Screenwriting as Creative Labour:
Pedagogies, Practices and Livelihoods in the New Cultural Economy

Bridget Elizabeth Conor

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Submitted for the degree of PhD in Media and Communication Studies

Declaration

I, ... declare that the work
presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed: ....

Abstract

This thesis analyses screenwriting as an exemplary and idiosyncratic form of creative labour in the 'new cultural economy' and specifically, in the contemporary UK screen production industry. Using a critical sociological framework combined with a neo-Foucauldian understanding of work and subjectivity, a series of explicit analytical connections are made in this project, between *screenwriting*, *creative labour* and the *new cultural economy*. I contend that screenwriting, as a form of creative labour which in many ways eschews the term 'creative', is an instructive, timely case study precisely because it agitates traditional dichotomies - between creativity and craft, art and commerce, individual and collaborative work - in pedagogy and practice.

After tracing the dynamics of this form of creative work in theoretical, discursive and historical terms, I then analyse how screenwriting is constructed, taught and practiced as labour in three areas: 'How-to' screenwriting manuals, pedagogical locations for screenwriting in the UK and British screenwriters' working lives. At each site, I focus on how craft and creativity are defined and experienced, how individual and collective forms of work are enacted at different locations and what implications these shifting designations have. Screenwriting within the mainstream Hollywood and British film industries in the contemporary moment demands particular and complex forms of worker subjectivity in order to distinguish it from other forms of filmmaking and writing, and to make the work knowable and do-able. I follow the voices of screenwriters and those who teach and instruct about screenwriting across the fieldwork sites and analyse the ways in which they calculate, navigate and make sense of the screen production labour market in which they are immersed. The theatrical, mythic and practical navigations of screenwriters in pedagogy and practice that are the centre of this thesis offer an antidote to impoverished, economistic readings of creativity, craft and creative labour in contemporary worlds of work.

Table of Contents

Introduction - Screenwriting as Creative Labour: Pedagogies, Practices and Livelihoods in the New Cultural Economy

In the introduction to the published edition of the *Being John Malkovich* (1999) screenplay, Charlie Kaufman offers his advice to other budding screenwriters who admire his work and harbour dreams of producing a film script of similar originality and vision. Kaufman proceeds to scupper those aspirations by offering an existential riff on his authoritative position as conceiver of the film - as 'screenwriter'. He offers no cute anecdotes or practical advice but rather presents an almost parodic vision of the screenwriter as neurotic, isolated and tortured individual. He reworks some of the well-worn aphorisms which pepper 'How-to' screenwriting manuals to emphasise the assumed torment of his own writerly ego:

> If there's anything I can say about screenwriting in this introduction it's that you need to write what you know. And I don't know anything. I don't understand a damn second of my life. I exist in a fog of confusion and anxiety and clutching jealousy and loneliness.

Kaufman also enthusiastically punctures the familiar puffed-up myth of individual creative drive and the moment of 'inspiration':

> What can I tell you about the screenwriting process as I know it? Just maybe that you're alone in this. Take your inspiration where you find it. I don't even know what that means. Inspiration? What the hell is inspiration anyway? You just sit there and wait. That's all I do. I sit and wait. I don't even know for what. For it to get better? What is it? You tell me. You write an introduction and send it to me.

Here Kaufman offers a satirical and poignant insight into the figure of the screenwriter as creative worker. He eschews the mentor and advice-giver roles that a 'guru' such as influential screenwriting instructor Robert McKee[1] might embody and instead proceeds to expose his own belaboured ego, a conflicted individual uncomfortable in his position as 'introduction writer' to his own published screenplay. Kaufman is now one of the most well known screenwriters in the mainstream screen production industry - his screenplays are hailed as ground-breaking works which upend all the traditional conventions of the feature film medium. He is now a writer-director, able to command huge sums for his original scripts. Kaufman has also become renowned for his commentary on the 'tortured screenwriter' figure, particularly in his film *Adaptation* (2004), in which a screenwriter

---

1 McKee is an influential screenwriting instructor (often referred to as a 'guru') who was also featured in Kaufman's film *Adaptation* (2004).

called Charlie Kaufman struggles to adapt a non-fiction book into a screenplay. Here, the multi-stranded plot ranges between characters, locations and time periods, from dramatised scenes from and about the non-fiction book to scenes involving Charlie and his twin brother Donald (who is also a wannabe screenwriter[2]) discussing the merits of McKee's 'Story' seminar. The *Being John Malkovich* introduction also appears as part of a published screenplay, in keeping with the relatively new phenomenon whereby screenplays are now routinely circulated as literary works, as texts to be read much like a novel or play. Here the screenwriter is presented as auteur, as a key creative input who by dint of this position, has the right to offer an introduction (however anxious and parodic) to his original work.

Kaufman and his introduction is repurposed here (in a reflexive flourish I believe he would enjoy) for my own introductory ends, to illustrate the complex strands of argument and analysis that form this project, an intersectional case study of screenwriting as creative labour. Kaufman as exemplary, successful, tortured, egotistical, insecure, isolated 'screenwriter' and 'creative worker' is a centrifugal force, exemplifying all the anxious and contradictory logics of this form of work as practice and pedagogy within the new cultural economy. This thesis argues that screenwriting offers a far-reaching and insightful analytical prism for a contemporaneous examination of creativity and craft work and the ways in which these are discussed, taught and experienced in the screen production industries in the UK and the new cultural economy more generally.

Screenwriting is a form of work routinely characterised as riven by the unassailable dichotomy between craft and creativity and in professional discourse, pedagogical frameworks and popular discussions of screenwriting, craft and creativity are often placed in opposition and contradiction. This is heightened in relation to screenwriting which is often viewed as the *least* creative form of writing because of its unashamed rigidity of form, its unapologetic commercial obligations, its inherent collectivity which downplays and denies claims to individual creative authorship and its liminality in terms of claims to literary status. The craft aspects of the work are routinely separated out and privileged in many discursive forums such as screenwriting histories, screenwriting manuals and screenwriting courses and this sense of pragmatism and vocationalism purposefully distinguishes screenwriting from other forms of authorship.

---

2 The twin brother character is fictional but is listed as the official co-writer of the film, another 'wink wink' gesture to the audience.

This analysis of screenwriting as creative labour is necessary and timely because it offers a fresh conception of both screenwriting and creative labour at a time when dire pronouncements about the decline of screenwriting as a creative form are routinely expressed and are tied to the wider concerns of an industry based on extreme risks and rewards. Instability and uncertainty in the mainstream screen production industries are frequently connected to the development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their deployment as new tools in the production, distribution and reception of screen texts, the subsequent rifts between producers and workers in relation to new models of remuneration for screen products in new media worlds and the subsequent destabilisation of the 'final draft' screenplay form. Uncertainties and risks inherent within an industry in which 'nobody knows anything'[3] are simultaneously and problematically reduced by a persistent conservatism within the development and funding cultures of the mainstream USA and UK markets.

'Creativity' as a key node within the discourses of the new cultural economy is also a concept which I argue is diminished at this time; the term 'creative' is increasingly hollowed out in an era in which terms are seemingly hitched to it with abandon - creative industries, creative skills, creative training, creative workplaces, creative innovation. Creativity is now considered a fundamental individual right and obligation in an era of vociferous neo-liberalism, and creative pedagogies and practices are now deftly tied into creative industries policy initiatives that largely ignore the term 'labour' altogether.

Thus I make a series of explicit analytical connections in this project, between *screenwriting*, *creative labour* and the *new cultural economy*, in a set of theoretical and practical ways that have not been undertaken before. I contend that screenwriting, as a form of creative labour which eschews the term 'creative', is an instructive, original case study precisely because it problematises notions of creativity, craft and authorship in pedagogy and practice. Screenwriting has always been immersed within, and been part of, a capitalist-intensive system of creative production which has contributed to its problematic claims to artistic legitimacy. Screenwriting is not a new form of creative labour (unlike so many *new* creative roles within the *new* cultural economy) and has a long and particular history of pedagogy and practice. Screenwriting as creative labour has certainly changed over time and from industry to industry, and requires particular modes of labour, calculations and navigations across markets and locations. Finally, screenwriting within the

---

3 A key industrial aphorism from the screenwriter William Goldman (1983).

mainstream Hollywood and British film industries in the contemporary moment demands certain complex forms of worker subjectivity in order to distinguish it from other forms of filmmaking and writing, and to make the work knowable and do-able. It demands isolation and collaboration, industrial awareness and entrepreneurialism, over-confidence and insecurity, idiosyncrasy and theatricality. All these particularities signal the 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1996) I am producing here - knowledge which offers wider insights into the experiences of creative pedagogy and practice today and to the unique Kaufman-esque figure of the screenwriter as creative worker.

After tracing the dynamics of this form of creative work in theoretical terms in chapter one, I then trace the historical development of screenwriting as a coherent and intelligible form of labour within the Hollywood production system and I focus on how screenwriters have mythologised and self-theorised about their work. I show how a mythic figure (encompassing a number of diverse labouring identities) of the screenwriter as tortured, complicit, collaborative and confident has developed in the documented histories of Hollywood film production. In chapter three I discuss the methodology of this project and the particular methodological challenges and limitations I have faced as a researcher committed to Haraway's (1996) call for 'situated knowledges' in feminist-inflected, social science research.

I then analyse how screenwriting is constructed, taught and practiced as labour in three fieldwork areas in chapters four, five and six: 'How-to' screenwriting manuals; selected pedagogical practices for screenwriting in the UK; and British screenwriters' working lives as they describe and experience them. In each area, I focus on how craft and creativity are defined and experienced, how individual and collective forms of creativity and craft work are privileged at different moments and locations, and what implications these shifting designations have. I argue that screenwriters are exemplary and idiosyncratic creative workers and their talk, experiences and labour practices are at the heart of this project. I follow the voices of screenwriters and those who teach screenwriting across the fieldwork sites and analyse the ways in which they calculate, navigate and make sense of the screen production labour market in which they are immersed. For example, I discuss the ways in which contemporary screenwriters 'speak back' to the collective history of their work and, in this sense, acknowledge and take pride in this history as one of marginalisation and liminality. Screenwriters also use, voice and display (as in Kaufman's parodic introduction) supreme confidence and savviness in order to navigate their work-worlds. I will show that their horror stories are their currency as much as their credits are, that they employ theatrical techniques to navigate

collaborative development and that the collective history of their work also fuels this confidence and brashness. Screenwriters also 'speak forward' to their audiences (producers, moviegoers, teachers, students, financiers and so on) and thus juggle many forms of political and social talk in pursuit of secure and rewarding creative and craft work.

I would like to finish my own introductory narrative with a few words on the style of this project, a style I see as directly engaging with, and reflecting the epistemological, textual and practical concerns of this topic - the complexities and the limitations. Whilst I acknowledge many times the diverse modes of screenwriting as creative work that are often practiced simultaneously (in television, film, new media, advertising) as well the multiple kinds of writing that any one practitioner may undertake (screenwriting, playwriting, journalism, fiction, advertising copy, blog writing and so on), here I generally focus on feature film writing when examples of projects and experiences are used. I also acknowledge that my discussion of screenwriting as creative labour is limited to a conception of this labour as industrial, as mainstream, as concerned with the Los Angeles and London-based industries and I am well aware that I am thus perpetuating a Hollywood-centric and feature film-centric epistemology. There are good reasons for this however, both practical (which I discuss in more detail in chapter three) and philosophical. I am concerned here with how the conventions of screenwriting as creative and craft form have been developed over time, how the traditional myths of the screenwriter as worker have been established and maintained, how 'good' screenwriting pedagogy and practice have been institutionalised and perpetuated in 'How-to' manuals, in histories, in pedagogical frameworks, and in labouring discourse across these locations. Thus the particular trajectory of this thesis is appropriate and necessary - beginning with theoretical concerns, moving to analysis of Hollywood history, myth and 'How-to', and then finishing with analysis of mainstream London-based pedagogies, practices and livelihoods.

In textual terms, I also reflexively mirror the form(s) of writing I speak about within this project. Particularly in chapters five and six, but also visible via quotes I use to open each chapter, I employ the conventions of screenplay form - courier twelve-point font, dialogue-based vignettes of my own research process, expositional descriptions of research encounters, themes and scenes - in order to produce a new and original dialogue. This is a dialogue between my own forms of legitimising (and limiting) academic talk and the legitimising, limited talk that makes screenwriting recognisable and know-able to those who do the work and those who consume the work - through movie-going,

through screenwriting training and education, through amateur screenplay reading and analysis in the blogosphere, for example. Here I am actively staking a claim to my own situated knowledge, to my own 'narrative production'. I am also paying tribute to the mythic and the very real figure(s) of the screenwriter as creative worker which I have encountered in the course of this project. I come back to the figure of Charlie Kaufman then, a character I have used in this introduction and a figure to whom many other screenwriters aspire within their pedagogies and practices. Kaufman finishes his introduction in typically self-reflexive and darkly humorous fashion:

> Listen, I'm just an insignificant guy who wants to be significant. I want to be loved and admired. I want women to think I'm sexy. Even men. That'd be fine, too. I want everyone to think I'm brilliant. And I want them all to think I don't care about any of that stuff. There you go. Who I am. Now I'd better get down to the Kinko's in Glendale and e-mail this to Faber and Faber before I change my chickenshit mind.

> Charlie Kaufman
> Los Angeles, California

This mixture of confidence, brutal honesty, sincerity and downtrodden humour offers the ideal opener to my own narrative, an examination of screenwriting as creative labour, as pedagogy, practice and livelihood in the new cultural economy.

Chapter One - Theorising screenwriting as creative labour

> My favourite bit is the, is making something at the
> beginning, when you're carving something out of nothing
> and then ideas begin to come together and you find
> yourself sitting on the bus pulling out your notebook and
> constantly making another note on that project, you begin
> to get the sense that, out of everything you're working
> on, you're being drawn more and more to this and things
> begin to fall into place and then there are holes in it
> and those puzzles are solved…and that's exciting and fun
> and um, kind of, odd.

