**Intro/overview/hook**

**Title slide – More Lonely Ere – Iddiorythmic communities and the nostalgic lens**

**Next Slide –** (Hannah/Cephas)

When you walk the streets local to where you live, to the shops, or even as you make the commute to work, have you ever noticed the same people that make the same journey and who move in the same spaces as you do – in front, to the side and behind you? These people are familiar but you do not know them, you are abstract to them – even though they occupy the same community as you and they may even share many of the same experiences as you.

**Next Slide – (**Watford Map)

Watford is a large town in the south east of England, situated within the bounds of the M25 but is not London. It is in Hertfordshire but not anything like the pastoral countryside of the Home Counties either. Its identity is closely intertwined with the way that it is designed to transport you away or through it. For the commuter, this is ideal, placing you within a stone’s throw to the capital and affording you the opportunity to escape the urban sprawl when not working.

 It is a between place.

**Next Slide –** (tree/Sarah)

My photographic series started as a personal investigation into connection to place. One that I have lived for the past 7 years without ever referring to as home - even though, I met my wife here and my daughter was born here. With the onset of the pandemic, I found myself walking more and exploring Watford in much more detail and noticing the same people under the same imperative to keep distant.

**Next Slide –** (Church/Ryan)

It became an opportunity to have a dialogue and journey through this separated existence of individualism to evaluate the idea of home and sanctuary; forging a new relationship with space and the people that I share it with and challenge an identity of a commuting town when there is no more commuting.

**Theoretical framework/research question**

**Next Slide –** (M25 Over the canal)

My own ideas of connection have led me to consider the way that communities have become ever more disconnected and disparate, or is that merely the perception? Watford’s position as a commuter town into the capital means that the place values the things which help people to make quick exit: The London orbital, the M1, main line train to Euston and also Watford’s position at the end of the over ground and the Metropolitan TFL network.

**Next Slide –** (window image)

This identity was fundamentally challenged when the pandemic and first lockdown came. Instead of commuting out of Watford we were encouraged to stay home in what was being referred to as the ‘new normal’ as if to contrast a past normal. Our lives have been inextricably changed, yes. But a larger question about the way communities evolve is raised. There is a tendency to judge the present on an idealistic view of the past, based on nostalgic longing for how things were better before, even if this has never existed. Suzanne Keller puts it best:

**Next Slide –** (Keller Quote)

*“the present search for community harks back to the nineteenth century when, in the face of rapid urbanisation, one idea of community was dying and no other had yet emerged to its place. This led human beings to construct an ideal (because lost) past or to design an ideal (because unrealised) future” (Keller, 1988, p. 167)*

The pandemic brings this into sharp focus for everybody in an extremely short period of time. We can quickly contrast a life and community that existed only a few months previously.

**Next Slide –** (Carbenders park tree)

This nostalgia associated with the way we consider the past, in part, it is shaped by the way that we consume this past, which becomes abstracted and edited as we rely on the construction of personal memory, hauntological photographic reminders, and in what Marianne Hirsch terms ‘post-memory.’ (Hirsch, 1997)

**Next Slide –** (Alistair/Kate)

The pandemic also highlighted community disparateness. People sharing spaces but living separately, which seems to be a contemporary problem, but what Roland Barthes termed ‘Iddiorythm’ suggesting similarities to the way that some monastic communities live within the same compounds but entirely independently from one another unless a communal worship of some kind is taking place – or how each of us live according to an individual rhythm. Iddiorythm is a very Barthian expression in which his idealised view of how we live together is very much related to separation and the value that he places on ‘distance,’ referring to Nietzsche’s idea of a ‘Pathos of Distance’ (Barthes, 2012), where nobility can be defined by the way it creates separation from others with an air of remorse and alienation. And this becomes ever more prescient when under the current pandemic nobility is defined by the need to safeguard our communities by remaining separate and distant from them. Idiorythm in this context becomes a useful tool to investigate the community and its aptitude to evolve in a short period of time.

