

Exegesis and Screenplay for a film entitled

KING TIDE

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Certificate of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to the substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Jim Marbrook, July 2012

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Abstract

King Tide is a 114 minute comedy-drama that is an exploration of care and of community. It follows the middle-aged Reade as he returns to New Zealand from the Gold Coast to begin an unofficial investigation into ACC fraud in the Kaipara/Dargaville community. He has left the Gold Coast under a cloud. His relationship with girlfriend Sharon has also drastically soured. Worst of all, he must leave his adored step-daughter Summer as he starts a new life in Dargaville.

His undercover investigation is soon complicated by the possibilities of a new relationship with country school teacher Nadine. Adding to this complexity is the very make-up of the community he finds himself in. News spreads fast here. His cover is blown almost immediately when he follows up on a tip and seeks out the head-injured Clay, a possible recipient of illegal ACC funds. Clay, the local woodchopping hero whose injury has reduced him to a silent state, is also Nadine's ex. The stumbling block of any investigation in the area is Roy, the enigmatic ACC co-ordinator and charismatic guardian of this town. Coalescing around him are a host of locals; hairdressers, carers, woodchoppers, fishermen and the local antique dealer Merle.

While the spine of the film centres on Reade's enquiry and investigation into fraud and community connivance, his journey also becomes a prism through which other things are seen; there is the Kaipara environment itself, small town culture and also Reade's own personal connection to the area (and this is mostly kept hidden). While Aotearoa / New Zealand has a reputation for its "cinema of unease" (Botes, 2008), *King Tide* represents an attempt to circumvent this by embracing weakness, disability and idiosyncrasy as the ties that can bind and protect a community.

EXEGESIS

Introduction

The overall purpose of this exegesis is to situate the creation of the screenplay for *King Tide* within the evolution of my own personal creative development and process. The story itself, centred on the care that a rural community can provide for those who have experienced Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and strokes (CVA), introduces the reader/viewer to an idealised version of the Dargaville / Kaipara area. In *King Tide* this community is in connivance with itself to support and aid those afflicted by illness.

In many ways the personal interest in making this story comes from past documentary work. These films opened up story possibilities but they also provided the impetus to look for new ways of considering the idea of small communities and how they care for their weakest and most vulnerable members.

Aside from the experimental narrative short film *Jumbo* (Marbrook, 1998) and the 40 minute drama *The Rules of Dogs and Men* (Marbrook & Marbrook, 2005) my personal creative output has mainly consisted of factual projects. Therefore a key part of the creative development for this project has to do with the shift from documentary to fiction. Further to this, my own personal relationship to the script is complicated by the fact that it is also a work that I wish to direct. And while a script is essentially an invitation the writer makes for collaboration with the production team and with funders, the script for *King Tide* also must serve another purpose. It must support and speak to the intentions of the director.

It is also important to mention that the script, as an early draft, is a work-in-progress. The expectation is that the further influences from funding bodies, collaborators and further research, will allow the project to evolve considerably.

The first chapter of this exegesis will dissect and categorise several of the more popular script writing texts such as Robert McKee's *Story* (1997) and Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (2007). These are works that look back to both Aristotle and to mythology for story writing inspiration. But this section will also place the manuals of these script writing "gurus" within a wider context. Andrew Horton (1994) makes a more academic pass at the scriptwriting manual and sets up a kind of variety of screenplay that he sees sitting in opposition to the Hollywood model. He refers to this as "the character-based screenplay". When seen through Bakhtin's critical framework, he also references this type of story-telling as the *carnavalesque*. Finally, this first chapter will also critically examine the paradigms on which the commercial story writing manuals have developed and track these against the evaluation of a more personal style of cinema, that of the writer/director.

The second chapter will track the shift between a documentary treatment and the fictional representation of the subject matter. It will also relate this idea of fictionalised representation to ideas of character and of locale. Much of my documentary work has involved filming and recording the lives of people who either have a disability and/or have experienced mental illness. The personal concerns in the documentary representation of this subject are naturally closely entwined with one's conceptions of power structures. Using examples of how a current affairs treatment of a traumatic brain injury story differs from personal documentary work and the fictionalised screenplay, the merits and drawbacks of the switch to fiction will be discussed.

The final section of this exegesis will discuss and appraise the steps that lie ahead in the preproduction process. The first part of this chapter will look at ways in which our understanding of story is being expanded as technology and the needs of creators and collaborators expand. Further to this, the parallel between the possible development

process for *King Tide* and the film that I have recently co-produced will be discussed.

The production of *Genesis*, itself an adaptation of my documentary *Dark Horse* (Marbrook, 2003) has paralleled the writing of *King Tide*.

Finally, the possibilities of the story itself will be outlined. Here some of the ideas that Horton synthesises from Bakhtin will be considered and compared to some of the creative choices made during the writing of this screenplay.

Synopsis

Reade Wiles' life on the Gold Coast has been truncated by a scandal that has driven him from his job and caused a rupture in his family. Forced to return to New Zealand to work, isolated from his adored step-daughter, he is asked to uncover possible corruption within the local Accident Compensation Commission (ACC). As Reade begins to meet the locals, the strangeness and idiosyncrasies of the community begin to charm him and his interest in local teacher Nadine Otway grows.