(Todd D. in conversation, 2009)

Here is a screenwriter who provides a more effervescent, upbeat insight into the labour of the screenwriter than was offered by Charlie Kaufman. Todd D. describes the excitement at the beginning of a project, the 'carving out' of ideas and characters, the problem-solving, the setting of scenes. This first chapter sets the theoretical scene for a labourist analysis of screenwriting and one which works to critically evaluate the marginal and highly particular status of screenwriting as a form of creative labour within film production systems and the new cultural economy. On the one hand, screenwriting offers an exemplary case study of creative work in post-modernised film production industries, work characterised by freelancing and multivalent working patterns, insecurity and hierarchisation. It is a form of idiosyncratic creative labour in the 'new cultural economy' precisely because it is unapologetically market-oriented and is thus easily able to elide traditional polarities - between craft/creativity, art/commerce, individual/collective. Consequently, I will argue that this form of creative labour more effortlessly conflates these same contradictions and polarities that produce anxiety in all forms of creative work.

Screenwriting is a form of work routinely characterised as riven by the unassailable dichotomy between creativity and craft, and in professional discourse, pedagogical frameworks and popular discussions of screenwriting, creativity and craft are often seen in sequence or, more forcefully, in contradiction. The craft aspects of the work are routinely separated out and privileged in many discursive forums such as screenwriting histories, screenwriting manuals and screenwriting courses and this sense of pragmatism and vocationalism distinguishes screenwriting from other forms of authorship. I theorise screenwriting here as a form of creative pedagogy and practice which is

highly particular and idiosyncratic - borne from a long and conflicted history of dramatic writing and writing for the screen, borne from the overwhelming dominance of Hollywood-oriented modes of storytelling but also determined by local industrial dynamics, and borne from the particularly contested forms of craft and creativity which screenwriters practice.

Firstly, I will outline the theoretical framework in which I contend that 'creative labour' can best be critically examined. Developments and changes in the organisation of production and the rise of supposedly new forms of work and working experiences in late capitalism have been analysed using a number of paradigms. These range from what I would term 'liberal-democratic' theories of the information society (following Banks, 2007 and Brophy, 2008) to post-Fordist readings of changes in production organisation. Autonomist-Marxist perspectives have also been deployed to emphasise the hegemonic influence of 'immaterial labour' in post-Fordist economies and more critical sociological accounts have outlined the features of creative labour in now 'fiercely neo-liberal' societies (McRobbie, 2002b, 518). All have been employed in order to understand how the experiences of work have changed in recent decades and particularly, how the work of artists and 'creatives' is now constituted and experienced within the postmodernised cultural industries. Notions of work, subjectivity and agency (as articulated by Du Gay, 1996 and Rose, 1999 for example) will be linked into the conceptions of immaterial labour and will lead into a broader examination of the development of creative industries policy in the UK. This section will be rounded out with a critical discussion of empirical work on creative labour markets and creative workers in the UK and USA.

1. Labouring in late capitalism

1.1. The 'postmodernisation' of production

Shifts in production organisation since the 1970s and the rise of new working subjectivities have been analysed in numerous and variegated ways. There is a vast array of accounts of these changes which are largely within a 'liberal-democratic' paradigm that celebrates them as progressive and humanitarian in the benefits they offer 'post-modern' workers (for example see Aglietta, 1979; Bell, 1973; Lash and Urry, 1987; Piore and Sabel, 1984). This paradigm can, in some respects, also be seen at work in autonomist Marxist accounts (see Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Virno, 2004, Lazzarato, 1996) of these changes in production, which focus on the nature of work in 'informational' societies. As Webster (2002) outlines, most theories of the 'information society' and the shifts to postmodernised production systems focus on a number of quantitative changes that, it is argued, have led to a qualitatively new society. Lash and Urry (1987) argue that these changes can be understood using a periodisation which moves from nineteenth century liberal capitalism to twentieth century 'organised' capitalism (organised primarily on a national scale as opposed to a local or regional level in the nineteenth century) and then to late twentieth and twenty-first century 'disorganised' capitalism which is more fragmented, flexible and global in scope. On the one hand, technological developments since the 1970s and the rise in the pervasive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been a starting point for analysis. For others, economic changes, particularly the measured increase in the economic worth of 'informational activities' are paramount. Occupational changes are also foregrounded - from a preponderance of workers in primary and secondary occupational sectors to the rise in service sector (tertiary) and now 'information-processing' or 'symbol-manipulation' (quarternary sector) jobs (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 292). Bell's (1973) study of the shift from industrial to post-industrial society was one of the first wide-ranging studies which used quantitative data of occupational changes in advanced industrial economies to argue for a qualitative shift in the character of society and the centrality of theoretical knowledge and information in this shift. Bell's term 'post-industrial' society has become synonymous with the phrase 'information society' which is now used with regularity, although Webster (2002) points out this amorphous term is often ill-defined and over-used.

Post-Fordist writers have produced parallel accounts of changes in various production sectors (from car manufacturing to film production) that emphasise shifts from mass production to small-batch

production. The theorists of the Regulation School[1] (Aglietta, 1979, and Lipietz, 1987 for example) concentrate on 'regimes of capitalist accumulation' and examine these in relation to concomitant modes of regulation, arguing for a shift from a Fordist regime of accumulation to a post-Fordist system which is characterised by the flexibility of production and consumption and a corresponding 'flexibility of employees' as Webster (2002, 79) puts it. An alternative conception of the breakdown of Fordism by Piore and Sabel (1984) argues for 'flexible specialisation' as the most accurate descriptor of production organisation after-Fordism. Their work on the 'second industrial divide' emphasises a more decisive break between Fordism and what comes after it and highlights the centrality of information and communication technologies and information itself to new flexible production systems. Castells (1996-1998) focuses on the concept of 'informational capitalism' and a new 'informational mode of development' – emphasising both continuity in terms of capitalist economic relations while also arguing for the new centrality of informationalism, that is "…the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity" (1996, 17). Castells also argues that changes in production organisation can be understood using the concept of networks - 'the network society' is his description of the global system of production which is coordinated on a global scale and in real-time, using advanced ICTs. Castells uses the figure of the informational labourer as the new worker within this system and this figure is deemed to now stand in the place of the earlier industrial worker. Castells writes:

> knowledge and information are the essential materials of the new production process and education is the key quality of labour [so] the new producers of informational capitalism are those knowledge generators and information processors whose contribution is most valuable…to the economy (1997, 345).

Castells is a pioneer within a particular intellectual tradition concerned with spatial models ('the space of flows') of changes in production organisation. Many of these writers are broadly Marxist in orientation, concerned about changes in the organisation of work under new forms of capitalist intensive development and certainly not a unified chorus of celebration of the benign benefits of dispersed or flexibilised forms of work. Writers such as Castells offer prescient, empirically-grounded accounts of these changes and entirely new models of analysis - from Piore and Sabel's 'flexible specialisation' to Castells' 'space of flows'. A philosophical approach to this subject comes from the neo-Marxist Autonomia movement in which there are parallel lines of argument in relation to the increasing centrality of knowledge and information in workplaces and working-lives.

---

[1] Note that the Regulation School is arguably more strongly 'leftist' than the term 'liberal democratic' would suggest.

1.2. Autonomist Marxism and Immaterial Labour

The new forms and characteristics of labour in informational production systems can also be theorised using the concept of 'immaterial labour' and this has been undertaken by Italian neo-Marxist writers such as Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), Virno (2004) and Lazzarato (1996). This concept provides a historically situated picture of the changes in both production organisation, labour relations and the experiences of work within postmodern societies (based within Italian autonomist worker movements of the 1960s) while also making some philosophical connections to the myriad issues – of power, subjectivity and agency - which open up the discussion of the postmodernisation of production to a less materialist, more nuanced and insightful approach than many of the quantitative accounts allow for.

Immaterial labour is defined as "the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato, 1996, 133). This definition covers two aspects of this production process; firstly, Lazzarato refers to the 'informational content' of a commodity and writes that immaterial labour can be used to explain the changes that have occurred in workers' labour processes, in which computer operation skills and 'horizontal and vertical communication' are now integral to work in secondary and tertiary production sectors. Secondly, Lazzarato refers to the 'cultural content' of the commodity, that is, immaterial labour can refer to labour activities not often considered to be 'work' – as Lazzarato puts it, "the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion" (Ibid., 133). Hardt and Negri outline a similar distinction between firstly, intellectual or linguistic immaterial labour (embodied in tasks such as problem-solving) and 'affective labour', labour that "produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion" (2004, 108).[2] For Hardt and Negri, many jobs combine these two forms and are also always both material and immaterial, involving both bodies and brains. However, they argue that immaterial labour "has become hegemonic in qualitative terms and has imposed a tendency on other forms of labour and society itself" (109).

The rise in the centrality of immaterial labour is tied up with changes in production and work since the 1970s and modern management techniques which Lazzarato (1996) argues, have increasingly

---

[2] This concept is also referred to as 'emotional work' by Hochschild (1983).

sought to co-opt the soul of the worker – to make the worker's personality and subjectivity "susceptible to organisation and control" (134) thus meaning that within advanced capitalism, "command resides within the subject him- or herself, and within the communicative process" (135). Virno (2004) uses the notion of 'virtuosity' and draws from Marx's writings on intellectual labour to describe this new form of 'immaterial labour' as a form of wage labour which is not productive labour. He argues that virtuosity and cooperation are central in post-Fordism. Hardt and Negri also argue for a conception of 'biopolitical production', that is, production bound up not simply in economic phenomena but involving "all aspects of social life, including communication, knowledge and affects" (2004, 101). Virno describes this 'generic human faculty' that is central to the multitude of the post-Fordist era as the 'general intellect': "The general intellect manifests itself today, above all, as the communication, abstraction, self-reflection, of living subjects" and also notes that the intellect is "...a perpetuation of wage labour, as a hierarchical system, as a pillar of the production of surplus-value (1994, 65).

Lazzarato (1996) specifies audiovisual production as a 'classic' form of immaterial production, arguing that such an industry is constituted by the combination of different types of work skill (intellectual skills, manual skills and entrepreneurial skills) and is characterised by collective 'networks and flows'. Virno (1994) provides a similar analysis of the 'culture industry', arguing that it "plays the role of industry of the means of production" (61). Lazzarato's general description of the location(s) of immaterial production (or in his words, 'the basin of immaterial labour') has immediate resonance with descriptions of the Hollywood production agglomeration and post-Fordist screen production practices which A.J. Scott (2005) and others have illustrated (and which are outlined in chapter two). Lazzarato writes:

> Small and sometimes very small 'productive units' (often consisting of only one individual) are organised for specific ad hoc projects, and may exist only for the duration of those particular jobs. The cycle of production comes into operation only when it is required by the capitalist; once the job is done, the cycle dissolves back into the networks and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities (1996, 137).

Hardt and Negri echo this illustration, arguing that the hegemony of immaterial labour has transformed Fordist production organisation to "the innumerable and indeterminate relationships of distributed networks" (2004, 113). These networks combine both technical systems of production

and the 'biopolitical labour' of working subjects, producing both material goods (such as screen products) but "also relationships and ultimately social life itself" (Ibid., 109).

Autonomist Marxism also stresses the radical possibilities opened up by the new hegemony of immaterial labour. Lazzarato emphasises that immaterial labour can highlight "the radical autonomy of its productive synergies" (1996, 145) and that 'antagonisms and contradictions' abound in the processes of immaterial production. Dyer-Witheford (2004, np.) echoes this in his analysis of autonomous Marxism, noting that "Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is the active subject of production, the well-spring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital must draw." Brian Holmes is even more optimistic in his definition of immaterial labour and its radical potential, stating in an interview:

> the basic notion of immaterial labour is that the manipulation of information, but also the interplay of affects, have become more central in the contemporary working process even in the factories, but much more so in the many forms of language-, image- and ambience-production. Workers can no longer be treated like Taylorist gorillas, exploited for their purely physical force; the 'spirit of the worker' has come down onto the factory floor, and from there it can gain further autonomy by escaping into the flexible work situations developing in the urban territory (Van Osten, 2004, np.)

Here the flexible working conditions of post-Fordism offer utopian possibilities for freedom of head and hand in the factory and outside it. Overall, Autonomist Marxism enables a highly sophisticated philosophical account of the 'double face' of immaterial labour within Empire – its potential for total, unmediated control over labouring bodies and brains as well as its social, emancipatory possibilities. An incorporation of the concept of immaterial labour into broader analyses of the postmodernisation of production is an important step in conceiving of the conditions by which labouring now is understood and experienced in 'late capitalism' and the 'new cultural economy' however it is limited in its theoretical utility and practical application. This leads to a wider set of critiques which point to the weaknesses of broadly 'liberal-democratic' theories of the 'information society' and the immaterial labour which these authors argue is ubiquitous within it.

1.3. Critiquing 'liberal-democratic' and Autonomist Marxist theories of the 'information society'

In general, sociologists have produced a number of prescient and wide-reaching accounts of the changes outlined above. There have been particular issues which have divided these accounts however. Theorists have disagreed over the extent to which the documented changes can be claimed to illustrate a fundamental break with earlier forms of production organisation. Writers such as Bell (1973) and Piore and Sabel (1984) have argued for a strong break (between Fordism and flexible specialisation for example) and this is in keeping with more populist writers in this vein such as Toffler (1980). This position has served as a key plank for criticism of such pronouncements. Pollert writes that these arguments define:

> the agenda of debate, assumes a radical break with the past, conflates and
> obscures complex and contradictory processes within the organisation of work,
> and by asserting a sea-change of management strategy and employment structure,
> fuses description, prediction and prescription towards a self-fulfilling prophecy
> (1988, 42-43).

Dyer-Witheford (2004) uses Webster and Robins (1981) to illustrate the confluence of some of these arguments for the revolution of the information society with the neo-liberalism of the 1980s: "it was swiftly articulated with an ascendant neo-liberalism for which notions of informational revolution provided a handy way to 'annex the language of social change from socialism' (Webster and Robins, 1981, 250)".

The conceptual problems with broadly 'liberal-democratic' theories of changes in production organisation and more specific theories of immaterial labour[3] are their tendencies (both subtle and overt) to celebrate the 'freedom' and 'autonomy' which post-Fordism, flexible specialisation and other incantations of the 'information society' promise, thus masking or downplaying issues of increased exploitation, precariousness, marginalisation and discrimination which new forms of immaterial work have also made visible.[4] Whilst they have varying philosophical agendas, they also

---

[3] As already noted, autonomist Marxists do question the adverse effects of postmodernisation and post-Fordism for immaterial labourers as well as the radical potentialities but, because of their philosophical agenda, are not concerned with evidentiary empiricism. See Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) for a full critique along these lines.

