Bakhtin discusses Dostoevsky as containing many voices with their own perspective and weight. The author does not just present a single reality (monologism) instead the characters present voices and different points of view in their interactions creating multiple thoughts and

dialogism. This concept is demonstrated not only in the autoethnographical weight throughout the thesis, in which my relationship with the place and participants is exposed, but also through the voices heard through the characters in the film. The characters articulate the stories and thoughts of the participants and become the voice of those who are at times marginalised. Bakhtin (1984) argues that dialogism replaces monologism or single voice in which there is only one ideology, and this is seen more often in traditional writing forms. Monologism fails to recognise the other through dialogue and instead delivers the author's thoughts. Dialogism is not confined to text but can also be seen socially in the everyday interactions amongst people. Monologism is also present in the everyday and can be seen in examples such as government and policing in which one voice is heard and asserted without dialogue from others. Bakhtin (1984) argues that language is not merely a device to communicate information. It is more than that; it is a way of socially interacting and through merging with others' perspectives, self-actualisation can occur.

Bakhtin (1984) draws on these perspectives through his analysis of history and predominately through his work on Rabelais in which he describes Medieval folk culture, carnival and subsequent carnivalized literature as discussed above. In the same way that carnival opposes governance and hierarchical control, so too does dialogism. Dialogism and carnival are used to ridicule authority. This ridicule is prominent within the thesis. There is visual reference in the film for example with the graffiti, vandalism and reference to drug use which demonstrates transgressive behaviour. The drag performances themselves mock through sexual innuendo and performance.

Through the interplay of different voices and perspectives a new way of seeing is created. However, Lachman (1989) explains, "The "prevailing order" of Bakhtin's day was, however, that of a folk culture from which the folk had been banished and replaced by its perverse double: "folklore." The poetics of the folk epos became a recommended literary paradigm; carnival laughter was stifled in the chorus" (p.5). Lachman (1989, p.119) continues,

Rabelais and Dostoevsky belong in a common genre tradition having its beginnings in the Menippean Satire, a tradition which in its thematics, stylistics, and narrative structure represents a counter-tradition to the "epic" (classical) line of European prose. About the specific interdependencies and relations between genre tradition, folk culture, and "carnival ideology.

When looking at the relationship between folk culture and literature it can be suggested that Bakhtin's (1984, p.122) literary texts mirror carnivalesque practice through which folk culture is reflected and represented,

Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms-from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature.

Bakhtin views monologue as being a centralised power in which there is one unchallenged voice however through the engagement of two or more voices dialogue occurs and different viewpoints are shared, and truth becomes negotiated. Bakhtin (1984), applies the concept of dialogism to literature when discussing the difference between poetry and novels, contending that the words of poetry lack relation to social and historical relations and are therefore used monologically as opposed to the dialogical words of the novel which also

allows for the double-voiced word. Bakhtin is not just interested in literary influences but in other aspects such as cultural influences that weave their way into Rabelais' work. The writer should not ignore "the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, but should explore the relationship between a literary text and 'discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs'" (Bakhtin, 1984. p.259). The monologues within the film particularly highlight the engagement of the different voices heard within this study as they demonstrate the social discourse of both person and place thereby creating a text that is open to interpretation.

Rather like Bakhtin's definition of carnival, Vice (1997) argues, "Bakhtin's discussion of the term 'dialogism is ambiguous, however, as it is both linguistic and novelistic. He uses it to refer to particular instances of language, perceptible in novels and popular speech; and also to refer to a defining quality of language itself..." (p.45). Hirschkop (1989) observes an ambiguity in a single definition too observing Bakhtin's discussion of styles of text and social contexts. However, Kristeva (1980) suggests a connection between the two definitions, believing that dialogism is found inherently in language itself. This viewpoint is shared by Vice (1997) who suggests that, "as we live among the many languages of social heteroglossia, dialogism is necessarily the way in which we construct meaning...each utterance, whether it takes the form of a conversation in the street or a novel, consists of the unique orchestration of well-worn words" (p.46). In his ambiguity, Bakhtin (1984) states, "The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from

generation to another generation” (p.202). This suggests that dialogism is more concerned with the social aspect of language and therefore becomes a useful construct within this written thesis as it enables Blackpool and drag to be viewed as texts which I have I have read, and my interpretation is presented through the film and written thesis which demonstrates an example of dialogism through the heteroglossia of voice, word and thought. The words in the stories that were shared with myself by the participants and my own understanding and experiences of both the town and the research process merged. This led to the creation of the film and the written thesis which allowed for the context to be affirmed and shared.

A form of escape – the exact opposite of dreams

Bakhtin (1984) identified the grotesque realism as a key idea of Rabelais’ work. The grotesque involves taking that which is normally considered as sublime and undermining it to the extent that it appears to be degrading and almost disgusting, “The essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.62).