As the investigation develops Reade notices that Clay, Nadine's catatonic and head-injured ex, seems to be receiving special attention. Meanwhile, Reade himself has been sought out by the Police and by the man he is supposed to be investigating: the enigmatic Roy. Reade's photographic hobby leads him on a wild chase onto the Kaipara where he is marooned on a sand bar, believing the community are now out to get him. Looming in the back ground is Clay's father Stan, a very loose cannon.

Hendy, the town drunk, approaches Reade with an offer to trade unspecified favours for information on the real story behind Clay's accident. As the pressure mounts, Clay tries to escape from his carer Trix and Nadine cuts off contact with Reade. Reade's boss Grieves has now moved him out from his undercover role right into the ACC office beside Roy.

Just when Reade feels he is making progress with the investigation Roy dies, a possible suicide. But Roy's funeral, and the vacuum his departure creates, opens a doorway for the dangerous Stan to move in and reclaim his son. Complicating things even more is the arrival of Reade's step daughter Summer.

As Stan prepares some drastic measure that he believes will shock his son Clay back from his catatonic state, the locals rally around Reade. After a beach chase and showdown they manage to save Clay and restore some kind of equilibrium to the community. But, in saving Clay, Reade has also become a willing collaborator. His fate sealed, he now has the potential to become a trusted member of this community.

1. Scriptwriting Literature – plot, character and orthodoxy

Aristotle and Structure

As a document, the screenplay must serve two purposes: it must artfully tell a story but it also has a clear, commercial goal. It must convince a funding organisation to invest. The process of *selling* a script seems to necessarily engage the writer in an orthodoxy that has even affected and standardised the very look and feel of a screenplay. Script writing *gurus* like Syd Field encourage standardisation in the way screenplays are presented (Conor, 2010, p.114). Descriptions of action, character and dialogue should all be precisely indented. New locations and times should be signalled in a standard way. The screenplay, as sales document, has an ideal length and should not exceed 120 minutes. It should read in courier 12 point. (Millard, 2010, p.15) And it should, according to the manuals, contain the minimum of camera directions.

This chapter describes and tracks my own engagement with screenwriting manuals and literature that have both helped and hindering the creation of this screenplay. While many of these works investigate the classical origins of the story and the mythological basis from which stories develop, most are, in essence, “how to” guides (Conor, 2010, p.117).

When the research and initial plotting began for *King Tide*, the main idea was to develop a script that expanded ideas that previous documentary and drama work had touched on. Given that some of the dramatic work (*Jumbo*, Marbrook, 1998) experimented with performance styles, long takes and with elliptical dialogue, it was hoped that this script would not only be a container for story but that it would also work as a framework upon which an innovative visual and directorial style could be built.

The premise behind *King Tide* began with an examination of the idea of a friendship between Reade - a carer - and Clay - a patient. Clay had lost the ability to communicate properly as a result of a head injury. The initial impetus was to try and categorise the type of narrative this could become and then search for plot structures that the film idea could fit inside.

A key classical source work that is often cited as a guide to plot and structure is Aristotle's *Poetics* (2012). Many screenwriting manuals use this as a foundation document of sorts. In this work, Aristotle lays down the classical foundations for drama and specifically tags what he categorises as appropriate dramatic action as it relates to *tragedy*. Robert McKee takes up many of his ideas and provides a manual *Story* (McKee, 1997) that is intended to give the screenwriter the resources to write a successful screenplay. In McKee's words the "premise" of the story becomes the "controlling idea" (McKee, 1997, p.124) In McKee's schematic it is the "inciting incident" (McKee, 1997, p.181) that sets up the structure of the events that lead us through conflict to a resolution. It is a systematic approach that engages the writer in a quite linear approach to storytelling.

In fact, McKee's approach and the tools and examples that he provides for the reader are quite prescriptive and there is a real focus on convincing the reader of the appropriateness of his "method". Some have even seen his book as being one that hinders the creative process rather than encouraging it, providing a more editorial framework for the writer rather than one that encourages creation itself. (Conor, 2010, p.117).

Nonetheless the skeleton on which a new story is built often starts with research into past explorations of similarly-themed works. In the case of *King Tide* they ranged from

the more traditional Hollywood fare (*Awakenings*, 1990) through to post-modern deadpan (*The Man Without a Past*, 2002) and on to the extreme subjectivity of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). The key to this initial process seemed to be to provide a space within which new characters could form and develop relationships on the page. Placing a familiar structure on these characters too early on in the writing process felt premature.

McKee's advice to writers is that; "Structure and character are interlocked. The event structure of a story is created out of the choices that characters make under pressure and the actions they choose to take." (McKee, 1997. p 106). Most of his advice concerns what he describes as films that have an "archplot" (McKee, 1997, p.48). This is the direct antecedent of Aristotle's conception of an ideal tragedy, almost a closed story in which all loose ends are tied up. Guy Gallo, in a more recent work, laments the influence of Aristotle's ideas on screenwriting culture. He makes an assessment of what they actually mean when related to our conception of *character* and *plot*.