[4] For example, de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2005) have emphasised the consequences of the now stark divisions of labour within post-modern or post-Fordist production systems – that separate out high-tech research and development (R&D) workers in Silicon Valley from young women in developing nations who assemble microchips for example. Documented tensions and stratifications within post-Fordist workforces often reinforce traditional stratifications along gender, ethnic and socio-economic lines, issues which proponents of post-industrial or information societies and workers often neglect entirely.

tend to make sweeping claims about changes to the nature of work and society whilst neglecting the continuities also visible between industrial and informational capitalism. In fact, such theories also raise further issues, by using easily co-optable terminology such as 'immaterial labour' or 'symbol-manipulation' to potentially hierarchise labour in new and problematic ways, between skilled/creative and unskilled/non-creative jobs for example. These paradigms - whilst providing important tools for understanding the disparate changes precipitated by declining manufacturing industries, rising employment in new types of 'knowledge' work, and the pervasive influence of information technology - offer a philosophically rich but only partial theoretical framework for understanding changes in labouring practices in late capitalism.

This case study is of a different intellectual order - an inter-sectional and theoretically informed project which aims to illustrate how a particular form of creative work (or 'immaterial labour' or 'symbol-manipulation'), screenwriting, is constructed in discourse and practice, is shaped by *both* historical and contemporary production dynamics and is thus, experienced and lived as creative labour in the 'new cultural economy'.

The theoretical paradigms I have outlined offer only preliminary steps in illuminating the nature of creative labour generally or screenwriting labour specifically – these 'traditional' theoretical trajectories from Fordism to post-Fordism for example, cannot be satisfactorily applied to the growth of the 'creative economy' and the screenwriting work which functions within it. As Pang writes in her critique of Lazzarato's use of the concept of immaterial labour, "creative labour does not embody the disappearance of boundaries between manual and intellectual labour, but is a unique function that demonstrates the intensification of the contradictions between the two logics" (2009, 56).

Pang raises a fruitful set of questions around definitions of work itself in the 'new economy' in which manufacturing jobs are undoubtedly in decline – questions around the 'boundaries' that have been set up in organisational theory and the inherent assumptions often animated around creative/skilled/intellectual versus uncreative/unskilled/manual work. These questions will be specified and critiqued in relation to screenwriting labour below. Firstly however, theoretical tools drawn from scholarship around work and subjectivity are addressed, providing insights which begin to move us beyond the rigidities set up and critiqued in the previous sections.

1.4. Theories of work and subjectivity

As was outlined in relation to post-Fordism, particular proponents of the postmodernisation of production emphasise new possibilities for flexible, autonomous work within advanced capitalist networks. Lash and Urry discuss reflexivity at work in postmodern production practices and write that there is "a radical enhancement in late modernity of individualisation" (1994, 4) and "a developing process of reflexive accumulation in economic life" (5). This is a trend which has been articulated by other theorists such as Bauman (2001) who discusses present-day 'uncertainties' within liquefied modernity as powerful 'individualising' forces and Beck who outlines a theory of reflexive modernisation within a 'risk society' which is characterised by both continuities and ruptures in social development (1992, 149). As McRobbie puts it, the concept of reflexivity is deployed as "a traditional notion of the unified subject increasingly able – indeed called upon – to undertake self-monitoring activities" (2002b, 522). Individualisation viewed through a critical sociological lens is not concerned with individuals per se, as McRobbie argues, but is about "new, more fluid, less permanent social relations seemingly marked by choice and options" (517).

Banks (2007) distinguishes the crude, 'alienated worker' subject of critical theory with the 'active-but-governed subject' of a neo-Foucauldian approach which illuminates the 'subjectivising discourses of enterprise' which have been deployed within cultural policy and cultural work. Du Gay (1996) analyses changes in identity and governmentality at work using a Foucauldian framework and discusses the emergence of the 'enterprising self' within the context of neo-liberal 'enterprise culture' in Britain in the 1980s. For Du Gay, shifts from 'formality' to 'flexibility' in the workings of a firm have signalled parallel changes in the framing of work itself – work is now framed as self-fulfilment:

> the worker is made 'subject in that the worker is both 'subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault, 1982: 212) (Du Gay, 1996, 63).

Theories of individualisation in the 'new economy' (and related discussions such as those around the performativity of self and identity-making in work and the aestheticisation of work, see Featherstone, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994 for example) have not been blithely taken up however. Adkins and Lury offer an important critique which flags up the universalising tendencies of these theories, arguing that techniques of 'self identity' within workplaces "are in part constitutive of the

individualised, self-possessing workers with performable identities currently required for accumulation" (1999, 611) and are often highly gendered, thus men are "far better placed to fulfil the requirements of economic subjecthood in the new capitalism identified by Lash and Urry" (Ibid., 612)[5]

Rose elaborates on the links between personhood and freedom which can be applied to working identities, describing:

> a regime of the self where competent personhood is thought to depend upon the continual exercise of freedom, and where one is encouraged to understand one's life, actually or potentially, not in terms of fate or social status, but in terms of one's success or failure acquiring the skills and making the choices to actualise oneself (1999, 87).

In fact, Rose argues that work is now just as much psychological as it is economic which again fits with the affective understanding of immaterial labour which Virno, Lazzarato and others have articulated.[6] Rose notes that we are 'people at work' and that the activity of labour is transformed "into a matter of self-actualisation, in which cash return is less important than the identity conferred on the employee." (1999, 91) The 'enterprising self' evoked by Du Gay (1996) and elaborated by Rose (1999) can be viewed in the context of the Hollywood production system, a system in which 'above-the-line' creative workers such as screenwriters must 'calculate' about themselves (calculate their own career trajectories, project portfolios, credits, links to agents and so on) and 'work upon themselves' (researching and developing their craft and skills and maintaining their 'profiles' within the industry through manual-reading, networking and the navigation of development meetings for example) (Du Gay 1996, 60 quoting Rose, 1989, 7-8).

A particularly illuminating account of the particularities of industrial reflexivity within screen production systems comes from Caldwell's (2008) extensive research into film and television workers in Los Angeles and their "forms of local cultural negotiation and expression." (2) For him this involves an analysis of production culture that pays close attention to both macro-economic processes and micro-social levels of daily working lives. The industrial backdrop for the localised

---

[5] Adkins is one of the few theorists who have perceptively challenged a number of the underlying assumptions of theories of the 'new economy', discussing how the relations between labour and personhood may have changed (relating this to gender in particular) and also suggesting that temporality needs more attention within theorisations of creative labour and economy. See Adkins (2005).

[6] Note that McGuigan (2009, 145) argues that Rose's governmentality school is useful but 'politically ambiguous' in contrast to the hard Marxist orientation of the Autonomists.

careers and experiences of film workers is crucial; the corporate goals of film and television producers are constantly aligned with those of the workers themselves which then affects how those working experiences are felt and articulated:

> reflexivity operates as a creative process involving human agency and critical competence at the local cultural level as much as a discursive process establishing power at the broader social level. This mutual alignment may give film and television entertainment much of its resilience, since the alliance synthesises the gratifications of human creative resistance with the excessive profitability of new forms of conglomeration (Caldwell, 2008, 33).

Caldwell also links the industrial reflexivity of film workers to the changes in work organisation outlined above, noting that a more volatile industry and labour market serves producers, who orient and naturalise the 'enterprising selves' within their workforce to insecure industrial conditions:

> Institutional reflexivity allows studios and corporations to quickly adapt to changing economic and technical conditions. But it also benefits from a churning workforce by accommodating the personal anxieties, volatilities, and impermanence of the migratory labourers that work in these jobs. With little permanence or job security, and with none of the regimentation of production proper, workers tell stories that affirm constant interpersonal flexibility, quid pro quo networking, and mutual exploitation as vocational skill-set (Caldwell, 2008, 59).

Thus it is important, in analyses of this new breed of 'creative' or 'immaterial' workers, to be attuned to the technologies of the self (to use Foucault's term), to the pedagogies and practices which are marshalled in order to put creative labour power to work in particular creative industries or sectors. This is backed up by Grieveson who argues that governmentality itself needs to be placed more firmly within the film studies of the twenty first century, writing that the production of culture "...becomes, in myriad ways, central to the concretisation of technologies of the self in concert with liberal democratic rationality" (2009, 6). Grieveson, in discussing this process of 'concretisation' is arguably talking as much about processes of cultural consumption as about

cultural production but his call to engage with 'governmental rationalities' is one I specifically answer in this analysis of screenwriting labour.[7]

Thus, a close examination of the pedagogies and practices constructed, employed and encouraged within screenwriting labour markets and the daily lives of screenwriters is central to my epistemological approach – one which mitigates against a simplified sociological or political economic account of screenwriting labour and seeks to foreground the 'missing subject' which Blair (2003) identifies (in the labour process theory of Braverman, 1973, for example) in order to illuminate the very particular creative subjects activated and put to work within screenwriting labour markets.

1.5. Theorising 'creative labour'

The theories outlined above have been mobilised to examine the particular changes that are visible within creative occupations and the production of cultural goods. Certain cultural industries such as the Hollywood production system have been analysed as exhibiting a post-Fordist model in its changing organisation (from mass production to independent and contracted forms of filmmaking, see Christopherson & Storper, 1986, 1989; Storper, 1989, 1993) and the term 'immaterial labour' has been utilised in relation to creative occupations within new media production (such as game developers, see De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2005). Celebratory accounts of a new 'creative class' (for example Leadbeater, 1999; Landry, 2000; Florida, 2004) have argued that the freelancers and independent creative workers more visible within the economic growth patterns of cities and nations are the vanguard of the workforce in 'post-industrial' societies, embodying the traits – entrepreneurialism, networked, multivalent, flexible - most valued in advanced, neo-liberal economies. These celebratory accounts have in turn been taken up by governments keen to invest in their 'creative industries' and 'knowledge economies' and hoping to reap both economic and

---

[7] Issues of workers' subjectivity and agency tie closely to 'cheer-leading' accounts (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell and Yang, 2005, 115) of autonomy in work which have been picked up by neo-liberal governments since the 1980s and have been used to promote entrepreneurialism within national creative industries and economies. Writers such as Du Gay and Pryke (2002) and McRobbie (2004) have contextualised their analyses by discussing the 'cultural turn' and specific influential policy-making environments such as New Labour's in the UK which have turned on concepts such as 'creativity' and 'innovation'. Populist writers (Reich, 1991; Drucker, 1993; Leadbeater, 1999; Landry, 2000; Florida, 2004;) have seized upon the possibilities of new creative and 'talent-led' economies and have aligned with neo-liberal values in the promotion of such economies and their potentialities. The buzz-words these writers have popularised (from workers as 'symbol-handlers' to 'creative cities' and 'creative classes') also tie in to initiatives by national governments to build 'knowledge economies' in the wake of declining manufacturing sectors and/or other primary and secondary sector occupations as I have already discussed.

cultural rewards. Garnham (2005, 20) argues that the shift from 'cultural industries' to 'creative industries' terminology in UK policy-making is inseparable from the discourse of the 'information society' "and that set of economic analyses and policy arguments to which that term now refers."

Most recently, Oakley (2009) has argued that the terminology has noticeably shifted within creative industries policy-making in the UK in the last decade.[8] Notions of 'creativity' have been increasingly but partially decoupled from notions of 'culture' and 'innovation' has become the newest buzz-word, a trend which is now promoting a 'thin notion of cultural value' and has conflated innovation with a bland conception of 'novelty'. Banks and Hesmondhalgh have more vociferously critiqued the ways in which labour itself has been almost entirely obfuscated within creative industries policy and concurrently, how this policy agenda has become "...increasingly linked to educational and employment policy, but under the sign of economics rather than social reform or cultural equity" (2009, 428).[9] These authors argue that the creative industries policy environment in the UK in 2009 looks 'increasingly bleak'. Contemporary discussions and analyses of creative labour in the UK are indeed developing at a particularly interesting and rich intersection of a number of theoretical and policy-directed paradigms.

Critical sociological accounts of creative labour (Blair, 2001, 2003; Gill, 2002, 2007; McRobbie, 1998, 2002a, 2002b; 2004; Ross, 2004; Ryan, 1991; Ursell, 2000) provide an incisive basis for analysis which, when combined with a Foucauldian understanding of work and subjectivity, mitigates against simplistic accounts of brutalised and exploited workers. As Hesmondhalgh writes in his assessment of theories of creative labour as they have developed in recent years, the work of McRobbie and Ross provide the most promising openings because, "they join theoretical sophistication with empirical sociological analysis of the specific discourses of creativity and self-realisation in particular industries" (2007, 67).

The most penetrating accounts of creative labour to date have illuminated trends in late capitalist workplaces (towards increased individualisation, self-reflexivity and uncertainty; see also Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992, Du Gay, 1996; Sennett, 1998) whilst also offering prescient critiques of neo-liberal working cultures and claims to increased freedom and creativity in work. What these

---

[8] Garnham (2005, 27) earlier argued that in the shift from 'cultural' to 'creative industries' terminology in UK arts and media policy-making, a number of related terms were central: 'access', 'excellence', 'education' and 'economic value'.

[9] Banks and Hesmondhalgh identify an 'educational turn' in the UK government's Creative Economy Program (CEP) which promotes employer-led and individual skills discourses and policies and represents "an instrumentalist reduction of knowledge and creativity to national economic assets" (428). I will address and analyse educational policy and pedagogy in relation to screenwriting work more fully in chapter five.

accounts do not neglect, unlike labour process theory and some sociological accounts, is the *self in work*. A neo-Foucauldian perspective focuses on the 'technologies of the self' or 'self-steering mechanisms' (Foucault, 1988) that creative workers embody and employ in order to conduct themselves in their work. Buzz-words such as 'freedom' and 'flexibility' within creative labour practices are "new languages and techniques to bind the worker into the productive life of society" (Rose, 1990, 60) and are also embodied and enacted by workers themselves. I argue that the work of screenwriters not only exemplifies creative labour as it has been theorised by critical sociologists in the new cultural economy but also enables an analysis of a unique and idiosyncratic set of professional self-actualising practices, technologies of the self and processes of navigation and calculation within a specific creative industry that often eschews the term 'creative' in practice and labour - mainstream, industrial filmmaking.