**Next Slide –** (Tesco Path)

Iddiorythm, separation, and the disparate disconnect of people residing here only to travel away in a town such as Watford, creates an opportunity to apply the same concept to place, which we impact but also impacts us. A town that is between city and countryside encourages the question of where one stops and the other begins? Beynon et al introduces the elusive concept of ‘Rurality,’ which is always in dispute and not easily defined, noting that there is not a ‘single variable that can ‘capture’ urban/rural settlements (Beynon, et al., 2016) that also cites Weisheit et al’s 1995 study into crime and policing in rural and small town America, which discusses the ambiguous nature of these definitions among other areas that quite often cross over into photographic practice:

**Next Slide –** (quote)

*“like concepts such as ‘truth’ ‘beauty,’ or ‘justice,’ everyone knows the term rural, but no one can define the term very precisely” (Weisheit, et al., 1995, p. 213)*

**Next Slide –** (Edgeland - gate)

Marian Shoard did however create a useful term to sum this up, even though ambiguity remains at its core: ‘edgelands.’ (Shoard, 2002) - Those liminal spaces existing in the human settlement that are not one thing or the other. From this I define Watford an edgeland. Even before this pandemic, which created liminality for all of us, its position as a non-descript character-less commuter town has been the topic of disdain for writers including Nick Hornby’s ‘High Fidelity’ and political comedy ‘The Thick of it where it was a place to avoid and considered bleak. Both of these do not inspire reasons to reside here. When Paul Farley and Michael Symmonds Roberts made their own observations on interpreting edgelands for the book of the same name, they made special reference to the train line that runs through the town and also landmarks just outside the boundary of Watford but not really the town itself – Watford might be too edgelands for edgelands. But by their own definition:

**Next Slide –** (quote)

*“English towns and cities, where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders” (Farley & Symmonds Roberts, 2011, p. 5),*

**Next Slide –** (buddleia pathway)

In which Watford spends much of its time arguing over – for many outside, it is effectively part of the city, and to those that live here it is defiantly not. Watford, of all the large towns is a place engulfed by its position next to the capital whose urban sprawl can’t identify itself as anything close to being rural.

**Next Slide –** (football pitch/ Harry)

If edgelands are always in flux then we can infer that so too is the local community, continually evaluating and re-evaluating its sense of self as the environment changes. And this is especially true in a place such as Watford, whose position as an edgeland is part of its central identity. The impact of the community changes the town and then changes the people in turn. And a pandemic, albeit unexpected, merely accelerates this process.

**Methodology/case selection**

**Next Slide –** (tree root)

As photographer, I made a number of conscious choices in the way that I represented these ideas visually.

**Next Slide –** (M25 Path)

**Next Slide –** (Tesco-Firestation)

**Next Slide –** (swing and den)

There are the unique characteristics, such as the environment, architecture and balance of green space of the place to consider, which have an impact on the community who inhabit it.

**Next Slide –** (Harmon quote)

Graham Harmon suggests these qualities are part of an object orientated ontology (2018), referring to an inanimate agency that influences human interpretation, as he notes: *“we abstract certain features from these objects, which exist in their full and unexhausted plenitude quite apart from all our theoretical, perceptual, or practical encounters with them”* (Harmon, 2020, p. 18).

**Next Slide –** (bin bag)

From this, it is important to understand the limitations that are created through personal bias and also technological interpretation. Photographs are also objects with their own agency, according to Harmon. They also abstract from other objects by reducing reality into two dimensional surfaces and single truths – context and interpretation dependent. The process of photographing places limitations of not only time but also via the chemical makeup of photographic emulsions or computer programed methods of interpreting light. Neither can hope to fully realise the reality present but can feed nostalgia by editing the experience of a place or time further into its idealised elements.

 **Next Slide –** (Campany quote)

As David Campany reminds us: *“The time and appearance of the photograph is inseparable from the time and appearance of the world yet they are clearly not the same”* (Campany, 2020, p. 52).

To push this idea as a way of showing my community as subjective and idealised, I made use of black and white analogue photographic processes that by their nature abstract the world as we anthropocentrically perceive it in colour.