... It's as if everything Aristotle says about character hints at its organizing power, but given the overwhelming presumption that plot was paramount, that stories were given and familiar, he could not make the leap to realize that new stories were possible, and were possible only if his analysis of character were extended. (Gallo, 2012, p.22)

According to Gallo, Aristotle saw characters drawn into a plot-driven drama at the wills of Fate and Destiny. He quotes Heraclitus to explain: "Ethos anthropos daimon'...A man's character is his fate"...(Gallo, 2012, p.22). In telling these kind of stories the hero must remain the hero and the villain must remain the villain because those are their functions in the story. Gallo's regret is that funding bodies and studio executives

developed a belief that plot should guide character and not vice versa. While an action movie needs the drive of a disciplined structure and plot to move it forward, other films that don't fit into the *blockbuster* model often require a more thorough consideration of character that then goes on to guide plot development. (Horton, 1994, p.4)

Gallo suggests a more character-based approach to script development and this parallels the experience that has surrounded the writing of *King Tide*. In *King Tide*, the intention was to create characters that lived in a specific world. The shifting sands, tides and mudflats of the Dargaville/Kaipara area were also chosen as locations because they seemed to fit in to the story at a more metaphorical level. The juxtaposition of these landscapes against ideas of Clay's brain injury, against the fleeting nature of his memory and his perceptions, was intended set up some visual counterpoint to a character who is essentially closed off from the world. The draft of the script that this exegesis accompanies is an attempt to explore and expand upon the relations between characters connected to this world and this landscape.

Gallo also examines the idea of structure in revisiting the work of celebrated screenwriter William Goldman. He critically examines some of Goldman's ideas of an underlying structure. He quotes Goldman thus; "The essential opening labor a screenwriter must execute is, of course, deciding what the proper structure should be". (Gallo, 2012, p.16) But explicit in Goldman's most famous comment on screenwriting: "Nobody knows anything." (Goldman, 2013) is also the idea that the writer must trust their own taste and also write what interests them.

However, the way in which Goldman's first major film project, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), arose is a good example of how a story structure grew and was developed almost in reaction to conventional commercial wisdom. The impetus to write

the script grew from detailed research into the historical figure of Butch Cassidy. The most unlikely aspects of Cassidy's story were the ones that entranced Goldman the most: his common touch, the way he was embraced and was hidden by locals and also his escape to South America. As the script went to its first auction Goldman describes how only one studio showed any interest. They requested rewrites. Goldman recounts a studio executive saying; "We'll buy this if they don't go to South America"...I said but they went to South America. And the studio guy said, "I don't give a shit. All I know is one thing – John Wayne don't run away" (Goldman, 2013).

Goldman goes on to describe himself steadfastly sticking to this film structure because the historical truth of the narrative was the thing that had enamoured him of the story in the first place. In fact, as a revisioning of the western genre, the structure is refreshingly open and shows a willingness to explore and challenge convention. He playfully extends the *super posse* chase sequence, he inserts a musical sequence (*Rain Drops are Falling on my Head*) and then adds the supposedly *unwestern* escape to South America that sets up the final tragic/heroic denouement. The clear suggestion that Goldman gives us is that, in the process of writing this story, the subjects (and the truths) that most interest the writer are going to be the aspects of the story that he or she can most successfully render into a dramatic work.

Myth, Narrative and Constructing a Director's Vision

The ways in which the themes of *King Tide* can be successfully and ethically fictionalised will be explored in more detail in the next chapter but my last documentary *Mental Notes* (Marbrook, 2012) does provide some clues about possible plot structures as they relate to those who are living with disabilities. Indeed, the narrative structure of *Mental Notes* (Marbrook, 2012) was conceived after a close examination of the testimonies of many ex-patients from psychiatric institutions. These stories did share

some specific narrative progressions. In the cases of those who were put into care (or treatment) and then went on to live in the community, these journeys often included the idea of resistance to diagnosis, gradual acceptance of their own *difference* and then final refusal and resistance to societal labels. They were, in many ways, journeys of self-awareness.

For *King Tide* to be personally satisfying it did have to stake out some new territory. Nevertheless, these ideas of the move to self-awareness were powerful strands that could possibly make up a key part of Clay's narrative journey. The potential for recovery was also something that could be used in another way. Rehabilitation from head injuries can be notoriously difficult to second guess (Hessen, E. Nestvold, K & Sundet, K. 2006; Okie 2006). So running parallel with the idea of a possible rehabilitation was also the idea of a series of false hopes and misreadings of recovery. Clay's horse racing obsession became one of these.

Initial research also explored Reade (the carer) and the possible roles he might fulfil in the community of the story. Rewritten as some kind of administrator with hands-on experience, he is hired by the ACC Regional Manager Grieves because of his reputation as a health system whistle-blower. The moral choice that Reade is finally forced to make, either support the locals or expose an ACC fraud, is then linked to our understanding of his discovery (and ultimately his acceptance) of a very unusual, specific and idealised community. A fictional examination of this world allows for exaggeration and invention. Essentially, Reade is forced to become a detective for the ACC in a town where everybody knows everybody else's business and can second guess his every move. Pushing an absurdist framework onto Reade's investigation and encouraging a more comic representation of Dargaville helps disintegrate one's ideas of what is moral and what is legally right.

Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973) also presents viewers with a small town in a state of flux. In this case the film retells experiences of Fellini's own youth, specifically the episodes within the year when fascist forces took over his own town of Rimini. In fact, Fellini dismantles many of the suggestions that scriptwriting manuals present to their readers. He sets up a community rather than concentrating on one hero/heroine. He slices his film up into episodes rather than dwelling on the causal logic that McKee sees as essential. In fact it is the passing of the seasons in this town that demark the film's temporal progression. If anything, *Amarcord* (Fellini, 1973) is a testament to an approach where the rich representation of community provides a latitude and depth that a more linear narrative would have problems fulfilling.