Examples of the grotesque are littered throughout the film. On the journey into Blackpool there are examples of graffiti hidden within a car park. As a juxtaposition, this car park is one of the main car parks in the town centre near the police station that has recently relocated to outside of town and for as far as I can remember has been a place that has always displayed some form of

graffiti. It is also a place that is seen locally as being 'rough' and not somewhere that you would want to spend time. Quite often there are people hanging around there and it can feel intimidating. As a local it is somewhere that you know about and drive past but tend to ignore as it is just slightly away from the centre: it is the everyday. It is not somewhere that you would want to go. It is also somewhere that you pretend is not there, even though you know that it is. It is an example of the grotesque as it has been vandalised and degraded by those who are perhaps abject of society and the official world. The application of the grotesque and the feelings created by this space suggest that we run away from the everyday and we hide it, that the everyday that we want to create is a paper-thin myth. The film, in some respects connected to the grotesque, is also autobiographical as it is about situating parts of my life that are to do with Blackpool in relation to the grotesque. This added to my feelings of betrayal as I was betraying the illusion of order and established values as a felt experience.

Whilst filming in this area, I felt apprehensive and uneasy. I felt that I did not belong there, and I wanted to get away as soon as possible. I was aware that I had expensive equipment with me and was worried in case I became a target for theft. However, I wanted to include this scene as it could be viewed as an example of the grotesque in so much as the graffiti is a piece of art that has come to symbolise gang culture and identity. In an autoethnographical way I was acknowledging the grotesque as someone who knows the area. Bakhtin's grotesque becomes important within this context as it is an exaggerated representation of the body which disrupts expectations of society and those who create graffiti and similar are often excluded from the official world. Graffiti

can be used to claim spaces, to challenge the hegemonic political or ideological systems of a particular place and time and this is represented in the film (Bakhtin, 1984). By its very nature, the fact that the graffiti is in such close proximity to the police station becomes carnivalesque as it overturned the dominant social binary in order to create a different way of living. In exposing areas like this I felt that I had betrayed Blackpool and I was exploiting this exposure for the purpose of this thesis. This concept resonated closely with myself; the symbolic violence also represented my identity as a researcher, as an academic with a job that yields social status, but yet here I was deliberately looking at areas that undermine the very hierarchy on which this status and identity depends. In a similar way I was exposing the myth of the everyday; that part of the everyday where I would not like to go.

Taking a closer look at this specific piece of graffiti, the eagle is clutching a snake and appears to be flying away with it whilst the remaining bigger snake is saying to the eagle, 'too many snakes in dis town!' Underneath the eagle is a scroll with a name on it suggesting the leader's name. On the wall there are several other names however not all of them are created with the same detail and precision suggesting a lack of identity and a sense of inferiority compared to the grander designs of which perhaps act as a warning. On the same wall there is a design which appears at first to look like a fast food logo however upon closer inspection there is a drug reference as the tag says, 'burner king.' By dominating and deconstructing the private property, the graffiti almost mocks the corporate world (Snyder, 2009). This mocking is observed in Bakhtin's carnival (1984) in which reversals of power occur in carnivalesque spaces, as well as affirmations of forms of identity that transpire outside of the

law. These examples along with associated forms of transgressive behaviours, such as gluttony (during the medieval setting of Rabelais), and drug dealing, crime and vandalism of contemporary Blackpool are all forms of carnivalesque behaviour and excess. Earlier on in this thesis I have examined why Blackpool has become such a post-industrial carnivalesque enclave through the discussion of Blackpool's history and working-class identity. I acknowledge that although Bakhtin's (1984) concept of carnival is situated within Medieval times, Blackpool as a place encapsulates carnival and carnivalesque behaviour which at times is presented as a diluted form of Bakhtin's Medieval rendition because of the modern-day context to which it is applied.

Reference to drug use within Blackpool appears later on through the film and I found filming this challenging as I was deliberately choosing to highlight the negative places and problems of the town. The scene shows drugs paraphernalia within a public space and this made me feel uneasy. There are needles and equipment used for heating or burning drugs before being injected and although I did not touch any of the equipment, I thought about the diseases that they might be carrying. There are also empty cans of strong lager set against a crumbling wall hinting at the theme of decay. This image suggests the need for escape. Again, this is reminiscent of the grotesque; there is a need to feel the highs of drug use in order to escape the trudge of life and existence in Blackpool. However, behind the depiction of un-rule, in the images that I have created, there are lives which are the part of the everyday that I avoided acknowledging and felt uneasy in doing so. I felt that I was betraying Blackpool by exposing these aspects of its every day.