1.6.Problematising the term 'creative'

I would like to pause here for a moment to further problematise the use of the term 'creative' as it is deployed generally, and in relation to the creative industries or to creative labour theory specifically. I have already signalled that an essential problematic is inherent in the use of terms such as 'immaterial' or, more specifically, 'creative', to distinguish certain forms of work from others in this theoretical context. Creative labour theory in its least innovative forms is at risk of seeming complicit with neo-liberal, creative industries discourses which champion autonomous, flexible, innovative, entrepreneurial and individual working practices and discourses which paradoxically downgrade craft-based work as creativity's opposite: un- or semi-skilled, collective, rigid, rote, and uninspired. Simply using the phrase 'creative labour' and singling out screenwriters as creative workers as I do here, signals some form of complicity with these political tendencies and raises a series of important ontological questions: What is creativity? By designating a whole swathe of disparate occupations as 'creative', does this necessarily create a corresponding 'uncreative' category and how on earth are such designations philosophically or practically made? Is 'everyone creative' as one early creative industries policy document stated? (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001). Negus and Pickering discuss the origins of the organicist form of the term 'creativity', noting that:

> It distinguishes the artist as someone who's 'inner' voice emerges from self-exploration, and whose expressive power derives from imaginative depth. Artistic creativity has become synonymous with this sense of exploration and expressive power. As a form of radical subjectivism, it neglects other modes of creativity,

such as the creativity sparked by dialogue and collaboration, or the creativity in popular cultural traditions (2004, 4)

The authors explicitly tie the organicist definition of creativity long dominant within Western, romantic thought to the concept of the individual and to corresponding terms which, as I noted above, have been politically mobilised within neo-liberalism and the 'new cultural economy' in the last decade, terms such as imagination, innovation and originality.[10] For Banks and Hesmondhalgh, it is still reasonable to broadly define 'creative', 'cultural' or 'artistic' labour as labour organised under approximated 'craft' conditions:

> This implies a cooperative model of capitalist production inherited from pre-modern guilds where workers were allocated their role in discrete labour hierarchies, based on traditional, small-scale and skilled handicraft production (Hauser, 1999). It is widely observed that creative or artistic production has largely retained this craft basis since it is the most appropriate means through which demonstrably new, original or creative commodities can be generated (2009, 416).

For Banks and Hesmondhalgh, the romantic discourses of the production of art ensured that 'artistic-creative' labour was and continues to be 'concrete and named', authentic and unable to be subsumed within mass, assembly-line type production processes. Thus they define 'creative labour' as that work which: "is geared to the production of original or distinctive commodities that are primarily aesthetic and/or symbolic-expressive, rather than utilitarian and functional (Hirsch, 1972)" (2009, 416).

Importantly, the term 'craft' is integrated here, which is more often than not separated out from notions of creativity in screenwriting work in order to distinguish it from other, more arguably high-minded, artistic and literary forms of writing. Sennett (2008) has recently contributed to a pragmatic reorientation of theories of craftsmanship, which he associates with 'good work' or a sense of a job well done. For Sennett, a trained skill contrasts with a 'coup de foudre' or the divine inspiration associated with creativity per se, that training and repetition in craft-work leads to the "bedding in" of tacit knowledge which can then inform processes of creation (2008, 37). Sennett also argues that craftsmanship is much more widely practiced than artistry and that there is no art without craft; for him, the two impulses can not be separated out. He goes on to write:

---

[10] Raymond Williams is also an important reference point in this tradition. His rich discussion of the 'creative mind' in *The Long Revolution* (1961) offers much more detail on the philosophical developments in the conception of creativity, from Plato onwards.

art seems to draw attention to work that is unique or at least distinctive, whereas craft names a more anonymous, collective, and continued practice. But we should be suspicious of this contrast. Originality is also a social label, and originals form peculiar bonds with other people (2008, p. 66).

What I would like to take from these few points on the definitional dynamics of 'creativity' and 'craft' is that these two terms are in much closer alignment than is often expressed in much creative labour theory. As Banks and Hesmondhalgh and Sennett make clear (although in passing) creativity and craft are intertwined. Creative production is ideally organised under communal, craft conditions and forms of craft are integral to the ways that cultural goods such as screenplays and films are produced. Creativity here, is not privileged as individual, imaginative and mysterious; it is as much a collective and collaborative set of production dynamics that fuel originality and innovation in any realm of cultural production.[11] And as I have already stated, screenwriting is often viewed as the *least* creative form of writing because of its unashamed rigidity of form, its unapologetic commercial obligations, its inherent collectivity which downplays and denies claims to individual creative authorship and its liminality in terms of claims to literary status.

Crucially at this stage of my theorisation is Negus and Pickering's lingering point that 'creativity' as it is widely used, cleaves very closely to notions of individual genius, imagination and innovation, which suggests an implicit and contradictory process of separating out (individual, inspired) creativity from (routine, collective) craft. It is this double movement - the separating out of craft/ creativity or individual/collective in theory and discourse and the conflation of these polarities under the banner of the 'new cultural economy' - which is central to my elucidation of screenwriting as exemplary yet particular creative work.

1.7. Empirical investigations of creative work

Empirical investigations of creative work in new cultural economies have materialised the practices and experiences of work in sectors such as television, film and new media production and fashion design. To varying degrees however, the studies have been scattered and mark just the beginnings of this area of inquiry. The studies conducted by McRobbie (1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004), Ursell (2000), Gill (2002, 2007) Blair (2001, 2003), Ross (2004) and De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2005)

_____

[11] A point which is the focus of the sociology of Becker and his 'art worlds' (Becker, 1982).

provide rich accounts of creative work in the 'new economy' and draw on the theoretical frameworks outlined above in various ways.

However, they also have limitations. Whilst these studies have established a vocabulary for understanding creative labour, it is a vocabulary which has quickly become ubiquitous and is thus often assumed rather than challenged in relation to particularised forms of work in the new cultural economy. McRobbie's studies in the mid-90s laid much of the groundwork in establishing the 'features' of creative work which are now spooled out routinely in subsequent manuscripts but this has served to solidify and routinise these terms to an extent (from 'flexible' to 'portfolio' to 'multivalent'). From this point (and much of McRobbie's work is now dated), the theory has remained surprisingly inert. The terms have atrophied around the amorphous and now potentially complicit notion of 'creative labour' and the challenging and complexifying work - the employing of empiricism to extend, renew and challenge the vocabulary within particular working contexts - has been pursued in isolated and modest ways.

Additionally, what is often highlighted within creative labour research (and particularly more recent studies that have sought to discuss subjectivity in work such as Ursell and dePeuter & Dyer-Witheford for example) is the pleasure/pain or seductive/destructive duality of creative work, as if this work has a particular claim to this double-edged sword. I'd like to follow on from my earlier critique of 'liberal-democratic' theories of the information society here. As I have already suggested, the use of this duality in both contexts often acts as a privileging mechanism (whether intended or not), offering up creative or immaterial labour as deeply and inherently *more* satisfying and pleasurable as well as more troubling and anguishing than dirty, rote, unskilled craft- or manufacturing-based work which could never possibly provide such polarities or depths of experience. In doing so, creative labour research can generate and/or renew social hierarchies in relation to postmodern forms of work. Standard creative labour terminology, which assumes rather than interrogates a term such as 'creative', with its pleasurable, fulfilling, artistic and hallowed assumptions, has shades of this.

Creative labour theorists have also, to some extent, fallen prey to what could be termed the 'self-mythologising'[12] of cultural workers themselves and to the cheerleading accounts of 'creativity' from governments and the populist gurus mentioned above. I strongly guard against a 'falling back' onto the pleasure/pain dichotomy within labour analysis as a justification in itself for researching screenwriting work – this seems to me a short-cut to profundity, a denial of complexity in work and the creation of working subjects. More than this, a wider critique of cultural studies and critical sociology needs to be addressed here in that, arguably, this field and the scholars within it have followed a research agenda which generally plucks out a particular (and often quite niche) 'creative' occupation and studies it as such. This also connects to a broader and oft-invoked criticism of creative labour theory within the social sciences, as discussed above, that argues that academic definitions of 'creativity' and 'creative jobs' invoke another set of rigid boundaries, distinguishing particular jobs as 'creative' and casting others into the same old 'semi-skilled', 'manual' categories which are inherently unworthy of scholarly attention.

This critique is laid out by Mato (2009) who argues that 'all industries are cultural' and questions the prevailing cultural industries scholarship which privileges film and television production over toy or garment production for example. Mato argues that it is at the myriad point(s) of consumption that products (and arguably *any* products) can be analysed as cultural as well as material entities. Miller (2009) agrees that Mato's question is an important one but rebuts with his own; 'are all industries primarily cultural?' He argues that Mato's assertion in fact *also* sits very closely alongside the neo-liberal and celebratory creative industries discourses which decontextualise terms such as 'creativity' in order to mobilise them "through the neo-classical shibboleth of unlocking creativity through individual human capital" (Miller, 2009, 94). So, just as much as cultural studies could be argued to be unconsciously aligned with 'Richard Floridians' (as Miller puts it), those who fetishise creativity and hierarchise 'creative' occupations, the opposite tendency is just as visible: the assertion - through picking particular occupations and arguing they are creative or cultural - that

---

[12] As well as the mythologies that circulate within particular industries such as Hollywood (and which I discuss more specifically in relation to the myth-of-the-screenwriter in chapter two). Caldwell (2009) has an extensive discussion of the commercial industrial theorizing that distinguishes contemporary and 'messy' Hollywood and interestingly, notes that academic screen studies has a 'curious affinity' with this theorizing and 'myth-making' (167). This is an important parallel alongside the accusations I'm discussing here against scholarship which has 'swallowed' the creative industries hype. Caldwell stresses that in doing robust industrial theorizing scholarship, we need to be suspicious of all our data and committed to multi-sited ethnography and systematic textual analysis. See chapter three for further discussion of methodology here but for me, the key point is that these slippery discourses around 'creativity' vs 'manual' labour signal what Pang describes (in defining the creative economy) as "the mutual conditioning between the culture and economy of late capitalism" (2009, 73) and the infiltration of this logic into the academy as much as it may have infiltrated policy and populist writing.

anything can be creative, that anything that turns a profit can be creative and cultural.[13] Miller finishes by saying:

> We need to analyse all these economic sectors, and recognise that each has cultural elements. But because culture involves all the questions of managing populations and coping with a life after manufacturing, its specificities need to be asserted and maintained (2009, 97).

In another important contribution to the debate Pang refutes uncritical celebrations of creative labour arguing in a Marxist vein that the "constituents of creative labour" must be viewed as "politically confounding", as constantly incorporating the oppositional logics of art and commerce and co-opting different forms of labour (2009, 72). The arguments outlined here around definitions of 'creative labour' and the theories that have spun out from them illustrate for me, the importance of this area of study and the need for the development of the theory and vocabulary.

Thus I believe it is still efficacious to take up my position and examine a case study of a particular, very traditionally defined 'creative' and 'industrial' occupation. I do not choose this occupation randomly however, and I believe it is a particular creative occupation which can illuminate a number of issues and invigorate creative labour research and cultural and production studies more broadly. Firstly, it is a form of writing and thus a form of creative authorship which raises a number of wider questions about creativity and craft practices. Secondly, it offers unique historical and contemporary insights into industrial forms of cultural production and the standardisation of creative production and the teaching of creative production. Unlike other realms of cultural-artistic production that have fuelled the ongoing debate about art versus commerce, screenwriting and mainstream filmmaking have always been immersed within capitalist-intensive industry; have always therefore, had spurious claims to legitimate 'artistic' production; and have thus, always elided the anxieties that have animated other realms of literary production for example.[14] Because of this, screenwriting embodies a number of powerful tensions and contradictions which are

---

[13] This definitional problem was previously raised by Hesmondhalgh and Pratt who argued that the simplest and most 'coherent' way to define a 'cultural' industry was to weigh up the utilitarian versus non-utilitarian functions of symbolic goods (2005, 6).

[14] Geraghty, writing in the realm of adaptation studies, notes that a 'hierarchy of judgement' has often animated the discourses around the craft of adapting literature for the screen, a hierarchy which "privileges literature, reading and authorship over screen, viewing, and mass production" (2008, 2). I have not had the space here to engage with adaptation theory in any detail but it is a rich area for the theorising of the intertextual dynamics that play out between literary works and their various screen adaptations and, of course, the mainstream UK industry and its key commissioning bodies are heavily reliant on adaptations for relatively secure revenue streams. Geraghty's (2008) text is a recent and prominent discussion of adaptive texts and processes.

symptoms of the 'twisted' economic logic of late capitalism in which creative workers now function. Finally, it is a case study which illuminates the role that the logics of governmentality play in the production of culture in the new economy, logics that propagate the notion that, as 'self-regulating liberal subjects', we are all creative, we are all entrepreneurs, we can all become screenwriters.

1.8. The standard creative labour vocabulary

McRobbie (1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2004) has offered a sophisticated investigation into creative workers in the UK in the last decade and her critique draws together many of the themes identified in previous sections. This work is often used in later studies of creative occupations as a starting point for the laying out of the standard vocabulary. She draws on her own study of young British fashion designers and other tracking studies of television workers, writers and 'cultural intermediaries' and argues that there are common themes across the research which highlight some of the key characteristics of creative work and make up the standard creative labour lexicon.