In *Amarcord* (Fellini, 1973) we are charmed and seduced by numerous characters, many of whom are also in the process of embracing Italy's fascist future. *King Tide* is a kind of reversal of this. Through Reade we meet the eccentric group of residents who must be embraced if the weaker members of a community are to survive in some kind of comfort and ease. Both of these community situations also present clear opportunities to comically subvert the idea of the hero's journey. This brings us to another current in understanding screenplay manuals – the integration of a mythological framework.

While McKee vaunts his own approach to story, Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (2007) steps into different terrain by seeking to assign mythological roles to story types and to characters. He uses a mythological framework that was popularised by Joseph Campbell. Campbell's experience with myth, with Jung and with eastern philosophy helped him to synthesise story archetypes and trace cross-cultural mythological links in his seminal book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1993). The influence of Campbell's work on myth filtered down to Hollywood. We see it clearly in this quotation from George Lucas;

“It was very eerie because in reading *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* I began to realize that my first draft of *Star Wars* was following classic motifs...so I modified my next draft [of *Star Wars*] according to what I'd been learning about classical motifs and made it a little bit more consistent” (Larsen & Larsen, 2002, p.541).

Campbell’s work influenced Vogler to such an extent that he wrote a memo to staff where he worked at Disney exhorting them to look more closely at Campbell’s mythical model. This eventually became Vogler’s screenwriting best seller *The Writer’s Journey* (2007). What Vogler told his Disney audience included such all-encompassing ideas as the following: “The ideas in the book can be applied to understanding any human problem. They are a great key to life as well as being a major tool for dealing more effectively with a mass audience.” (Vogler, para 16, 2013)

Vogler’s ideas do provide an interesting framework with which to analyse some of the broader commercial works such as *Star Wars*. However the idea of the hero has been subverted and reworked through many centuries of literature. Indeed, the work of Russian theoretician Bakhtin, cited in Andrew Horton’s *Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay* (1994), suggests that real characters develop from a polyphony of voices. Using characters from Dostoevsky as examples, Horton (by way of Bakhtin) advises on looking at characters in another way:

The character-centered script portrays character not as a static state of being but as a dynamic process of becoming which we will call the carnivalesque: in brief the carnivalesque describes an ongoing, ever-changing state in which character is recognized as being made up of many “voices” within us. Each with its own history, needs, flavor, limitations, joys, and rhythms. (Horton, 1994, p.19)

In other words, we should expect characters to be filled with “difficult and often contradictory moral choices” (Horton, 1994, p.18). In the carnivalesque view of Bakhtin (via Horton) an audience may be affected by core characteristics and experiences that they “may not come to identify or understand.” (Horton. 1994. p.19). There may also be things that are not resolved, an area “which we cannot fully or totally know, understand or embrace.” (Horton, 1994, p.19). This is the richness of fully rounded work and a world that one finds in a novel like *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky, 1914). This psychological portrait of the murderer and main character Raskolnikov resists easy analysis and is, by moment, crime thriller, confessional and existential treatise.

What theoreticians like Bakhtin provide to those engaged in the process of screenwriting is a considered and innovative analysis of narrative that lies outside of the commercial imperative of the screenwriting manual. Their purpose is to draw literary and artistic parallels that bring a writer or a filmmaker into a space where a work of art can be seen up-close. This chapter will close with two examples of the relationship between the script “guru” and some of the more challenging ideas of cinematic expression and in modern literature.

In a commentary on Antonioni’s *La Notte* (1961), Syd Field recounts how he analysed and reanalysed the film to understand the way it worked and why it had provoked such a strong emotional response. He states; “I had no language or words about what I felt at the time” (Field, 2013, para 17).

He also admits that he mainly saw Antonioni as a filmmaker “who is too internal...focusing on what does not happen, rather than what could happen” (Field, para 16, 2013). Then Field makes a reassessment of his responses. “Looking back, I

think what I responded to the most was how I identified with the characters and their search for meaning in life” (Field, para 17, 2013).

Field’s analysis is ultimately (and he does admit this) limited by his ability to clearly articulate Antonioni’s visual treatment of the story. Whereas for a philosopher like Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 1987) understanding the way cinema works is a very different act. The austerity and simplicity of Robert Bresson’s films, the way they deviate from the Hollywood model, encourage a totally different spirit of appreciation in Deleuze. His starting point for a discussion on Robert Bresson is his understanding of a film’s space itself – even before story (Deleuze, 1987).¹

When Robert McKee categorises “art film” or the “avant garde” he bundles many writers and artists in together. The work of Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf and William Burroughs form part of large group that he sees primarily as being involved in creating what he calls the *anti-plot*. Translating these ideas to a specific film like Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) he can grudgingly admit that it can work “when done well...this sense of a single perception, no matter how incoherent, holds the work together...” But he qualifies this by saying; “for audiences willing to venture into its distortions.” (McKee, 1997, p.55). But he remains sceptical about any other work that seeks to experiment or purposefully challenge; “they reflect not reality, but the solipsism of the filmmaker, and in doing so, stretch the limits of story design toward didactic and ideational structures.” (McKee, 1997, p.55).