There is a serious issue with drug use which has not gone unnoticed within the media as discussed earlier. This is also highlighted in a local newspaper, *The Gazette* (2018) which states that Blackpool has the highest death through drug misuse rate. It goes on to say that the Office for National Statistics believes this is because it is a coastal holiday resort with high levels of deprivation which is linked to increased drug use. Drug use also associated with attempts to escape or create a different reality, a reality very often associated with deprivation. The concept of escape, of creating a different reality is highlighted within the discussion and descriptions of drag and Blackpool's history as a holiday resort, through to the deviations from what is taken to be the normal established order. O'Connor (2017) also reported similar in relation to deprivation in which it states that, "More than a tenth of the town's working-age inhabitants live on state benefits paid to those deemed too sick to work. Antidepressant prescription rates are among the highest in the country,' and that, 'Life expectancy (is) already the lowest in England" (p.1). The article goes on to describe the temptations which draw in the day trippers including the cheap new drug 'spice' which is fast becoming a problem within the town centre. It is almost 'normal' to see the effects of this drug when walking through town as its users appear to be in a zombie like state, bent over and frozen to the spot.

The particular images in the film caused unrest for one of the participants within the study and I faced a problem as they wanted the scene removed however, I wanted to include it as it was an example of the everyday and helped to highlight the themes within this thesis. The use of drugs and alcohol portrays the grotesque reality of the human condition as one that needs to

satisfy its urges through escapism in whatever form that might take. I was concerned that they might withdraw their consent as it was evident from the conversations about the scene that they were not happy for me to explicitly highlight the town's drug problem and this became a challenge in the creation of the film. However, after further discussions over the phone and through email, an acceptance was reached. The participant was keen to describe the work that is going on with various agencies within Blackpool in order to address this problem. They explained that although there is still a problem with drugs, every effort is being made to counteract this. An example of this is the Horizon service which is funded by Blackpool Council and provides drug and alcohol dependency support as well as sexual health services.

Abjection

Another trait of Carnival is characterised by laughter and the dismissal of seriousness as opposed to the structure, routine and devotion to both work and the church. The Carnival is a time of celebration but with a public mocking of authority (Bakhtin, 1984). This laughter was most often directed towards the top part of the hierarchy and all that was official as opposed to the celebration of what was not official meaning that repression was reversed for that period of time. "People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.10). Because of the inversion of the typical relationships that were held during the rest of the

year, the things that were typically held in suspicion by authority became a source of opposition. One way of viewing this Carnavalesque behaviour is through the concept of filthiness and abjection.

The Carnival places interest in things that are dirty as opposed to the clean. There is an emphasis on the body and its functions as opposed to the church or authoritarian power. The Carnival acknowledged and promoted the reality of the body in the notion that it defecated, reproduced, and died (Bakhtin, 1984). This highlighted the fact that we are human and share such characteristics. The body was viewed as two parts; the upper and lower halves of the body. The upper body was seen as being associated with reason and the mind whereas the lower body represented filth and bodily functions that are normally abjected within everyday life. This affirms the importance of the body within this study by the way in which the clubs address gendered physicality, the smell of the filthy toilets in one of the clubs through to the glitz and hyper-sexuality of Funny Girls. The body was also seen as being open or closed. The upper half was closed whereas the lower half, that which is concerned with bodily functions, is open as Bakhtin believed the world either enters or emerges from the lower half. This places an emphasis on what is hidden but also introduces the notion of birth and renewal. The theme of renewal links closely to the theme of identity assertion and outlandish transgression of the trans community and the nightclubs in which they perform, and this is described earlier on. This concept is strengthened as the spirit of the Carnival is carried by the theme of renewal and creation. It does not seek to reproduce power, instead it invents new orders (Bakhtin, 1984). Therefore, one of the key aspects of the Carnival and Carnavalesque behaviour is that of

degradation, the degrading of what is official and transferring it to the realm of the unofficial. Bakhtin (1984) explains,

This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed which we find abundantly represented in Rabelais' novel.

This communication and expression could be applied to the drag performances at both Funny Girls and Pepes. Both performances contained direct sexual reference and innuendo which mocked the everyday forms of etiquette thereby creating a marketplace style of expression both verbally and physically. An example of which was at Funny Girls when Betty Legs Diamond was dressed as Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* and was grabbing her crotch during the song Under the Sea. The performance had taken a children's song and given it an adult theme through the mocking of sexuality and body parts. The audience responded by laughing and cheering in a raucous way. Zoe's banter with the audience was also laden with sexual innuendo and the audience again laughed along. I did not notice anyone leaving the audience in disgust and therefore I can assume that the audience supported and enhanced the sexual references, and this helped to create the celebratory atmosphere and therefore supporting the theme of carnival laughter, "...this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.12). In reference to the film, one of the drag performances at Pride shows a duck puppet nestling into and pecking the drag queen's

breasts and she responds by at first appearing shocked and then guiding the puppet there. Again, the audience responded by laughing at the performance.

It is important to understand that Bakhtin sees degradation as a way of making new. Within this theme it could be possible to claim that Blackpool has become a place of degradation in the sense that it attracts those that are culturally abject of society. One way that this has happened is through the town's working-class history and subsequent identity which is discussed earlier on. The theme of degradation as a way of making new is heard through the characters' monologues in the story of their journey to Blackpool to make a new start. In this example the degradation here is the degradation of not being accepted by the mainstream, by people who share a view which systematically tries not to acknowledge those parts of the everyday. Bakhtin (1984) explains that, "Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.... Grotesque realism knows no other level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving" (p.21).