She highlights the vagaries of fashion design work: low remuneration, extremely long working hours and "volatile and unpredictable" work patterns (2002a, 109) as well as the "intransigent" pleasures and personal satisfaction the work offers those who undertake it. She notes other recurring features such as enforced youthfulness and occupational diversification which are arguably features of many kinds of creative work including, I will argue, screenwriting labour in which diversification is often built into the work. As McRobbie notes, these working practices are characteristic of "portfolio careers" (2002a, 111) which are collated by individuals in order to offset the insecurity and capriciousness which is now built in to 'flexible' production systems such as film- or television-making. This then requires creative individuals to be intensely 'self-promotional', echoing the constant need to 'work on oneself' that writers such as Du Gay (1996) and Rose (1999) articulate. Another key feature of new creative work for McRobbie is the uneven spread of rewards across labouring sectors, a theme echoed by Ursell (2000) and one visible within Hollywood's screenwriting labour force.[15]

McRobbie (2002a and 2002b) argues that all these factors mean there is little possibility for a politics of the workplace; unionisation is generally non-existent and there are no permanent

_____

[15] See chapter two for further discussion.

workplaces or contracts to demand such mechanisms of support and security for freelancers. Of course, a politics of work would traditionally be concerned with issues such as diversity of the workforce, and this is an issue raised in much of the research: Dyer-Witheford (2005), Gill (2002, 2007), Ursell (2000) as well as McRobbie all identify lack of diversity as a consequence of the conditions of new creative work and within the screenwriting sector this is also an acute concern (see UK Film Council, 2006; 2007 and Writers Guild of America, 2009 for example). Overall, McRobbie is concerned with all these features as 'disciplinary techniques', arguing that the inherently exploitative and problematic aspects of these employment trends are easily elided by concepts such as 'pleasure' in work. However McRobbie's work is now dated and, whilst it offers some empirical directions, is limited in its scope and application.[16]

Importantly for my purposes here, McRobbie (1998) is one of the only creative labour theorists to have attended to issues of pedagogy - in her case, a consideration of the growth of fashion education in the UK and interviews with fashion design heads of department. Her empirical work is deployed in specific rhetorical ways; statements from respondents about curricula are routinely linked to Bourdieu's[17] notions of distinction and cultural consecration in order to distinguish 'types' of fashion education, the differences between fashion departments and the routine distancing of fashion education from manufacture and production, for example. Primarily, McRobbie ties her pedagogical interests to Bourdieu's sociology in order to illuminate relations of power which fracture her field of interest along gender and class lines. She also employs a traditional chronological approach – moving from the history of debates within art and fashion education to contemporary educational models - and also traces her subjects (the designers themselves) from education into work, the various career modalities of the work and on to the interaction between design and fashion journalism.

---

[16] McRobbie of course acknowledges this, arguing that British fashion design is more exceptional than exemplary as a case study, suggesting that this exceptionality is a feature of creative labour sectors/sub-sectors and it is particularism which is central. Her work challenged existing accounts of the sociology of work within a particular historical moment (Britain in the 1980s and 90s). (See 1998, 176-177).

[17] Adkins notes that Bourdieu is often utilised to unearth and illuminate material relations between labour and persons within the new creative economy but that this has limitations because Bourdieu's notions of 'property in the person' (such as forms of capital adhering to individuals) "remains trapped within a social contract of personhood" which Adkins argues may now have been reconstituted as an externalised relation, one foregrounded by audience effects (2005, 125). Although I don't believe screenwriting wholly exemplifies Adkins' perceived shift from the 'social contract model of personhood' (which she ties to the role of the author-function in cultural production) to the externalised, 'audience effects' relation, I would posit that another particularity of screenwriting is that it bridges both of these models and perhaps, has always done so. However, an important critical point I wish to take from Adkins here is that the use of Bourdieu is only one (wholly sociological) way to examine the relations between creative labour and personhood and in the re-making of a creative labour vocabulary, Adkins' work is particularly illuminating.

I echo the focus on pedagogy (within screenwriting courses and manuals) as an empirical strategy in a more conceptually-driven and forceful way than has been done before. McRobbie's Heads of Department act largely as repositories of knowledge in a straight-forward, sociological capacity, but for me, interviews with teachers of screenwriting and a consideration of pedagogical paradigms for screenwriting within degree courses and 'How-To' manuals complexify and hamper a straight historical or chronological approach, enabling a more reflexive epistemological framework, one much more focused on industrial theorising and myth-making. The courses and manuals I analyse in chapters four and five are multi-sited locations for analysis in which I trace the ways in which terms such as 'craft' and 'creativity' simultaneously produce over-confidence and anxiety in the production and reproduction of screenwriting work and workers.

This approach also guards against a reliance on the pleasure/pain dichotomy because if offers a number of further planes of analysis for the construction of working selves. It moves beyond the contexts and experiences of work alone (the plane on which pleasure/pain can be most unproblematically positioned) and signals that the complex vocabulary of screenwriting work may be simultaneously brought into being in the classroom or the specialised seminar or the development meeting or within the 'How-To' manual. For my specific case study, this approach is integral to an understanding of how screenwriters are made, re-made, governed and self-govern within their industrial contexts of work and thus it is a significant extension of the 'early' methods of a theorist such as McRobbie.

Gill (2002, 2007) and Ross (2004) have undertaken empirical investigations of new media work[18] as forms of creative labour – what Ross (2004) refers to as 'no-collar' work. Using the standard vocabulary, Gill (2002) notes that new media workers also exemplify portfolio, project-based careers and that these are undertaken within a popular conception of this type of work as 'cool, creative and egalitarian'. Both Gill and Ross are also concerned with the hidden costs of new media work that clash with the utopian pronouncements about new media organisations – Ross employs the phrase, "the industrialisation of bohemia" to explore this (2004, 10). Ross offers a particularly useful research model. Because of the quality and depth of his ethnographic project at Razorfish, a New York-based new media company, his observations 'on-the-ground' enabled him to observe the material realities of Pang's summary of the creative economy, the "mutual conditioning between

---

[18] De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2005) have also contributed interesting analysis here based on an investigation of gaming and game producers.

culture and economy in late capitalism" (2009, p. 73). As Ross puts it, his subjects presented to him "the makings of a self-justifying, low-wage workforce, at the very heart of the knowledge industries so crucial to its growth and development" (2004, 24).

Ursell (2000) and Blair (2001, 2003) address the issues of conditions and experiences within flexible labour markets and do so within the television and film production sectors in the UK respectively. They offer the most useful empirical tools for a screenwriting-centric case study. Ursell (2000) is concerned with 'exploitation, commodification and subjectivity' in the employment relations of UK television labour markets and she identifies three key features of the work: the self-organisation of the labour market; the payment structure that leads to a dual labour market; and the positive experiences of the workers themselves – their articulation of the popular recognition they enjoy along with critical and aesthetic acclaim and the pleasures and pride the work engenders.

Key to her theoretical positioning is a 'moving-on' of labour process theory in late capitalism and the incorporation of a Foucauldian understanding of technologies of the self as they are historically situated and invoked. She uses her empirical work to attend to "the material structures of work, employment and market exchange" (2000, 811) and this approach is a key touchstone for my own project. Ursell notes the centrality of networking and collegiality to television production work, however new and specific terms are added to the vocabulary. She argues that this leads to a "status hierarchy" (Ibid.) and an "economy of favours" (Ibid., 813) in which processes of hiring are based on familiarity, individual workers must relentlessly compete for projects and the producer or firm ultimately controls the channels of paid employment. The dual labour market represents another recurring motif for culture industry work – there is a well-placed minority of workers in regular, well-paid work and then 'the rest', sifting around in the bloated base of the pyramid and often working long hours for little or no pay in an attempt to move up the ladder. As Ursell notes:

> Acclaim, reward, recognition characterise the top end of the television labour market and arguably, it is the attractiveness of such attributes which helps keep the bottom end entranced and enlisted. Truly, this is a technology of the self which turns on self-enterprise (2000, 818).

However, Ursell also argues that this is a motivating form of work which cannot simply be viewed in economic terms – subjectivity is key here and the pleasures the work provides are also central to her analysis. The work is both exploitative and rewarding: "This vampire is seductive" as she puts it

(Ibid., 821). For Ursell, the fact that this type of work is about the use and exchange of semiotic values is key, signalling the inherent sociality of both creation and valourisation. Thus "television workers – through their products, their work relations, their relations to audiences, their relation to their 'selves' – would seem to epitomise and to be a major vehicle of postmodernising influences" (Ibid., 822).

Ursell's article is also both dated and isolated however. It is based on extensive empirical findings but much of the work was carried out in the early-mid 1990s and like McRobbie's work, has not been followed up in the last decade. Ursell also underlines the characterisation of television production particularly as 'vampiric' because it allows for the 'sensual dimensions of subjectivity' (2000, p. 821) and because this form of work can be a 'labour of love'. However, these conclusions again fall back on the pleasure/pain, seductive/destructive duality of creative labour and go one step further, tying the duality to screen production work particularly because "both use value and exchange value are constituted semiotically" and because this work represents a "*social* cycle of creation and valorisation" (Ibid., p. 822). Again, I caution against such conclusions which privilege particular forms of creative work and the perceived polarities of joy/sorrow within them. While Ursell's extensive empirical work may well have identified particular postmodern 'technologies of the self' within television production work, I don't wish to follow Ursell's line of argument to the extent that screenwriting work begins to resemble a blandly vampiric occupation. It would be an easy set of conclusions to draw but not ones that would challenge and extend creative labour theory and vocabulary let alone theoretical and empirical discussions of screenwriting work.

Blair (2001, 2003) is specifically concerned with project-based film production work. A key strength of her work is a strong critique of accounts of changes in film production organisation which employ flexible specialisation as an explanatory paradigm.[19] She argues that the work of Christopherson and Storper, for example, offers only a "partial understanding" (167) of film labour markets, and in her 2001 article draws particular attention to the shortcomings in the dual labour market (or core-periphery model as Castells, 1996 would characterise it) analysis which Christopherson and Storper utilise. For Blair (2001), such an analysis "does not fully embrace the complexities of group and individual movement within the labour market" (167). Blair's empirical

---

[19] This is a critique outlined more fully in Blair and Rainnie (2000). Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) also challenge 'populist and academic analyses of employment' in the creative industries by drawing on the same empirical data used in Blair's (2001) paper, suggesting that continuities in the labour/capital employment relation are as important as any changes and that 'epochal change' which post-Fordist accounts would assume, is overblown.

work is centred on a below-the-line crew working on a particular British film production therefore her conclusions are focused on below-the-line, freelance film workers and their experiences breaking in to the industry and maintaining employment over time. Blair is also interested in the hierarchies which develop in working groups, the 'managerial' control that is asserted both by production companies and employers and senior crew members, and the 'pressures' of the daily work – long hours, often low pay and the pressure to perform and maintain individual reputations within wider, interdependent networks of employment.

As with Ursell (2000) and McRobbie (2002a, 2002b, 2004) particularly, power, subjectivity and agency for film workers are key framing themes in a later paper from Blair (2003). In an attempt to draw together theoretical strands from both labour process theory and notions of Foucauldian subjectivity as Ursell does, Blair (2003) uses Elias's (1970) theories of 'relations of interdependence' between social actors. Using this conceptual framework to incorporate both individual subjectivities and wider structurations, Blair examines the workings of 'semi-permanent work groups' within the UK film industry, that is, project teams which move from project to project as a unit. The general features of the work which Blair outlines (2003) are now familiar; she provides evidence of chronic uncertainty coupled with an oversupply of labour which, she argues, influences the power balance between employers and employees in film production work. She also examines hierarchisation within the work groups, in which the head-of-departments (HODs) take on the roles of employers on particular projects. For Blair (2003) this is a 'double-edged sword' for freelancers who often exemplify loyalty to their HOD (in order to maintain a secure position within a work group) but this can lead to disadvantageous deals for freelancers who must accept the conditions without the possibility for negotiation. On the other hand, HODs are dependent on team members during a production in order to maintain their own status within the industry. In general for Blair, this style of creative working is built on 'complex interdependencies' as well as a generally asymmetrical power balance that favours those who retain (the few) senior positions within the industry.[20] Again Blair argues that such working practices are often voluntarily and consciously sought by freelance film workers themselves who favour the 'routine stability' of this type of organisation as opposed to facing the vagaries of truly freelance film production work.

---

[20] Kong (2005) offers an interesting cultural geographer's account of 'sociality' in relation to film production in Hong Kong and South China which has some resonances with Blair's work. Kong discusses risk and trust in the networks of film production in the region and the questionable efficacy of regional film policies in fostering such 'sociality'.

Screenwriters, as inherently more atomised in their working practices as writers (and as nominally above-the-line), may not be as inclined to take part in the type of production organisation which Blair outlines and in general, it would seem that such strategies are more frequently observed in below-the-line occupations. However, clearly screenwriters are enmeshed in networks of screen production and ongoing partnerships with particular 'collaborators' (particularly directors or producers) which lead to relationships of interdependence so this analysis does offer some useful points of both theoretical and practical application.[21] Blair leaves room for further analysis that would consider "a more routine reflexivity which arises through social conditioning" (2003, 692) and here she suggests that Bourdieu's notion of habitus could be an important theoretical tool. However, this suggestion is not developed or extended, nor has her empirical work been updated since and, again, a useful empirical study is offered but without room for a sustained dialogue between theory and practice nor a sustained challenge to existing creative labour theory. Her use of Elias' sociological framework is a useful tool for the particular below-the-line industrial relationships and 'interdependencies' she documents but is hemmed in. It is her critique of post-Fordist accounts of flexible specialisation within film production networks that is the most developed but, therefore, terms such as subjectivity and agency in film production work do not get an extensive airing in her publications to date.

1.9. Conceptualising screenwriting as creative labour

Screenwriting can on the one hand be understood as an exemplary form of creative labour as it has been theorised by Blair, Gill, McRobbie, Ross and Ursell. Many of the features of the work of fashion designers, new media workers and film and television production workers can be identified as common features of screenwriting labour. For example, inherent features of creative work such as portfolio careers, freelance/multivalent working patterns, the preponderance of entrepreneurial and networked working identities and the lack of industrial diversity can all be identified within screenwriting labour markets in both the USA and UK. Diversification of working practices is often built into writing work. In fact, screenwriting is often a diversifying technique for novelists or playwrights and established screenwriters will generally be working on a number of scripts at once

---

[21] MacDonald however, employs the modified term Screen Idea Working Group (SIWG) to understand and document "a group that does focus on a screenwriter's single screen idea (either singly or in association with others) in pursuit of the goal of production" (2004a, 209). He goes on to distinguish between the Screen Production Working Group (SPWG) and the SIWG noting that the SIWG may often have less permanence within film production networks, that employment relations may be significantly looser and less formal and that they may be multi-tasking, juggling a number of projects rather than working on one. He also discusses similarities - both groups work on a single project that continues through development and production for example. He finally notes that power relations are fluid within the SIWG and pays particular attention to the varying positions of authority the screenwriter may hold within a SIWG.