Ultimately what McKee, Field and the other *gurus* bring to the pedagogical framework of screenwriting is limited by their need to convince us that their text, their seminar and their method is the best. They exist in a commercial environment and, like many of the

¹ Of Bresson, Deleuze begins by saying: “there are rarely entire spaces in Bresson’s cinema. There are disconnected spaces.”

scripts they discuss, box office is the best indicator of artistic success. As guides to the writing process they do provide frameworks that were interesting to consider but, most often, their comments negated the development of a personal approach to cinema, a personal response to storytelling and a deeper understanding of real reflections on the historical art of storytelling.

2. From Documentary to a Fictional Approach

Current Affairs and Documentary

The writing process for this script and exegesis has been framed by several key projects that have ran concurrently with *King Tide*. One of these is the feature-length documentary *Mental Notes* (Marbrook, 2012) and the other is the fictional adaptation of my earlier documentary *Dark Horse* (Marbrook, 2003). This has now become the feature film *Genesis* (at the time of writing this film is still in post-production).

Both of these projects parse and dissect similar subject matter to *King Tide* and, in their own ways, both track community reactions to illness and disability. Therefore this chapter will follow and analyse the creative voyage that has led, by way of the script, from a documentary rendering of *truth* to a purely fictional narrative.

While the dynamics of the main characters in *King Tide* ebb and flow around ACC services in the Dargaville area, the initial intention was to use these services as a backdrop around which a small, eccentric community could be fleshed out as we followed the ACC thread. The first step was looking at the way the services worked and this research also coincided with major disruptions inside the ACC itself.

In August 2012 two major reports concerning the ACC were published. The first was a report on privacy breeches (Office of the Privacy Commissioner, 2012) and the second concerned governance of the ACC itself. (Controller and Auditor-General, August, 2012). Both reports suggested that changes were necessary in the way the ACC was governed and in the way in which a client's privacy was guarded. More importantly, in the context of my own analysis, the most public presentation of the facts was Melanie Reid's *60 Minutes* (Reid, 2012) special on ACC whistle-blower Bronwyn Pullar. The

60 Minutes (2012) report is a good place to start in trying to outline the strengths and weaknesses of a purely journalistic or factual approach.

Melanie Reid's piece is, in essence, a sustained interview between Ms Pullar, aggrieved ACC client, and Reid, the journalist. Melanie Reid takes us carefully and closely through Pullar's plight. The intimacy between subject and journalist is emphasised several times during the piece when Reid remarks "I've been asking you to go public with this for years...". The interview is clearly punctuated with Reid's "Piece to Camera" segments. These not only allow the gradual piecing together of story threads but they also allow the journalist to editorialise.

This kind of programming fits conveniently into its scheduled slot. While it requires research, the interview-based format limits shooting hours and production resources. The exclusive presence of a whistle-blower allows it to retain its cache of exclusivity. But while looking for a way of *telling* an ACC / Rehabilitation story, Melanie Reid's piece also confirms the limitations of this approach.

Conspicuous by their absence in the *60 Minutes* (Reid, 2012) report were two key structural elements. The first of these is what can be described as *actuality footage* (NFSA, n.d.). This is a collection of observational shots of daily life that exist outside of the interview set-up. In Reid's piece the focus is on the evidence of the interview and not so much on the life of the subject. The second missing element is a closer look at the ACC, at the thoughts and opinions of those within the organisation. Our snapshot of this in *60 Minutes* (2012) comes from Ms Pullar's secret recording and from emails that have been requested through the Official Information Act. A crusading, journalistic approach is good at apportioning guilt and then, of course, demanding justice. But an inside view of the workings of the organisation is more difficult to develop once this

confrontational framework has been established. A fictional approach, of course, can dwell on the aspects of the story that the writer finds interesting, it can tell the story from the inside or the outside. It can set itself up in Nelson, Wellington or Dargaville.

Another aspect of the story that only played out in the background of this piece concerned the long term effects of mild head injuries (and this, potentially, had more dire long-term consequences for the ACC). Sets of recent findings are beginning to clearly link these mild head injuries with long term depression and even suicide (Omalu, B., Hamilton, R., Kambo, I., DeKosky, S., Bailes, J., 2010). Proving these kinds of allegations requires either a much longer and deeper journalistic examination or a change of approach. Both the longer documentary form and the fictional narrative provide opportunities to develop this further.

While the *60 Minutes* (Reid, 2012) piece was effective in telling a personal story that had significantly damaged a national organisation, it only briefly touched on some of the difficulties a head-injured person faces in their daily life. Part of the impetus to write and direct *King Tide* was to have a freer hand in creating and developing the world of the story, the world in which more serious issues of care could be examined within a more subjective context.

Much of the process behind the commissioning of factual programming in New Zealand also hinders a broader approach to stories and subjects. An example of this is the pathway that *Mental Notes* (Marbrook, 2012) took from initial pitch in 2007 through to its final theatrical release in 2012. The original pitch sought network support to tell an historical story, one that focused on the culture of psychiatric institutional care and one that allowed for a range of voices and contributions. The focus would be on understanding a flawed system of care rather than rounding up culprits. The co-

production that was eventually proposed by the network became *The Shock Box* (Conway, M., Harrington, C., & Marbrook, J. 2007), a 30 minute investigative piece for TVNZ's *Sunday Programme*.