If Blackpool is viewed as epitomising the Carnavalesque it is possible to suggest that people coming to Blackpool need not necessarily conform to the rules imparted by society; they do not conform to them. Instead they take the abject and create from it either by constructing new identities or forming them through belonging to a group of similar others. The monologues in the film tell the story of two characters who have created new identities and how this was possible because of Blackpool's identity and working-class history. Bakhtin (1984) explains that the main participants of the Carnival were the lower and middle classes however he extends the invitation of inclusiveness within

Carnival, “People of various other unorganized elements which belonged to none of these social groups and which were numerous at that time also participated in the celebrations. But the medieval culture of folk humour actually belonged to all the people. The truth of laughter embraced and carried away everyone; nobody could resist it” (p.82).

Pride

Within the film one section was filmed during Blackpool Pride 2016 and it is appropriate that Bakhtin’s (1984) Carnival theory can be applied here as it demonstrates the construction of a second world and is associated with change and renewal. Elliot (1999) explains that, the “carnival reversal implies a change from principles of stability and closure to constant possibility” (p.130); therefore, there is a sense of renewal for all the participants. I felt that this was appropriate during my observations of Blackpool Pride which is also shown in the film. The build up to Blackpool Pride is year-round with events to raise money and awareness and these events typically take place in the gay bars in Blackpool and are open to anyone that supports Pride. Blackpool Pride usually takes place over an entire weekend with the main procession taking place on the Saturday. The main procession snakes its way along the promenade and is made up of different local services and charities with many wearing flamboyant dress. It attracts many people from outside the area and the procession is a spectacle for all age groups.

In previous years, The Winter Gardens has played host to the information stands as well as different entertainment arenas. The Winter Gardens was constructed in 1938 and continues to host high quality shows many direct from the West-End. Blackpool also hosts the longest running seaside show in Britain; Legends. This is a show which features tribute artists, bands and dancers. Next to the Winter Gardens is The Grand Theatre which was opened in 1894 and was financed by theatre manager Thomas Sergenson who also helped to transform the existence of other local theatres. This is all evidence of Blackpool's propensity to view, to spectate, to watch performance in a theatrical manner that embraces the burlesque, the stereotype, the hyper-normal and its deviances. This is reiterated visually in the film and through the descriptions of my visits to the clubs in Blackpool in which I discuss the flamboyant performances of the drag queens as well as the spaces in which they perform.

I wanted to capture the experience of walking into the Winter Gardens as well as the people who went there and so I used a hand-held camera, not only to make myself inconspicuous but also to give the viewer a sense of walking with me a getting a first glimpse as I did. At first it felt a bit overwhelming as there were so many people but also some of the drag queens were so elaborate in their costumes and shoes that they literally towered over everyone and became focal points in their own right. Yet at the same time there was a feeling of acceptance too. Looking around, there were families with young children, mixed sex and gay couples as well as transvestites and transgender people. It felt like an open and welcoming space. The celebrations carried on outside, where despite the weather, there was a band performing and people were

drinking and dancing. I wanted to capture the carnival spirit of Pride within the film and so I deliberately chose to film the more well attended events rather than some of the smaller events that were taking place at the same time. The public celebration of Pride had taken over the town centre and had moved from the predominantly gay areas which were also shown in the film. It was being celebrated in the public arena. Bakhtin (1984) describes the inclusivity of medieval celebrations, "But the medieval culture of folk humour actually belonged to all the people. The truth of laughter actually belonged to all the people. The truth of laughter embraced and carried away everyone; nobody could resist it" (p.82).

Public spaces can be seen as predominantly heterosexual and that anyone who deviates from the "presumed natural and authentic heterosexuality of public spaces," (Holt & Griffin, 2003. p.409) faces potential trouble or danger. Such deviance from the heteronormative discourse led to reclaiming public spaces in which to express sexuality (Oswin, 2008). Examples of these spaces are shown in the film for example Blackpool's gay area, which has become a safe space for the lesbian, gay and trans community. This has not always been the case due to the law, not just in this country but also in America in which history saw the Stonewall raid which subsequently led to the addition of trans within the lesbian, gay and bi community. In June 1969, the police carried out an arbitrary raid in Stonewall Inn and in defence the gay and lesbian patrons fought back against the police. Further conflict ensued and was supported by members of the trans and drag community as an expression of solidarity. In remembrance of the victims of the riot, the following year a march was held in New York paving the way for future marches. Vienna held the first rainbow

parade in 1984 as a collective celebration of the lesbian, gay, bi and trans communities in a bid to promote greater social awareness. Whilst these international events form an iconic set of examples of allowing public space to be accessible to and recognise the legitimacy of non-hetero people, the areas that you identify in your film are different. They are areas of deprivation which seem to be characterised as a place in the everyday that you would not want to go, unless you were made abject from everywhere else.