– both original and commissioned work, for example. Screenwriting working practices are also characteristic of 'portfolio careers' which are collated by individuals in order to offset the insecurity and capriciousness which is now built in to 'flexible' screen production systems. For screenwriters, this has become an inherent feature of 'getting by' and particularly moving up in their field; the skills required to 'network', 'take meetings' and 'pitch ideas' have become central to everyday screenwriting careers (discussed extensively by Caldwell, 2008).[22]

The experiences of screenwriters also exemplify trends identified within "speeded-up creative worlds", what Caldwell refers to as "migratory labour and churn", "outsourcing's bid culture" and film production systems that privilege and encourage "speed shooting and hyper-production (2008, 11). As in other creative sectors, the lack of diversity in the screenwriting industry in terms of gender and ethnicity for example has also been raised both in research and government-enacted research initiatives (see Bielby and Bielby, 1996; UK Film Council, 2007; Writers Guild of America West, 2009 for examples). Caldwell (2008) refers to the Hollywood-centred industry as one exemplified by 'gendered production spaces' such as writers' rooms and 'worker masochism' which sees film production tools masculinised and processes of networking often referred to in sexualised terms.

The Los Angeles-centric labour market (which is examined in detail in chapter two) offers clear parallels with other forms of creative work that encourage degradation, precariousness and marginalisation for many workers; hierarchisation, a dual labour market, entrenched insecurity, individualisation and compulsory entrepreneurialism. This is the labour market in which the majority of screenwriters writing mainstream feature films must function or engage with at some level. However, there are also a number of exceptional features of this creative work, and the labour market in which it functions, that mark it out as a distinctive case study, requiring a unique and particular theorisation. The vocabulary of creative labour needs to be rewritten here because screenwriting directly challenges a number of the 'taken-for-granted' precepts of creative labour

---

[22] It's important to note that I am aware of juggling differing research traditions here and although I do not have the room to fully engage with these differences and the histories that feed into them, I'd like to acknowledge that my project as a whole is a bridging one – between a broadly European Marxist labour research tradition and North American labour process and production studies work. Caldwell's (2008) recent text was influential when it was published half way through the writing of this dissertation and offered a highly specific and wide-ranging study of Hollywood 'production culture' which in many ways exposed the deficiencies in the European tradition for the examination of screenwriting labour. Caldwell's work has subsequently spawned further texts (2009) and I engage with these traditions and research contexts further in chapter two.

theory to date; the features, modes, historical developments and subjects of screenwriting work call into question the ubiquity of terms such as 'flexible', 'new', and even 'creative'.

Screenwriting labour must be separated out from the theorisations of other creative labour forms because of the intensively industrial nature of the work. Screenwriting is a historical and contemporary industrial creative labour form, one rationalised and standardised from its earliest days and which therefore exemplifies idiosyncratic characteristics and bestows distinctive experiences and mechanisms of organisation and control. To an extent, this can be explained by the unique features of the organisation of the Hollywood screen production industry as Caldwell outlines in an extended but important comment:[23]

> Unlike the creative industries in New York or London that Ross and McRobbie analyse, however, film and television production in Los Angeles continues to survive with less volatility and relatively more predictability than either dot-com or club cultures. This relative predictability follows from a paradox. On the one hand, Hollywood is rather distinctive in maintaining very old forms of Fordist industrial predictability: a massive unionised workforce, a rationalised system of entitlements and inside dealing, and the unique geographical agglomeration of local suppliers, producers and facilities that Allen Scott identifies. On the other hand, Hollywood exploits very new forms of post-Fordism: diversity of tastes, heterogeneous identities, artistic or niche narrowcasting, and cultural innovation as part of a pervasive and edgy new multimedia experience economy. The industrial inertia that results from this mix of normally divergent organisational modes – geographic anchoring and industrial continuity alongside boundaryless cultural innovation – gives film and television their historical persistence and cultural resilience (2008, 33-34).

For screenwriters, the intransigent industrialisation of their work means that they have always experienced their labour as simultaneously individualised and collaborative; competitive and

---

[23] Specific mechanisms Caldwell identifies here, such as the 'rationalised system of entitlements' and 'inside dealing' are perhaps not immediately clear to a non-specialist and these features are examined in more detail in chapter two. The particular industrial mechanisms that also distinguish screenwriting work in the UK as opposed to the USA (and which paradoxically increase the unpredictabilities of the screenwriting labour market in the UK as opposed to Caldwell's point here on the relative stability of the USA market) are also outlined in chapter two. Note that whilst this quote might undermine the premise of my empirical work (why investigate the screenwriting market in the UK if it is so different from the dynamics of the USA labour market?) I argue that UK screenwriting work is largely determined by Hollywood's industrial logics which feed into pedagogy and practice - they incorporate and determine much British-based writing and have always done so. For more see chapters two, three and six.

hierarchised; marginalised and partial[24] which can only be understood and problematised by examining both the historical and contemporary industrial conditions within which screenwriting functions.

Pausing here for a moment, industrialisation as a foundational premise of screenwriting work can be fleshed out using a Marxist interpretative lens. Ryan discusses the capitalist production of culture, arguing that the degradation of creativity is inherent to the industrial production of artistic artefacts:

> By conceptualising and directing the process of creation, producers and directors can bind working artists to the organisation's mode of rationality; originals of a preferred type and quality are more likely, with less labour-power consumed in their production than might otherwise have been the case (1991, 117).

For Ryan, industrial production of culture shifts the 'right to imagine' from artists to corporate producers. Pang highlights the contradictions inherent in a late capitalist system that reifies but simultaneously commodifies creative freedom as much as possible:

> The creative economy continues to rely on the Romanticist notion of the genius-artist to reify creativity, while at the same time overcoming the 'inefficiency' associated with artist discourse. The creative worker might still be characterised by his or her personal artistic sensibilities, but he or she also rationally weighs both creative and artistic considerations to produce saleable products (2009, 58).

Using a critical sociological voice it can be argued that there are two modes of industrialised screenwriting labour which broadly determine the amount of autonomy and authority individual writers have to control their own creative work and the uses to which that work is put. This fits within the standard 'dual labour market' picture outlined by creative labour theorists and can be articulated using Ryan's (1991, 136) theorisation, in which he distinguishes two kinds of labour positions within industrial creative production systems: "contracted artists" and "professional creatives". The former category is 'personalised labour' and represents for Ryan not labour-power but the roles of 'petty capitalists' who supply intermediate artistic goods to corporations such as production companies. For screenwriting, this maps on to the labour market in which a small

---

[24] When I use the term 'partial' here I use it to connote the highly unstable and constantly shifting position of the screenwriter in the standard feature film production process. While they are arguably often positioned in the inception and pre-production phase, this is also often undercut by the involvement of a variety of 'cultural intermediaries' from script editors to producers and directors, to marketing and advertising personnel. 'Partial' enables me to guard against unduly privileging screenwriting labour (with original and writerly authority for example) whilst also acknowledging that screenwriting labour is usually talked about as being 'only one step' in a long production phase and value chain which often degrades the status of the work and keeps writers 'in their (partial) place'.

number of 'writer-producers' or well-known, consecrated writers function, survive and flourish at the top end. They are generally able to secure ongoing and rewarding work, are well-remunerated, critically recognised, able to resist attempts to rewrite or change their work and concerned about their 'property-rights' such as residuals payments.[25] Charlie Kaufman represents one prominent example of this elite screenwriting workforce.

On the other hand, 'professional creatives' are "supporting artists in the project team [who] are employed on wages or salaries in permanent or casual positions" (Ryan, 1991, 138). This is rationalised work, supporting work, "variable capital to be put to work across continuous cycles of production" (Ibid., 139). Professional creative screenwriting labour for film (and more routinely in the USA and UK, for television) represents the vast majority of screenwriting work undertaken in contemporary screen production industries at the 'bloated' bottom of the occupational pyramid. Within this category, the multiple, highly complex modalities of screenwriting work come to the surface – treatment writing, drafting, rewriting, polishing and so on. Screenwriters working at this blunt end of the industry are concerned with security, constantly scrambling to secure future work, lack autonomy and control and face brutalising and intense industrial conditions, the "serial corporate churn" characterised by Caldwell (2008, 113).

Screenwriting labour can be viewed within a creative work paradigm to an extent but can certainly not be considered to be a *new* form of creative work unlike other occupations such as those in new media, for example. The histories of screenwriting labour (outlined in chapter two) illustrate the development of industrialised writing, highlight the investments made within certain versions of this history/ies and stress that many of the features which characterise the labour process and subjectify individual writers in a contemporary setting can be traced through the histories of screenwriting. In fact, a distinction between freelance or independent writers and staff writers and the relative positions and attendant opportunities for work this offered were being acknowledged and discussed in early screenwriting handbooks and the wider industry in pre-Studio Era Hollywood (Maras, 2009, 159). This form of work is both old and new**.**[26]

---

[25] For more, see chapter two.

[26] This is a feature of fashion design as creative work which McRobbie identifies, describing it as a "hybrid of old and new" (1998, 150) and for her this ties in to a broader discussion of the historical trajectory of fashion/art-making practices from pre-modernity, through modernity and into a distinctly postmodern cultural economy.

Changes in the organisation of the film production industry have certainly followed broader changes in production organisation but again screenwriters cannot be analysed as exemplifying flexible, post-Fordist labour practices in the final instance. Firstly, screenwriters - designated as 'creatives' and as 'writers' - have always been, and continue to be, individualised and thus, to an extent, isolated in the experiences of their working lives. This is because of the nature of their work and its placement in the inception stages of a film production, often before a 'project-team' has been identified and assembled.[27] Simultaneously, writers are called into being within pedagogical frameworks of screenwriting as well as in daily industrial working contexts as collaborative and therefore inherently partial. Their work only becomes productive, useful and thus meaningful when it is subject to development, notes, input from other filmmakers and is then produced in filmic form leading to a constant and chaotic tension between individualised and collaborative modes of work.

Secondly, screenwriting work has also been consistently atomised. Whilst some may work in pairs, most experience the writing itself as solitary, even if working within larger television writing teams or other agglomerations. Screenwriters more commonly experience competition on numerous professional levels alongside both productive and punishing forms of collaboration. Again, atomisation within screenwriting work can only be understood by grasping both ends of this tension simultaneously. Firstly, practices and experiences of screenwriting selfhood are gained through individualising tendencies, such as recognising and working on one's craft skills and strengths within a particular genre - techniques encouraged in screenwriting courses and in screenwriting manuals. Secondly, engines of collaborative or communal subjecthood operate in the film industry - teaching and learning how to 'play the game' and negotiate development and the rewriting process for example.

Lastly, the creative drive of screenwriting labour is, and has historically been, highly organised and standardised. This feature of the work is then often used as evidence that screenwriting is *either* highly secure *or* highly marginal and degraded because of this standardisation. However, these opposing tendencies are not considered simultaneously and they must be. The long-term organisation and unionisation of the screen production industries[28] offers another important

---

[27] However, one needs to move with caution here. An important caveat which Pang (2009) makes clear is that, in examining the creative economy and creative workers, one can fall back on the notion of 'the autonomous artist' which comes out of 'author-based modernity'. For Pang this is a tool with fetishises creativity and masks the underlying fact that a creative worker's labour is now fully enmeshed within the 'dense economic reality' of late capitalism.

[28] More so in the USA than the UK but many British screenwriters are members of an American guild and routinely engage with the mechanisms of collective organisation within Hollywood. See UK Film Council (2007) for illuminating empirical data on this subject and see chapter six for more empirical discussion of my own.

diversion from creative work as it is conceptualised by McRobbie and others. Organisational security, the above-the-line status of screenwriters and the forms of marginalisation and brutalisation they routinely experience are utterly enmeshed. They breed acute anxiety and insecurity as well as brash over-confidence and theatricality; they are not polarities of experience. These material and both stimulating and brutal labour market conditions have profound effects on how screenwriters themselves function; their career trajectories, their creative and craft practices, their daily working lives and their self-perceptions are shaped by these specific and complex dynamics of cultural production. Thus, in the fieldwork-based chapters the key research questions are:

How is screenwriting constructed as a form of creative production and as both individualised and collaborative work in discourse, pedagogy and practice? and
How do screenwriters navigate, operate and calculate within the industrial realms of cultural/screen production in which they pursue and secure their livelihoods?

Screenwriting politically, ethically and materially disturbs and renews the concepts of craft, creativity and creative labour as I have theorised them above. I now turn to the particularities of screenwriting as a form of creative, cinematic authorship, as a form of both writing and filmmaking and an arena of creative production that complicates the boundaries between literary and screen production. Theories of cinematic authorship are firstly opened out to both mine the tension between 'writing' and 'filmmaking' and navigate a productive path across and through it.

2. Cinematic authorship

In this section, theoretical paradigms for the analysis of screenwriting as a creative practice are the focus, particularly theories of cinematic authorship. Developments in screen studies will also be discussed in order to signal the conceptual complexities of defining terms such as 'Hollywood' and 'screen production' in relation to the particularities of screenwriting as creative labour in the contemporary moment. This will enable a more nuanced engagement with the figure of the screenwriter and her/his creative work in subsequent chapters. This section will employ a conceptual as opposed to a chronological trajectory. I lay out a number of diverse but connected paradigms that open up a space for the examination of screenwriting as a particular form of creative production, both filmmaking and writing.

2.1. Theories of cinematic authorship and liminal designations of the screenwriter

Theories of authorship as they have been applied to film theory have had a problematic and contested reception. This reflects the intrinsic problems in comparing literature and film as texts and forms of media; scholarly opinion has generally shunned the idea that a traditional conception of authorship can be applied to cinema. The collaborative nature of filmmaking is often cited as a key reason why it is untenable to designate films as the products of a single author with a singular vision. As Livingston writes, there are both ontological and epistemological issues raised by the question of authorship – ontologically, the complex nature of cinematic production tends to mitigate against an easy positioning of one individual as a single 'author' and epistemologically, the difficulty in obtaining sufficient evidence of any particular film's conception and production again makes the authorial process a very difficult one to trace (1997, 145). However, auteur theory has also been hugely influential in film theory since the 1950s which has worked to ubiquitise the notion that singular authorship is possible within film production and that the director is that single author. As Bordwell and Thompson (1993, 38) put it, "the notion of the director-as-author remains probably the most widely shared assumption in film studies today." As is discussed further below, screenwriting historians often crudely argue that auteur theory has been a principal contributor to the historical and continuing marginalisation of the screenwriter in industrial filmmaking systems but this well-worn argument has had little airing in relation to contemporary screenwriting work nor has it been applied or revisited using empirical analysis of film production industries and subjects.