The Shock Box (Conway, Harrington, Marbrook, 2007), an investigation into child psychiatrist and alleged torturer Selwyn Leeks, worked in a similar way to Reid's piece in that it sought wrong-doers (Leeks) and also sought justice for the victims. It was less reliant on one long interview and built up a case using many witnesses. It took the familiar narrative format of the investigation, gathering witnesses and proof and then confronted the suspect, even filming him with a hidden camera. Then it sought redress from the police (Deputy Commissioner Malcolm Burgess) and the Solicitor General (Dr David Collins). What it couldn't do was confront the wider issues of *care* that lay within the failures of a system. These, we knew, were prevalent across most psychiatric hospitals from that era. Adding to these complications were doubts that were cast on the validity of the testimony that came from those who had been admitted to institutions under the Mental Health Act. Providing a voice for them seemed crucial.

When funding was finally secured to make *Mental Notes* in 2008, the limitations of this purely, journalistic approach to the subject could be rethought. The film follows the psychiatric journeys of five main participants as they describe (and sometimes re-enact) their movements through a system of treatment and care. Interspersed with this are comments from historians and clinicians but the main thrust of the narrative is this journey and the common links and experiences between all five.

Pursuing this longer and more sustained documentary structure also introduced new concerns. Any outside commentary, voice-over or journalistic editorialising had to be dispensed with. Its presence in the story became a real intrusion and changed the texture

of the testimony. The edit became centred on preserving the dignity and power of the patient *voice*. As *King Tide* took shape the possibilities of a more fictional approach to similar subject matter became clearer. It had the potential to free up the narrative and tell a more multifaceted story. Being fictional, notions of the reliable witness and on notions of voice seemed less crucial.

Documentary and Fictional Representations of Disability

While the documentary approach to filming people who are disabled (or who experience mental illness) is bound up in many ethical considerations, the fictional approach to their representation is less clear. Comic portrayals that challenge some of these ethical considerations range from the broad Jim Carey vehicle, *Me, Myself and Irene* (2000), through to the mordant deadpan of Aki Kaurismaki's *The Man Without a Past* (2002).

This next section looks at Clay and how his diagnosis and head injury have framed the development of his character. A clinician might describe Clay as having verbal apraxia and global aphasia (meaning he can't speak, nor read, nor write and may have difficulty understanding others). He also has hemiparesis (limited movement in one half of his body) and may even have cognitive deficiencies as well. (Merriam-webster, n.d.).

Further research on Clay's condition opened up more possibilities for his character.

He was originally conceived as a man who changes during the course of the film.

Again, these ideas of recovery seemed like strong story threads that were worth developing. Medical research has also established a clear link between head injury and personality changes (Ruocco & Swirsky-Sacchetti, 2007). Similarly, Wood and Rutherford (2006) showed how difficulties in adjusting to life after serious head injury were proportional to the severity of the injury. Other recent research (for instance, Hessen, E. Nestvold, K & Sundet, K. 2006; Okie 2006; and Ownsworth 2006) also

pointed to the many difficulties faced when recovering from such physical trauma.

However these same studies also found that the relationship between the types of head injury and the personality change were impossible to predict.

The random nature of brain injuries and the huge range of manifestations of their symptoms provided a great degree of latitude when plotting and creating realistic reactions to events for a character such as Clay. While the development of Clay's character unearthed narrative opportunities, the methods of representing the documentary participants in *Mental Notes* had more to do with maintaining their dignity. The process of the edit needed to preserve their voices (and also the voice of the film). Their authority as witnesses could not be undermined or usurped. Documentary theorist Bill Nichols develops this idea of "voice" even more; "By voice I mean something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials presented to us" (Nichols. p259).

The social point of view in the fictional story is less bound up in the idea of representing characters ethically and more concerned with seeing them within the truth of the dramatic encounter (in a scene or sequence). In *King Tide*, Clay mostly remains a mute witness to events unfolding around him. In fact, the screenplay resists the temptation to present any real "awakening". Sometimes, such as when Reade talks to him after his attempt to escape in the car, we are encouraged to read him more as a cipher, a mirror for Reade's own need to communicate as he tries to apologise for his interest in Nadine. As Clay is almost about to seizure on the roadside Reade tries to explain himself; "You know when I met Nadine I didn't make the connection." The silence and then the seizure that follow Reade's efforts to communicate push us away from being able to

analyse Clay's character but they also serve another purpose: they develop and enhance the mystery of his illness and injury and what he knows. They install doubt.

This idea of a witness who cannot communicate is fully developed in a work like Robert Bresson's *Au Hazard Balthazar* (1966). The subtle interplay between the donkey, the main subject of Bresson's film, and those it encounters (who both love and torment and then eventually kill it) is an example of how a mute witness of events can encourage the audience to project their own fears, feelings and sympathies onto a character whose emotions cannot be accessed in any meaningful way. Ultimately, it is hoped, the ambiguity of Clay's actions will set up a situation that we might find in a Bresson film; one where a character's hidden life acquires presence and depth and where "the visible becomes the embodiment of the invisible" (Statler, 2013. p.21).