As part of the research process I had been invited to attend the trans area. I had been told that it was in the Winter Gardens, but I struggled to find it. I resorted to asking the Winter Gardens' staff who also were unable to locate the area. At this point I felt quite worried that I would not get to see what was happening. Eventually I saw a sign by a bar area which at first had been hidden and I went upstairs and spent some time within this area. I found it interesting that this was a public event and yet the trans area was out of the way and hidden. As I did not have permission to film or interview, I was unable to capture this visually in the film and this frustrated me as I would have liked to have shown the contrast. I simply sat and watched what was going on within the space. I saw individuals and families interacting and enjoying the atmosphere. The space had been set up as a tearoom and there were tables neatly set with table linen with small groups and families sat having tea and cakes. It felt serene and happy. It was very different from the space below which was bustling with people in outrageous costumes with music playing and people drinking. It was a much calmer atmosphere. I sat down and had a drink and tried to observe what was going on. Looking around there were people who were in the process of transitioning as they were still male in

appearance although they were wearing dresses, make up and wigs and some of them had family members with them. Moving slightly away from the tea room I could see there were various stalls promoting make-up and prosthetic body parts as well an agenda of inspirational talks by people who had transitioned. I would have liked to include this within the film. I wandered over to where the talks were taking place but there was no room to sit down so I went back to the tea room. Some of the people seemed to know each other and I wondered if it was through a local support group that a participant had told me about. The area seemed to provide a hospitable and safe space for those that wished to be there. By describing this space, I was exposing aspects of intimacy within my study. My study makes use of this intimacy and the research is dependent upon exploiting through exposing that intimacy. This exploitation is another example of the feeling that I have betrayed Blackpool.

In contrast to this the drag area was much more open and accessible as the film shows. An example of this was in one of the areas in the Winter Gardens which was dedicated to drag. I noticed one of the performers who I had seen at Pepes and chose to film the performance as I wanted to include this in the film. Looking around there were many people in drag and this area was a lot louder and bolder than the trans area. Celebrations such as Pride mark the temporary abolition of hierarchy and prohibitions and yet at the same time, I felt that there was difference between the openness of the lesbian, gay and bi celebrations and the trans. Yet both areas echoed Bakhtin's (1984) market place festivals, "They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance" (p.9).

Make-up and non-conformity.

Bakhtin's emphasis on the grotesque shares links with the social culture of Carnival. In both, there is the dissolution of everyday rules regarding acceptable behaviour, notions of power, and the constraints that social hierarchies and positions placed on individuals. This is discussed earlier in the description of the development of Blackpool as a working-class holiday destination as well as the descriptions of my own observations of Funny Girls and Pepes Bar. Both concepts can be viewed as a means of allowing oppressed individuals to celebrate and be who they want to be in that particular time. They also serve as a way of assisting those in power to retain control as by allowing for the temporary suspension of rules, those within the lower hierarchy are reminded of where power is invested outside the arena of the Carnival. However, if the town of Blackpool is viewed as a metaphor for the Carnival, this makes it a permanent space for Carnavalesque behaviour albeit a more diluted version of Bakhtin's (1984) descriptions,

The carnival spirit with its freedom, its utopian character orientated toward the future, was gradually transformed into a mere holiday mood. The feast ceased almost entirely to be the people's second life, their temporary renaissance and renewal. We have stressed the word almost because the popular festive carnival principle is indestructible. Though narrow and weakened, it still continues to fertilize various areas of life and culture.

One of the qualities of Bakhtin's Carnival was that everyone was permitted to dress up as something they were not the rest of the time. This is discussed in the earlier description of Blackpool when the factory workers afforded holiday clothes. However, this can also be seen today and is shown throughout

the film both visually and verbally. Both of the characters speak of using clothing to create their identities. Within the carnival and setting of Blackpool this is allowed and it gives permission for individuals to reclaim and shape their identity on a more permanent basis if required. This epitomises the spirit of possibility in the Carnival: meaning that limits are not bound by anything and people can choose who they want to be. This can be viewed specifically towards the end of the film in the photographs of a participant making himself up as a drag queen. It could be argued that through the process of creating this identity through make-up and clothes, an example of the 'mask' is made explicit. As Bakhtin (1984) explains, "Even more important is the theme of the mask, the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself" (p.40).

The mask and a form of abjection are seen in the application of the make-up. This style of heavy and dramatic make-up would not blend in within the everyday however they become fabricated through the environment and surroundings of the individual. Through the make-up process and transition, the participant was not claiming to be a woman-rather more they were making it clear, through this process, that there is little or no conformity as to what would be acceptable outside of Bakhtin's Carnival. What I mean by this is that through the performance of applying over-elaborate make-up and clothing, the participant was dressed so as not to blend in with the world outside the performance space. "The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and

image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.40).