Livingston defines a cinematic author as:

> the agent or agent(s) who intentionally make(s) a cinematic utterance; where
> cinematic utterance = an action the intended function of which is to make
> manifest or communicate some attitude(s) by means of the production of an
> apparently moving image projected onto a screen or other surface (1997, 141).

Livingston postulates a number of 'ideal-typical' examples of film production authorship; an 'authorless' film in which there are a number of 'makers' (writers, financial backers and stars, for example) but no author – no fixed locus of power and control; 'authority without authorship' in which a financial backer initiates a film project but has no artistic or technical skills to contribute; instances of 'taking orders' in which "a decision relative to an utterance's expressive content is ordained by someone who wields the requisite power…to issue a well-founded ultimatum to the

text's maker(s)" (1997, 141); and finally cases of well-founded single authorship in which one individual (usually a writer-director) realises a clear, singular vision onscreen and contributes in many artistic and technical ways to the realisation of that vision. Thus Livingston works to problematise the notion of cinematic authorship itself, suggesting that questions of authorship must be examined in relation to the specific contexts of individual productions.

Gaut (1997) argues forcefully against the concept of single filmic authorship. She suggests that a dominant literary paradigm has been (wrongly) applied to film theory and subsequently fuelled auteur theory and has also been perpetuated in semiotic analyses of films as 'texts'. For Gaut, the film author(s) cannot be considered as literary author(s) because films are not texts and "rather than rigidly categorising films by their directors, films should be multiply classified" (165). She writes that the differences in ontology between literature and film partly explain the failure of claims to single authorship, noting that this is because of their different "individuation-conditions":

> literary works are individuated by their texts...but films are not so individuated, for radically different films can emerge from the same text...Films are, in fact, individuated by their entire range of acoustic and visual properties and by the casual sources of these (Ibid., 162).

For Gaut, this ontological issue can lead to important differences in how actors relate to and approach their roles variously in plays and films which has implications for authorship. Film actors she argues, co-determine their filmic characters to a greater extent. Gaut notes that some variations in collaborative artistic activities. In particular, film productions need to be considered, specifically, the degree to which power is centralised or dispersed in "determining the artistic properties of a film" and also "the degree to which the different collaborators are in agreement over the aims of the film and their role within its production" (Ibid., 164).

Gaut and Livingston both refute auteur theory and raise wider questions about the theoretical difficulties of equating literary and filmic authorship (questions also raised in adaptation studies, by theorists such as Geraghty, 2008). However they make little mention of screenwriters specifically and do not provide any analysis or consideration of screenplays as literary texts and screenwriters as authors, precisely because they resist designating film production as textual production. To find any postulation of the screenwriter as author in a literary sense, one is cast (chronologically at least) back to a few isolated texts that argued for a notion of the screenplay as literature.

Winston (1973) argued for the consideration of the screenplay as literature in a book which makes some basic arguments for this case but provides little analytical depth. Winston notes that John Gassner wrote a foreword to one of the first published collections of screenplays (*Twenty Best Film Plays*, Gassner and Nichols, 1943) and, in it, argued "the rather audacious proposition that the 'screenplay' could be considered not only as a new form of literature but also as a very important form in its own right" (1973, 13). Maras also flags up Gassner and Nichols' work as highly significant in the rise of the "screenplay as literature tradition" (2009, 51).[29] Winston argues (rather weakly) that his motivations for considering screenplays as literary texts are to acknowledge the 'critical importance' of the screenwriting stage in the process of creating a successful film (and here he equates this to a film which could be considered a 'work of art') and to suggest that such an approach could enable a better understanding of the later processes of production such as directing and editing (1973, 19). Winston compares theatre and film dramaturgy and also draws comparisons between literary and filmic narratives (acknowledging the latter's debt to the former) and writes,

> it is the novel's emphasis on story, with a looser structuring of events in contrast to the tighter, more structured elements of plot and conflict that are to be found in drama that has had the greatest influence on the development of cinema as an art (Ibid., 56).

Winston does offer some perceptive insights into the perceived inferiority of the screenplay form as opposed to the novel, noting that for example, screenplays and therefore cinema rely on 'indirect' as opposed to 'direct' metaphors. He also argues that the many failed adaptations of great literary works into films have also worked to distance the two forms whereas for Winston, screenplays deserve consideration as literary works in their own right. This could be reflected in a contemporary setting in which the publication of screenplays (often accompanied with commentaries from the screenwriters such as Kaufman's introduction) is now a routine practice.[30]

---

29 Maras also notes that it was the publication of *Twenty Best Film Plays* that gave rise to the new 'published screenplays' genre although he goes on to note that previous anthologies had been published such as France Taylor Patterson's Motion Picture Continuities in 1929 (2009, 51 and footnote 33).

30 Statistics and information on this trend prove very difficult to find – there are no commentaries on the development of this form of publishing, sales figures for the texts themselves are not available and there has been little discussion of this development in academic or popular commentaries on the screenwriting industry. There has been some acknowledgement of the increasing interest in and demand for script material in online forums. 'Script-hosting' websites have increased in popularity in the last decade - McGurk (2008) reports that www.simplyscripts.com received upwards of 12,000 hits a day in 2008 and www.Scipt-o-rama.com 10,000 hits a day and McGurk writes that a lively 'script trading' market now exists in which collectors buy up multiple drafts of classic or 'hyped' film scripts.

At this point, screenwriting as a form of creative production continues to confound by slipping from the grasp of both those theorists who deny individual claims to authorship in the realm of cinematic storytelling, and those who, in opposition, argue for recognition for the screenplay as literature and thus, the screenwriter as principal author. More telling in relation to an account of the ontology of the screenplay and the notion of cinematic authorship are the vociferous debates which accompanied the advent of auteur theory - and it is here I now turn.

2.2. Auteur theory and authorship

Stam (2000) provides a useful overview of auteur theory as it developed in post-war France in the 1950s and then gained considerable purchase in film theory, particularly as it matured in the USA. For Stam, the motivation behind auteur theory was a search for artistic legitimation which the cinema was struggling to attain. Andre Bazin summed up the theory in his 1957 article 'La politique des auteurs': "choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next" (Bazin, 1957 in Hillier, 1985, 255). In a more critical piece, Buscombe characterised auteurism as polemical as opposed to theoretical in intent and was "committed to the line that the cinema was an art of personal expression" (1973, 75). Crucially for my purposes, Buscombe critiqued auteurism in relation to Romantic artistic history, showing that the early *Cahiers du Cinema* writers (particularly Truffaut, Bazin and Rivette[31]) leaned heavily on this tradition in their distinction between a 'true auteur' - that is, a creator of cinema who brings a unique, organic, personal vision to the screen - and a 'metteur en scene'[32] - who is reminiscent of a rule-bound 'technician', copying or translating the ideas of others and not able to produce original work and assert a unique personal vision. Buscombe uses a quote from Rivette to highlight this division: "A cineaste who has made great films in the past may make mistakes, but his mistakes will have every chance of being, a priori, more impressive than the successes of a manufacturer" (cited in Buscombe, 1973, 77).

For Buscombe, "What seems to lie behind such a statement is the notion of the 'divine spark'[33] which separates off the artist from ordinary mortals, which divides the genius from the journeyman" (1973, 77) and this echoes my earlier discussion of the creativity/craft division also

---

[31] Francois Truffaut, Andre Bazin and Jaques Rivette - all French filmmakers who wrote numerous autuerist missives in *Cahiers du Cinema.*

[32] Which translates directly as 'scene setter'.

[33] This term is one that is frequently laced through 'How-to' manuals and screenwriting seminars as they discuss individual creativity and the sourcing of 'original' ideas. See chapters four and five for more.

traceable to Romantic notions of individual 'genius'. The manufacturer or craftsman as inferior figure is again invoked as a corollary to the artist-creative, the hallowed visionary. Buscombe used this critique to call for a move beyond the hegemony of auteur theory in the 1970s and some theorists called for an even more radical break with this tradition at the time (see Heath, 1973, who comments directly on Buscombe's approach). A further point I'd like to take up here is that, whilst these early critiques recognised the deficiencies in auteurism and its blinkered approach to cinematic production, they still implicitly invested in the notion of the director-as-auteur (or at least, invested in critiquing this position) and made little mention of the screenwriter as another figure who may have an authorial claim, whether legitimate or not. This is striking at least in the sense that a literary, single-authorship tradition is fundamental to auteur theory/polemic, one that the screen-*writer* has, by name, a claim to.[34]

In 1948, Alexandre Astruc coined the term 'camera-stylo' (or camera-pen) in which the perceived connection between film and literature was made clear, and crucially, Astruc did make reference to the screenwriter. He was at pains to specify what this notion meant for the role of the screenwriter arguing that one condition was essential:

> the scriptwriter directs his own scripts; or rather, that the scriptwriter ceases to exist, for in this kind of filmmaking, the distinction between author and director loses all meaning. Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen…how can one possibly distinguish between the man who conceives the work and the man who writes it? (Astruc, cited in Winston, 1973, p. 16).

Such a statement cuts to the heart of the subsequent effacement of the screenwriter within auteur theory and, arguably, within film studies and the popular conception of film production generally. While Astruc suggests a scriptwriter could direct their own script, he goes on to articulate the need to remove the scriptwriter altogether in order for the theory to hold water – for him, a script itself becomes meaningless and unnecessary. Of course this concept became a reality for many of the New Wave directors who rejected screenplays in favour of improvisation. But this is clearly a crucial moment of articulation in the process of the standardisation of the theory and thus the

---

[34] I realise that such a claim may have a somewhat spurious basis, assuming literary notions of a single-authorship model which could be read as ideologically suspect. But, I am taking my lead from the auteurists and those who have discussed authorship and cinema most prominently and believe this is a valid point at which to offer my own critique. See Heath (1973) for an ideology critique of auteur theory.

necessary designation of the industrially-immersed screenwriter as a partial creative input, as at best, a rule-bound 'technician'.

Stam argues that once auteur theory was taken up by Andrew Sarris in the USA, it became "a nationalistic instrument for asserting the superiority of American cinema" and this included studio-made cinema (2000, 89).[35] Sarris' manifesto was challenged by Richard Corliss in the 1970s who made the case for the importance of the screenwriter in the face of the auteurist focus on the director. Corliss wrote "the director is almost always an interpretive artist, not a creative one, and...the Hollywood film is a corporate art, not an individual one" (1974a, 543). Corliss was also concerned with the extent to which auteur theory had transplanted the creative role of the screenwriter into the director's domain: "Auteur criticism is essentially theme criticism; and themes – as expressed through plot, characterisation, and dialogue – belong primarily to the writer" (1974b, xxii). In striving for a re-versioning of auteur theory to include screenwriters, Corliss acknowledges the difficulties in 'classification and evaluation' and points out that:

> as with directors, one can distinguish several layers of screenwriting authorship: the indifferent work of a mediocre writer, whether it's an original script or an adaptation…the gem-polishing of a gifted adapter like Stewart[36]…and the creation of a superior original script, like Herman J. Mankiewicz's *Citizen Kane* (1974b, xxiv)

Corliss' 1974 book, in encyclopaedic form, presented an 'arbitrary but perhaps panoramic' overview of one hundred films made between 1927 and 1973 with discussion of the thirty-five writers or writing-teams behind them in an attempt to ameliorate the focus, at the time, on the director-as-author. However, Corliss represents the only example of a critique offering a counter-argument to Sarris' potent invocation of single directorial authorship.

Auteurism had conceptual links with structuralism and the influence of poststructuralist thought had an effect on notions of authorship into the 1960s and 70s, particularly through the work of Foucault

---

[35] Buscome (1973) had earlier criticised Sarris' approach as one which promoted a 'cult of personality' and utterly decontextualised film production practices.

[36] Donald Ogden Stewart

and Barthes.[37] For Stam the work of Foucault and Barthes led to the perception of the film author changing:

> a shifting configuration produced by the intersection of a group of films with historically constituted ways of reading and viewing. The author, in this anti-humanist reading, dissolved into more abstract, theoretical instances such as "enunciation", "subjectification", "ecriture" and "intertextuality" (2000, 125).[38]

Stam (2000) argues that the theoretical development of both notions of cinematic authorship and film studies itself continued to question the validity of auteur theory. Writers such as Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) and their theory of the 'classical Hollywood style' and Schatz's (1988) discussion of the 'genius of the system' downgraded the role of individuals in the film production process. Auteurism also struggled to maintain relevance in its application to television. Stam notes that television producers were often discussed as the "real auteurs" in television production in the 1970s and 1980s (and arguably this continues with contemporary figures such as David Chase, creator of *The Sopranos* 1999-2007, and David Simon, creator of *The Wire,* 2002-2008) (2000, 91). Stam acknowledges however, the ongoing robustness of auteur theory. He argues that it is widely practiced in film studies and in popular celebrations of film. Film publishing is frequently organised around the works of directors, retrospective film showcases routinely present the collected works of particular directors and film scholarship still reverts to the central creative figure of the director.

Thus theories of authorship and auteur theory as they have been applied to film production theory have consistently worked (both directly and indirectly) to tie notions of creativity, innovation and imagination in the production of screen works to the individual genius of the director, and more supposedly pedestrian and collective terms such as 'craft' and 'collaboration' become central to the way screenwriting is constructed, taught and understood. Certain consecrated screenwriters can be

---

[37] The writings of Foucault (1984) and Barthes (1977, 1982) offer insights into the conceptualisation of screenwriting as a particular form of authorship, one in which the erasure of the 'author-function' is a key mechanism that distances the writer from his work and forces an ambiguous relationship between author and text and between author and audience. Of course for both Foucault and Barthes, the 'removal' of the author is a necessary and important step towards the 'opening-up' of a text - the final signified becomes untenable and the reader becomes the central functional and interpretive figure. Arguably, within screenwriting as a literary form, processes of authorial effacement are acute - any possibilities for the author-function are often erased in the forms and processes of writing and also by those intermediaries who act as editors and gate-keepers between a screenplay in its own right and the production of a screenplay into a screen text. However, it is important to note that a contradictory logic is always in play here, because as I have already discussed, screen production industries also rely on the 'Romanticist notion of the genius-artist' in order to reify creative processes such as writing and perpetuate the 'scarcity myth' (as Pang, 2009 argues).