In documentary, the social point of view becomes a key consideration. It is this point of view that situates real people within the socio-political context of the film. It can affect their real lives. (Nichols, p.152). Nichols also reminds us of how documentary participants can also be described as *social actors* when the films they are collaborating on seek to represent social and political issues. This was most certainly the case with *Mental Notes* and Nichols also cautions; "Social actors are not pawns but people" (Nichols. P152).

It was liberating to be able to build Clay (and the other characters in *King Tide*) away from some of the constraints that seem to coalesce around the very human relationships between filmmaker and documentary participant. But the fictional approach also lacks the immediacy that a personal relationship brings to a factual work. The participants of *Mental Notes* wanted their stories recorded and preserved. The impulse to make it

became what Renov has outlined as the need to “record, reveal or preserve” (Renov, 1993). This gives the work a special purpose and focus.

On the surface, the documentary is an objective engagement with reality but this notion of objectivity in both factual and fictional work can also be seen as fraught with difficulty.

Many documentarists would appear to believe what fiction film-makers only feign to believe, or openly question: that film-making creates an objective representation of the way things really are...Very few seem prepared to admit through the very tissue and texture of their work that all film-making is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions, and point of view. (Nichols. p261)

Engaging in the production of a fictional story is accepting the script as one’s guide to the film but it is also an acceptance that the contract between the filmmaker and the audience is distinct and different from that of the documentary.

While a documentary can never pretend to be a perfectly objective statement Stella Bruzzi does maintain that it is a form that can best reflect the varieties of truth in a factual event: “a documentary is itself the crucial point at which the factual event, the difficulties of representation and the act of watching a documentary, are resolved” (Bruzzi, p.9). The script for *King Tide* is both a bid for a freer approach to explore specific subject matter but it is also a personal attempt to widen Nichols’ idea of “voice”. It is also a bid to engage the audience with the realities of fictional characters who, through their own actions, can also help us reflect on a deeper objective truth.

3. Final Reflections

The screenplay as visual prompt

The next phase of the script and story development for *King Tide* will involve working in Dargaville and the Kaipara, examining real locations and letting the community itself impact upon story and script. While the focus of this thesis has been on writing the story, the next phase of development will include attempts to visually situate and pictorially develop the representation of the Kaipara area. In this next phase, a diverse range of collaborators and investors must be enticed and invited to participate in the production process. In this section I will discuss the idea of script as visual prompt and situate the script for *King Tide* as a starting point for a more visual treatment of the story and an enticement to further collaboration and support.

Syd Field's comments on Antonioni and Deleuze's comments on Bresson in the first chapter of this exegesis hint at the deficiencies that a screenplay may have when translating sequences and scenes into what Deleuze philosophically calls "space time blocks" (Deleuze, 2012.). But predefining the visual style through photographs, through moving images, music and through design is now becoming more and more possible.

The screenplay may also be the starting point for something else entirely, even crossing over into other formats such as video games, web series, cartoons or television series.

An extensive collection of supporting visual material in the pre-production phase certainly extends the scope of the production and helps build relationships with potential audiences. The marketing and distribution of work is clearly linked to this dialogue between the creator and the consumer. The more direct the dialogue, the more the potential audience can be tempted to follow development. Peter Jackson is a good example of this. He has not only established clear and personal communication with

Hobbit fans, he also provides them with glimpses into the world of his film and into the pre-visualisation process within which characters are created (Jackson, 2013).

In the following sections I want to look more closely at some recent developments in the preproduction phase of filmmaking that will impact on the planning stages of *Kingtide*. Pre-visualisation, or “previs” is one aspect of this that is currently becoming more sophisticated. It can involve a range of techniques that include storyboards, drawings, graphics or 3D animation. Previs artist Gare Cline sees it as an essential means for the director to maintain visual control over the film; “Too often, a producer or a department head seizes the reigns from the director, because he or she either lacks or is incapable of expressing his or her vision” (Cline, nd). The visual treatment and exploration of the screenplay is becoming more and more crucial to the development phase. Katherine Millard has highlighted how technology can not only illustrate narrative concepts but also influence plot ideas and characterisation. In outlining the development process for *District 9* (2009) she details the extensive pre-visualisation work that was done even before the idea of the film was sold. This process involved the production of a graphic novel that allowed key creative decisions to be made as to the final design of a more friendly version of the aliens or “prawns” (Millard, 2011, p.150).

While the idea of pre-visualisation is more important for special effects films such as *District 9* (2009) Millard also discusses how pre-visualisation has helped the production of films that are less based on the idea of *spectacle* and that do not fit into our idea of what we know McKey calls the *archplot*. For example, pre-visualisation work by Gus Van Sant and Terence Davies tested visual approaches to more experimental narrative story telling. In Davies’ case it provided the visual backbone on which he based his feature *Of Time and the City* (2008). What the script of *King Tide* will always struggle to communicate is the in-depth visual exploration of the story.

Preliminary research has highlighted a range of visual sources that will be more closely integrated in further production documents and visual resources. These include 17th Century Dutch landscape painters like Jacob van Ruisdael and Aelbert Cuys through to large format photographers like Andreas Gursky and Edward Burtynsky.