Within the same section of film, I chose to play the song ‘What Makes a Man a Man?’ performed by Marc Almond (2008) but originally written and performed by Charles Aznavour in the 1970s and although predominantly written from a gay man’s perspective, the lyrics can be applied to other sub-cultures. I did this as I was informed by a participant that they had performed to it and that the lyrics resonated with other drag performers that he knew. Although the song might be described as somewhat predictable and almost caricature, I felt that it held the biographical weight of exclusion for some of the participants within this research and within Blackpool and as such becomes symbolic. It describes non-conformity, behaviour and difference within society and questions what makes a person fit within specific gender titles. The song when played alongside the visual of the photographs affirms the at times tragic yet affirming notion of what is unreal. It becomes a pastiche and is appropriate for the ending of the film as it closes on the image of Blackpool tower. I feel that it is appropriate to draw attention to some of the lyrics within the song.

Within the first verse the singer explains that they work ‘in a strange bar impersonating every star.’ This echoes the story within the film and immediately there is a connection to a place of performance and carnival through both the song and the visual. In the phenomenological tradition, gender is not a stable identity instead, “it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988. p.519). This notion of gender performance is highlighted when, ‘each night the men look so surprised, I change my sex before their eyes,’ and questions,

'what makes a man a man?' which is repeated throughout the song to highlight the struggle faced by particular sub-cultures within society (Almond, 2008).

The feeling of exclusion and ridicule is prominent through the lines, 'there's always those that spoil our games, by finding fault and calling names, always accusing... Yet they make fun of how I talk and imitate the way I walk...' (Almond, 2008). Through both of the stories within the film, there is at times a sense of ridicule and questioning of gender from society which occurs through public ridicule as well as the familial. This prompts the questioning of self-identification through the lines, 'I ask myself what I have got, of what I am and what I'm not...' and is answered with the powerful and affirming response, 'Nobody has the right to be, the judge of what is right for me (Almond, 2008).

The final lines are repeated, asking the viewer to, 'tell me if you can...what makes a man a man' (Almond, 2008) and I felt that this was audibly an appropriate way to conclude the film, alongside the visual backdrop of Blackpool Tower-as way of drawing together person and place.

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Appendix A

Drama, Creativity, and Critical Pedagogy

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Prism: Casting New Light on Learning, Theory and Practice

<http://prism-journal.blackburn.ac.uk/>

ISSN 2514-5347

Vol. I (1): pp. x-x

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Abstract

This article focuses on the work of Paulo Freire and the social theory encapsulated within 'Pedagogy of The Oppressed' (1996) as applied to a professional educational

context; A Year 11 GCSE drama class in preparation for their final assessment piece which was being moderated by an AQA assessor. Drama is a subject which allows for the key concepts of Freire's theory to be explored due its creative nature. There is an explanation of how this theory has been applied in a professional context whilst drawing on the work of Boal (1992) and Nicholson (2006).

Introduction

Drama, Creativity, and Critical Pedagogy

This paper was written in response to working with a group of GCSE drama students within a secondary school in the North West of Lancashire as they prepared for their final practical assessment. They had devised a thematic piece incorporating selected poems from Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience, which was filmed and then viewed to help this reflection. This choice came about through a previous session about situations of vulnerability that the students had found themselves in. They felt that this would be a good basis on which to devise their final piece as it would be something that they could relate to.

Boal (1982) forms the argument that within traditional theatre, there is a lack of emotional participation in the audience as they do not have the chance to express their feelings and beliefs, whereas within Theatre of the Oppressed, there is the need for a unity between the audience and the actors, which allows for a more liberating experience as the audience are allowed to participate; they are given a voice and are encouraged to change the performance. As Boal explains 'the Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!).' (p.30)

Boal based his theatre on the work of Freire's social theory in a move towards a critical form of pedagogy based through theatre. Boal (1992) sees theatre as a way of implementing social change amongst groups of people, as it is a form of knowledge which can be used a means of transforming society. Through drama, theatre groups or indeed individuals, can build and create a future, rather than just waiting for domination. In a similar way to Freire's need for dialogue, Boal attempted to break down the divisions between the passive audience (the spectator) and the performers (the actor), this generated the term 'spect-actor.' Boal (1992) explicates,

'[In] its most archaic sense, theatre is the capacity possessed by human beings – and not by animals – to observe themselves in action. Humans are capable of seeing themselves in the act of seeing, of thinking their emotions, of being moved by their thoughts. They can see themselves here and imagine themselves there; they can see themselves today and imagine themselves tomorrow. This is why humans are able to identify (themselves and others) and not merely to recognise.' (p.26)

Here I refer to Nicholson (2006), a practitioner whose work I have come to understand and relate to my own practice over the past few years and who is keen to advocate the work of Freire and Boal. Nicholson states, '...the immediate impact of a project of applied theatre may be measurable.' (p.141) This suggested that there could be emancipatory benefits for the group as they prepared for their moderation. Without our realising, the devised performance had spontaneously become a piece of applied theatre. The term "emancipatory" is not used here to mean that the students were from war torn countries fighting for everyday survival, but rather that they were facing challenges in their lives that were affecting them.