**Next Slide –** (Migrant Mother)

**Next Slide –** (Migrant Mother - thumb)

B&W specifically and uniquely presents this as a form of hauntological nostalgia in the way that it references a collective knowledge built on the canons of photography, such as the Farm Security Administration affiliates: Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans’ Documentary aesthetic. Lange’s images in particular have frequently been used as an example of the ‘quintessential documentary photograph’ as argued by Sally Stein (Stein, 2020, p. 59) despite later acknowledgements of their contrived elements and high levels of editorial control by FSA information head Roy Stryker. These images constructed an idealistic romanticised world that may never have existed but one that that is frequently referred to through tropes of photography.

**Next Slide –** (Mark)

When looking at black and white photographs, there is an immediate link to the photographic nature of the work; it creates a nostalgia usually associated with the past and is a construction, but this does not mean that the photograph can’t be a way of learning about community

**Next Slide –** (tree heart/help me)

 When used overtly, this can point out where it has also been used previously to the reader, leading to a re-evaluation and deconstruction of their built up world. Photography is a pictorial format that represents through compositional editing and selection. What is important is intent, and a transparency of representational values matching the outcome. As Kendall L. Walton reminds us: *“Representation without matching, is simply misrepresentation” (Walton, 2004, p. 350)*

**Next Slide –** (Mazhar)

**Next Slide –** (Madonna)

With this in mind, my images are a formalised gaze of portraits and landscapes in black and white to encourage a prolonged reading of the image. This is to present the characters from my local community as heroic, much like how Florence Owens Thompson, the subject of Lange’s Migrant Mother image, has been likened to the Madonna and Child.

**Next Slide –** (Narrative structure)

I then structured my narrative inspired by the Robert Frost Poem ‘Desert Places’ (Frost, 1936) taking a line from this poem for the title of the work. ‘More Lonely Ere’ is an antiquated way of stating you are more lonely before – effectively becoming less so the more learned about the place, the people and community. I made a sequence of the work using Joseph Campbell’s journey narrative structure (Campbell, 1949), rarely seen in a work of photography, as a way of denoting this representation through symbol and mythology, just as the FSA photographers constructed part of the American myth visually, and Frost through his words. My sequence creates a visual representation of the community having to re-discover itself through the local places it is limited to. This idea of local discovery became very important to show how a community can evolve.

**Next Slide –** (Car lot)

**Next Slide –** (woods)

**Next Slide –** (Fields)

**Next Slide –** (Louise/Home)

There are useful metaphors in Frost’s imagery that connect to the way that I have been considering community and connection in the landscape, as outlined by Li Wang’s study of Frost’s poem: There is the moral and spiritual wilderness in Desert Places represented by the edgelands in my images, his Woods are the people & society and my idea of community, the field, which represents nature and the home that provides safety and where one can find an identity (Wang, 2013, p. 2094). Visually, these metaphors are designed to place focus on the people and the landscape and how it co-exists.

**Next Slide –** (Jess and Darcie)

The project was not about creating any objective truth, instead using the medium to create something in between fiction and chronicle, again linking to the liminality of the edgelands and rurality concepts.

**Next Slide –** (Dad with weeds)

Iddiorythm is also a dichotomy between idealistic versus reality. My project represents this by consciously presenting images made during a time of challenge and great stress using photographic methods that romanticise, select and edit into idealistic moments that I construct – a false nostalgia created in a present, which could also have been photographed at another point in time.

**Next Slide –** (Amy and Wais)

What this shows is that even at this present time there are moments of hope and beauty without having to rely on subjective memories from the past. This mythologising of the present through a metaphorical journey of discovery shows us that the romantic and ideal is inherent now and exists within the places there to be discovered, or re-discovered. The ‘new normal’ is merely part of an evolving normal that occurs naturally, which has only been brought on much faster by current events.

**Next Slide –** (train arches)

Watford will potentially go back to its role in the delivery of commuters however, it will in the knowledge that at least one aspect of previous iddiorythms, of people’s individual rhythms, is now a acutely shared experience within the local community on some level – even when you see the same faces, you understand a little more about them.

**Next Slide –** (Den)

It is possible to use photography to create an idealistic and nostalgic view of a contemporary community, even when under the current pandemic, which leads to opening a dialogue to better appreciate the present.

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