Producing a *proof of concept* video is something that Robert Rodriguez used to convince Frank Miller to let him shoot *Sin City* but increasingly the visual presentation of concepts and ideas is a technique used to clarify a director's vision. In Kevin Tancharoen's (unsuccessful) pitch reel (Sciretta, P. 2013) for *The Hunger Games* (2012) he uses a careful edit of clips from reference films to tease out key ideas of character, light, atmosphere, rhythm and production design. While his clip did not tempt *The Hunger Games* (2012) producers to hire him as a director what it does show is that filmmakers are now extending the way they work. The pen and paper approach is giving way to editing and motion graphics programmes. Concept sketches have given way to complex collages of found clips, effects, textures and type.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter further development of story will also require a more significant engagement with the Dargaville/Kaipara area itself. I envisage reintegrating a documentary approach for this. Filming interviews with locals, exploring the visual possibilities of the Kaipara, will aid this deeper look into the real concerns of the community. The fictional world of Reade, Roy and the others can only be enriched by an encounter with the real world of the Kaipara.

Geoff Park's approach to New Zealand history and prehistory also provides a clue as to how sustained and thoughtful investigation of the environment can uncover the histories and memories of a landscape. When Park set off in the eighties to catalogue the few remaining stands of kahikatea lowland forests that colonisation and commercial

exploitation had banished to tiny corners of Aotearoa / New Zealand, he chose and developed a specific framework with which to investigate. His ecological/cultural approach, published as *Nga uruora: the groves of life* (Park, 1995) helps give a new context to landscape and anthropological history. He could be talking about the featureless Northern Wairoa riverside when he says; “Nothing signals that there is anything special here. Yet a culture’s special places are not necessarily visible to the eye” (Park, 1995, p.19)

The Screenplay – further drafts

During the three year development period that preceded the recent production of the feature film *Genesis*, my own role as co-producer set me at the hub of many exchanges of ideas and opinions. These were the dialogues between producers and funding bodies, distributors, sales agents, script consultants and those writing market reports and appraisals.

This exchange of ideas, this filtering of opinions and assessment of comments and (naturally) contradictions, became a part of each new funding round and each new draft. The work of this early draft of *King Tide* has been completed outside of the influence of these “industry” collaborations. As such, the process of development has been more personal and experiential.

Perhaps the strongest personal discovery in the writing of this screenplay has been the small community of characters that populate the film’s version of the Kaipara. I see these characters as having the potential to tell a strong community story. There is no necessity for them to be moral examples but rather I see them as a group who have found a way of resisting change by embracing a regional autonomy that is naturally suspicious of Auckland or Wellington or the Gold Coast.

Sam Neill's documentary *Cinema of Unease* (1995) develops the idea of a dark national character that surfaces in our films. The debate about this idea is still present in discussions of our national cinema. Maori and Polynesian filmmakers, those responsible for works that show communities bound together, are more likely to reject Neill's 1995 hypothesis (Botes, 2008, para.9). They are probably more likely to eschew the idea of New Zealander as a "man alone" as well. Nevertheless, as Costa Botes has recently reaffirmed; "the significance of 'unease' as a central trope or tradition cannot be so easily rejected" (Botes, 2008, para.9).

In recent times we have seen some antidotes for this "unease". Projects like *Boy* (2010), like the recent *Mt Zion* (2012) and even (in the low budget category) *Second Hand Wedding* (2008), have garnered attention and audiences. Fundamentally these films are populated with characters who are connected to their communities. Even though, as Goldman maintains, "nobody knows anything" about the reasons for a film's box office success, these aforementioned films do connect us with communities that our increasingly fragmented society has distanced us from.

Although there are manifestations of this "unease" within the screenplay (Clay's incoherence, for example), Reade's investigations ultimately uncover a society that loves itself "to bits". As further drafts evolve this tension between the *helping* and the *hindering* community will be explored to a greater extent, not just for its comic potential but also for its ability to politicise and exaggerate and also engage an audience with the real concerns of a small town.

Reade's journey itself is a bid not only to connect with Nadine and to understand the dilemma of Clay. There are also deeper issues that sit underneath his quest to uncover community dishonesty. These issues also concern Reade's place in the world of the

Kaipara (and of the Gold Coast as well). Shadowing this is his own past, Reade's family history. His visit to the old church at the end of the film is the only time when we see him actively trying to engage with this family history, returning to the place where we assume his father preached. It is a scene designed to suggest and tease out possible meanings and possible back story. But it is also one that intentionally refuses clear explanation. If Robert McKey's idea of a successful screenplay is one that contains the idea of satisfactory closure in the *archplot* then Reade's hidden past derails a neat and tidy consideration of his character. Like Clay and like Roy, the opacity of his history in the area should invite reflection and add another dimension to his relationship with the community and with the past.

Andrew Horton presents, via Bakhtin, another way of embracing a disunity to story progression that stems from a close examination of fiction and of fictional characters. Quoting Bakhtin, who comments on Dostoevsky, he writes: "In none of Dostoevsky's novels is there any evolution of a unified spirit. Each novel presents an opposition, which is never cancelled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses" (Horton, 1994, p.27). It is these oppositions that will continue to wrestle with each other in further drafts. They not only signal the contradictions and idiosyncrasies that our communities constantly challenge us with but they mark the inner conflicts that we all face as we try, like Reade, to make our way in the world.

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psychosocial outcome following traumatic brain injury. *Journal of the*

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Video Resources

Two of the works discussed in this thesis are available for viewing here:

Mental Notes <https://vimeo.com/50447175> password is vfilms

Dark Horse <https://vimeo.com/35040286> password is checkmate