Previous research from Nicholson (2006) suggests that there is a connection between applied drama and self-confidence, and I was keen to relate this to the liberatory aspect developing with the students. One of the most common aims and expected outcomes for those who engage with drama as a process is to increase confidence. Participants do frequently believe that their confidence was indeed boosted as a result of engagement in that process, which has enabled them to explore aspects of themselves through the mask of the other.

Following Freire's beliefs, at the start of the creation of this piece of theatre I had felt the need to intervene to an extent, yet at the same time I wanted the students to take ownership of the piece and exert their own choices as much as possible. Ranciere (1999) describes this process as 'subjectification.' This subjectification is produced through a collection of actions by a group of people allowing for an experience to be created and identity formed as part of the reconfiguration of their field of experience. I believe that a form of subjectification was being experienced within the drama space through the students' actions and words. They were drawing on their own personal experiences in order to create a piece of theatre.

The nature of drama as a subject produces the need for the vocalisation of thoughts and turning them into performance, but to an extent within the school environment there can be a hidden agenda. In this case, it was my need to prepare the students up to a standard in order for them to meet the requirements of the exam specification and ultimately pass their GCSE. Freire would describe the students as becoming 'containers' in which I, as their teacher, was ready to fill the students with the contents of my own narration. I was aware that this narration could become 'detached from reality,' which I did not want to happen and yet I knew that the students had targets to meet. However, through taking a step back and allowing the students to present their problems through drama, I became their student as I started to learn what they wanted their audience to feel and understand. As Freire reflects, within the drama space the teacher must be united with, not against the oppressed. (Freire, 1996).

Through my participation in drama activities relating to devised performance, such as hot seating and thought alleys, the division between teacher and student became blurred and I was able to understand the group's situation

through the initiated dialogues that were beginning to occur. Within the drama space there were, 'acts of cognition, not transferals of information,' (Ibid, p.60) occurring and 'authentic liberation,' (p.60) was taking place. This was evident in the way that I observed the group working together. For example, I was aware that a particular student who had previously appeared to be reluctant to join in and contribute to his group, was now taking more responsibility and was giving direction to the piece successfully. This particular piece was about relationships with parents and he had started to draw on his own relationship experience in order to create a believable dialogue.

Creating an Understanding of the Other

Initially the students decided that they would set their piece in a classroom and through performances of duologues and monologues, hoped that this would highlight different situations that young people may be affected by; for example, eating disorders and family problems. The fact that the students decided to set their piece in a classroom made me begin to wonder if they visualised it as their metaphorical oppressor. This view was strengthened further when they decided that they wanted to record a teacher giving instructions so that they could use it in their performance. It was interesting to note that they didn't ask me to do it, but instead asked another teacher to provide their voice. As a piece of theatre, this created a good effect but also from an emancipatory exploration, it made me question the methods of teaching being employed. I wondered if it was a subconscious decision and if they did actually view teachers as being oppressive, rather than working with them. When Freire refers to the oppressed, he was describing disenfranchised people situated within civil unrest whereas I am referring to a group of young people living in a civilized society. I am aware that the context is different but when describing and talking about the students' problems, it became evident to me that they too felt oppressed about the different situations that they were finding themselves in. I could have chosen a different term to reflect the students' position; however I felt that the word oppressed was transferable to this particular situation albeit on a different level to Freire's description.

The students also selected poems from William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' (1990) to match their particular problem. For example, one group who were looking at sibling rivalry chose the poem 'My Pretty Rose Tree,' as they felt that this stanza reflected the feelings of jealousy between the siblings:

'Then I went to my pretty rose tree,
To tend her by day and by night;
But my rose turned away with jealousy,
And her thorns were my only delight.'
(Blake,1990:41)

The student, who recited this stanza, did so after an argument with her 'sister' to highlight the fact that she was jealous of her sister's good looks and intelligence. I felt that through the tone of her voice, the student's feelings were conveyed effectively. Another student chose to use the use the following stanza from 'The Sick Rose', to help convey his feelings for his first love:

'Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.'
(Ibid, 1990:63)

Again, I observed his body language, (he appeared to look sad as he looked down and drooped his shoulders), and vocal delivery, (this was down with a downwards inflection). These particular examples may not be interpreted in the way that Blake wanted us to understand them but they resonated with the students and therefore were deemed as an appropriate choice to be used in the performance.

Although the group had originally scripted their dialogues, throughout rehearsal there seemed to be a move away from this sense of formality and the groups started to improvise their spoken words. I observed spontaneous scenes being created after discussions on their chosen topic. I believe that this was the students' way of vocalising their feelings and as Freire puts it, 'each individual wins back the right to say his or her own word, to name the world.' (p.15) I also noticed that two students had changed the theme that they wanted to act out. Again, I viewed this as a move towards applied theatre or even becoming reminiscent of Theatre of the Oppressed. For example, I observed that whilst they had been discussing a particular topic, other related themes had branched out from these dialogues and the students had decided to base their scenes around those instead, as it was something that they all could relate to. The students had been given a choice between following the prescribed scripts, or having choices; between being spectators or actors and between speaking out or being silent.

Theatre for Change

Boal (1992), when describing the powerful nature of theatre, echoes Freire's theory when he explains 'theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society.' (p.31). This would suggest that theatre can help groups of people help build a future, rather than just waiting for change. In reflection on my own practice, I observed that, through the use of drama, the students were becoming aware of their own situations so were able to talk about how they could externalise their feelings. Boal's description is reminiscent of Freire's need for dialogue as a means of transforming the individual, within which dialogue must engage critical thinking as a means to generating critical thinking as, '...without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.' (p.74) Regarding theatre, this would suggest that the spontaneity of improvisation would allow the participants (students) to explore their problem rather than simply remembering and reproducing written words. Boal's work is also rooted in liberation theory. Shor and Freire (1987) discuss liberatory and transformational education within schools and explain how important it is to understand the students that you are working with; they talk of researching the words of the students in order to understand their thoughts and to come to understand what they what they want and how they want to live. This is seen as a privileged place to be in in order to access their consciousness. A level of accessibility should therefore be able to be created within the space of applied drama. Shor and Freire, in their commitment to the dialogical, explain that if we are to begin to try and understand what is happening with our students' development, there is the utmost need for us as teachers to interact in a way that promotes the individual's own way of communication, rather than teaching

by rote. If we, as teachers, cannot interact with our students and speak to them in authentic language, then frustration is created because we are unable to start to research their themes and levels of development. Once we can teach and learn in a transformational way and bypass the dominant ideology, then learning may become reflexive. Shor and Freire explain:

'...the dominant ideology 'lives' inside us and also controls society outside. Therefore if this domination was definitive, there could be no possibility of social transformation. However transformation is possible because consciousness 'is not a mirror of reality, not a mere reflection but is *reflexive and reflective* of reality.' Shor and Freire (1987: 10)

It could therefore be possible to claim that the drama teacher and participants are capable of creating this transformative and reflexive learning especially if they are creating work that the students genuinely have an interest in and want their voices to be heard. The drama space becomes reminiscent of this, in the way that we often pretend to be other people and try to understand other people's thoughts and processes.

I believe that a piece of applied drama was happening within the process of creating a piece of theatre for the drama moderation. The group was identifying problems within their own situations and was using drama methods to bring them to life on the stage. This is reflective of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, as the drama that the students were creating was crossing from fiction into reality and becoming integrated into their lives and a sense of empathy was created.

Performance of this nature could also be seen everyday situations and Nicholson (2006) pushes this concept further by explaining how we are affected by soap operas in a similar way; she describes how people react to characters in soap-operas as if they were actual people and this can sometimes cause confusion.

Perceiving the Reality of Oppression: Final Reflections

Although this particular performance was not an attempt to resolve the groups' problems, it was acting as a vehicle for them to identify and vocalise, through dialogue, their thoughts and feelings. Due to ethical constrictions I am, quite rightly, unable to disclose too much information on any particular individual, but I am able to reveal the fact that at times there were some spontaneous breakthroughs within the group, when they had felt particularly emotional about the scene that they were working on. For example, one student had chosen a song to play during her performance that she felt reflected her feelings. When she began to speak her words and the song was played for the first time, she became overwhelmed and the whole group suddenly became aware of how she was feeling about her situation and reacted by consoling her and helping her through the scene. She had gone from standing on her own, speaking her inner monologue to breaking down barriers within the group; as Freire illustrates, 'Conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided.' (p.30). The group was as Freire puts it, '...perceiving the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.' (p.31)

The transformation within the group was even more apparent when it came to the actual day of the moderation performance as tensions were running high and there

had been external issues with a few students in the group. This in fact resulted in a better visual performance and also allowed the students to draw further on their emotions. For example, the students were able to draw on the feelings that they were experiencing about being assessed and to apply them into their individual performance.

After the actual moderation performance, the assessor commented on how creative the group was and that they had given a natural and believable performance (which incidentally was a marking level on the syllabus). Nicholson (2006) describes how empathy can influence the emotional condition of an audience. I believe that this is what happened during the moderation. I personally felt emotionally moved by the performance as I was aware of how far the students had come in their way of telling their truths. Nicholson's beliefs would suggest that drama can be used as a way of understanding each other and creating social change, which is an opinion that could be contested. Nicholson (Ibid, 2006), also states that through creative mediums such as drama, lasting social change is possible. I knew that a form of change had occurred within the group because they were displaying natural reactions through their performance to the problems that they were facing. Therefore they were convincing, because the students' words that were being spoken were being understood as truth. To reiterate Freire, 'we must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world.' (p.77)

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