[38] Wollen's (1972) structuralist re-reading of auteur theory was also a key text in this tradition.

identified as taking on the role of the auteur and often combine the roles of director and screenwriter to gain and maintain this title; contemporary 'hyphenate' figures or 'contracted artists' (to use Ryan's, 1991, designation) such as Charlie Kaufman or Russell T. Davies[39] embody this persona. But a vaguer apparition of the (often 'name'-less 'professional creative') writer is clearly visible here: one whose work is at least partly determined and obfuscated by the single, directorial authorship model of auteurism;[40] one who is partialised and atomised as a consequence of the durability of this model; and one who is thus afforded much less control and ownership than other 'above-the-line' inputs have enjoyed within a system that has at least some residual investment in authorship claims per se.[41]

2.3. A note on the evolution of 'Hollywood'

I now wish to further ground this analysis with an engagement with some of the more problematic issues here in relation to film studies theory – particularly the concept of 'Hollywood' itself as well as an acknowledgement of the complexities of examining the writing of 'screen' products – both for film and television. The focus of chapter two is on theories of change in the organisation of Hollywood production, as well as a historical discussion of labour relations and screenwriting in Hollywood, and this concept, 'Hollywood', cannot be placed front and centre without being problematised. Harbord (2007) offers a reconceptualisation of Hollywood and its screen products which helps to crystallise the key issues that are relevant for this contemporary analysis. However, this is where Harbord's contribution also ends as her philosophical offering provides no sustained empirical engagement with the trends she identifies. Also, like much of the previous theorisation which make up the film studies canon, Harbord does not discuss screenwriting specifically so I take up some of her key concepts in order to deploy them in the service of this case study.

Harbord (2007, 9) argues that "Hollywood has now lost its defining power as an analytical category" and that in fact, its last decade as a coherent category was the 1990s. She writes that in analysing Hollywood's organisation, practices and products, three aspects of change must be addressed. Firstly she notes the fact that Hollywood no longer produces films per se, but has

---

[39] Head writer and executive producer of the new BBC *Doctor Who* series (2005-2009).

[40] A model which has material consequences in terms of remuneration, reputation and status - see chapter two.

[41] The shift from contract to freelance modes of creative labour, which writers have experienced as other cultural workers have done, does provide insights into how the positions of screenwriters may have changed in the film production industry over time (the 'above-the-line' designation is one example) and the new modes and experiences of writers in a now flexibly-specialised industry will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

horizontally and vertically integrated into a "versioning of narrative across diverse media, connected and supported by an industry of promotion and distribution" (2007, 42). Secondly, she notes that the theatrical presentation of films is no longer central to the corporate revenues of the media companies who own the studios, instead representing the first (and arguably most visible) promotion of a product "spread laterally across a range of objects, site and practices" (Ibid). Thirdly, digitalisation is increasingly displacing the 'materiality' of film.

Not only must the notion of 'Hollywood' be scrutinised and re-framed, but Harbord argues that film's relationship with other media also needs to be interrogated. Harbord identifies an 'intertextual cannibalism' now at work within screen production (in the endless filmic 'remakes' of television programs and comics for example) and argues that there are two possible interpretations of Hollywood's relations to other media. On the one hand, the argument could be that "Hollywood is asserting the ongoing difference of film from other media" and on the other, that "Hollywood has necessarily incorporated the differences between media in order to thread together diverse media experience and disparate platforms of delivery" and, in the process, is securing its own future (2007, 44).

Clearly for screenwriters, this ubiquitous intertextuality has often been a routine feature of screenwriting as creative work; screenwriters usually work in both film and television (as well as in literary genres such as fiction and playwriting for example) and this can be motivated by aesthetic as well as economic goals. What is crucial here is Harbord's point that because of these profound changes in the workings of Hollywood, narrative has become a central organising mechanism in terms of both Hollywood history and the spatial organisation of its products and operations and thus narrative "needs to be seen as a labour that is made to work across texts as well as within a text" (Ibid., 49). For Hollywood to maintain control of its resources, its narratives and products, Harbord argues that copyright[42] has now become paramount, and this is copyright in the sense of corporate as opposed to individual ownership (Ibid., 51). In fact, copyright law represents "the manufacturing of the subject of authorship" (Lury, 1993, cited by Harbord, 50). This is another locus for the broader questions I have raised in this chapter about definitions of creativity and designations of authorship within film production – here is a move to ascribe creativity not to the

---

[42] An extensive discussion of issues of copyright is not one I have the room to engage with at length within this project. However I recognise it as a central issue in the ongoing discussion about filmmaking and forms of authorship and control of content.

director-as-author but to the corporation and all the proprietary and monetary rights that entails over time. In summary, Harbord writes:

> The effects of spatial and technological dispersion are ameliorated by two strategies of control: the use of archive material, in effect creating an historical density to the products and second, with recourse to a legal infrastructure that recognises and protects the virtual value of the corporation as trademark (2007, 54).

Both of these strategies have profound effects on the screenwriter. Their work (in a now 'flexible' and 'autonomous' industry) is increasingly circumscribed by the demands of producers and corporations to adapt and re-work material as opposed to creating original work.[43] This also then precludes the screenwriter from any claim to an original voice – arguably still the route to then receiving fair remuneration for their work - and any such claims are mitigated against by the ubiquitous control of copyright by their 'employers', the parent corporations.

Overall, Harbord's work can be synchronised with evidence for the further diminishment of screenwriting as a form of writing; the instabilities of 'the industry' are now routinely tied to the development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) which, whilst fuelling the 'knowledge economy' (if one is a proponent of liberal-democratic theories of the information society), may be destabilising the 'final draft' screenplay form (see Millard, 2010 and see further empirical discussion on the practices and practicalities of 'transmedia' screenwriting in chapter six). The advent of new ICTs in the production and particularly, the distribution and exhibition of screen-based texts has also fostered instability and renewed labour militancy, illustrated in the 2007-2008 USA writers' strike.[44] As with auteur theory, these shifting labour market mechanisms represent another productive facet of the consequently partial, idiosyncratic subjectivity of the screenwriter within contemporary screen production. The issues raised by Harbord's revisiting of film studies theory highlights the complexities inherent within the engagement with terms as broad and contingent as 'Hollywood' and 'screenwriting'. These are issues which further illuminate the particular definitional dynamics of screenwriting as a creative practice, as involving multiple forms of both 'writing' and 'filmmaking'.

---

[43] Pervasive 'conservatism' in the funding and commissioning of screenplays and screen products has also been identified as a 'worrying' trend in the UK context and is discussed in more detail in chapters five and six. See Parker, 2009.

[44] A movement which was focused on the new models of remuneration needed to keep up with the proliferation of scripted entertainment across new media platforms as well as the unwillingness of employers/studios/parent companies to offer such models of remuneration. See Banks (2010).

2.4. Theoretical and empirical research on screenwriting

Screenwriting is a creative and craft process - perhaps a commercially determined and thus, artistically spurious one - which has received little scholarly attention. This is not itself a satisfactory reason for giving it the scholarly attention it 'so desperately' requires (a condescending rhetorical position at least) but it does suggest that screenwriting is slippery enough to have been passed over for serious theoretical and empirical examination. Very few academic studies are available and most are exploratory and urge the need for more in-depth and extensive research. Nelmes (2007) says exactly this, arguing that the feature length screenplay needs to be considered as a worthy literary form in its own right as opposed to "…the precursor to the completed feature length film" (2007, 107). The small clutch of academic texts which do analyse aspects of the form and process of screenwriting conceptualise it as 'a postmodern literary exemplar' (Kohn, 2000); as an 'object problem' (Maras, 2009); as a project-based career within the Hollywood labour market (Bielby & Bielby, 1999) but one which often highlights issues of exploitation and uneven power relations (Kohn 2000; Judge, 1997), particularly issues of diversity (Bielby & Bielby, 1996); a form of writing which raises issues of pedagogy and practice (MacDonald, 2004a and 2004b; Nelmes, 2007); and an avenue for writers of other forms of literature or for talented individuals (see Hollenback, 1980, for one of the only dissertations on the processes of screenwriting and the career of Ernest Lehman).

MacDonald (2004a and 2004b) raises the issue of the neglect of screenwriting as a form worthy of serious study and focuses on the amorphousness of "the screen idea", the ubiquity of a 'screenwriting convention' within screenwriting teaching and manuals and raises concerns over the lack of critical teaching of screenwriting within the UK. MacDonald also draws on Bourdieu in order to sketch out a theoretical approach to the analysis of screenwriting which he argues takes the study of screenwriting beyond the 'How-To' manuals and enables a critical engagement with the field of film and television production.

MacDonald's doctoral thesis offers the only contemporary account of screenwriting in the UK, focusing on the ways in which the 'screenwork' is formulated, constructed and discussed, and is attendant to practices of screenwriting as well as screen-reading. MacDonald takes as his starting point, the notion (adapted from Phil Parker, 1998) of the 'screen idea' which he defines as:

> Any notion held by one or more people of a singular concept (however complex) which may have conventional shape or not, intended to become a screenwork whether or not it is possible to describe it in written form or by other means (2004a, 5).

Thus it is a 'dynamic and collectivised thought process' and this wide-reaching concept enables MacDonald to range across and marshal a large amount of theoretical and some empirical information. His approach also enables him to remain free-floating, not fixed to screenplay form or to individuals (screenplays or screenwriters) but focused on discourse, processes of creation and development of the screen idea. Most usefully for my purposes, MacDonald (2004a) mobilises particular theoretical conceits; he argues that there is a professional screenwriting 'doxa' and an 'a priori' view of the screen idea which is illuminated within screenwriting manuals and textbooks and is reinforced by professional screen readers (whom he surveys). He examines the field of screen drama production in the UK, concluding that it is: "small, complex, US-dominated, competitive and insecure in terms of employment, trust and status" (2004a, 10).

One of the strengths of MacDonald's work is his focus on pedagogy as well as practice and. in a subsequent article, MacDonald (2004b) notes that while there has been an increased standardisation of screenwriting education, funding and practice in the United Kingdom, which has helped screenwriters themselves, there are nevertheless problems in relation to defining what a 'good' or 'successful' script are. This ongoing issue leads to pedagogical problems and usually a reliance within funding bodies as well as the industry on the standard models of screenplay-writing which are repeated endlessly within 'How-to' screenwriting manuals which originate largely from Hollywood.

All this offers a hugely rich, multi-faceted and original discussion; little else in the realm of screenwriting theory has been as extensive and, therefore, is as directly applicable to my own project. Because of its particular focus, 'the screen idea' as opposed to texts or individuals (which he argues would be limiting) the dissertation offers much important theoretical groundwork and I see this project as both updating and complementing MacDonald's with my focus on screenwriting labour as pedagogy and practice. Whilst MacDonald's unifying concept of the screen idea does enable an extremely broad discussion, it is also often fractured because of this – dancing from theorists such as Bourdieu, Barthes and Pasolini to the conventional manuals to comments from

interviewees - and whilst this productively echoes, to an extent, the nature of 'screenwriting' as a slippery term, activity and process, the argument extends out in many directions. This may be a consequence of the undeveloped and dispersed nature of the field of screenwriting research itself (one MacDonald recognises and seeks to 'fill in') and this has recently been redressed to an extent by the publication of Maras's (2009) text.

In general, Maras' theoretical overview is concerned with the dominant ways in which screenwriting has been conceived and understood within history and discourse; for him, this includes three key trends: the emphasis on the screenplay itself as a written plan and thus screenplay fetishism within mainstream understandings of film production; the notion of the screenplay as blueprint and the dominant discourse this has engendered in the mainstream histories of film production; and the concept of 'writing for the screen' which is dominated by a literary notion of writing as opposed to writing with the camera, with bodies, with light and so on (2009, 172). Thus Maras' contribution is an important one, drawing together a large number of perspectives, definitions and practices around the notion of screenwriting and setting up a 'discourse frame' which

> goes against the common tendency in screenwriting circles to speak about 'the Script' (singular) and screenwriting, in very authoritative ways...It also allows us to focus on an essential and neglected aspect of the history of screenwriting practice: which is how critics and writers invented a practice in discourse (2009, 15).

A number of key discursive constructs are examined in detail and highlight Maras' concerns, such as the historical separation of conception from execution within the Hollywood-centric industry, particularism within the field of screenwriting and the construction of discourses around the 'sovereign script' and differing perspectives of the role(s) of the script within wider film production processes, of the screenplay as literature. Maras also marshals an unparalleled amount of discursive information, drawn from early and contemporary 'How-to' manuals, mainstream and 'alternative'[45] conceptions of screenplay form and content, a variety of theoretical engagements with the topic, from Russian filmmakers of the 1920s such as Eistenstein and Vertov to Janet Staiger and her 'modes' of Hollywood production to Balazs' discussions of the script as a literary form. Maras'

---

[45] Note Maras problematises the notion of 'alternative' screenwriting and approaches to the craft, noting that this 'othering' process perpetuates the notion that there is a set of standards within theory and practice that dominate the discourses of screenwriting (see for example 2009, 171-17).

book offers the only extensive historical and theoretical survey of this field meaning it operates at the level(s) of historical and discursive analysis only. Maras focuses on the goal of illuminating the 'object problem' within the field: "the difficulty of both defining screenwriting as an object, and identifying an object for screenwriting" (2009, 11). This theoretical and textual-based approach provides a foundational text for the field which was, as noted above, previously undeveloped and dispersed. I see Maras and MacDonald as two important influences on my own thinking and approach and my project continues to 'fill in the gaps' which these two authors open up whilst also opening up new 'gaps', bridged by my own theoretical and empirical data.

Conclusion

This review presents an original theoretical trajectory that provides a specific and innovative framework for the analysis of screenwriting labour. Concepts from immaterial labour to reflexivity, subjectivity and 'technologies of the self' in creative work, creative workers and their documented experiences in the UK, USA and Europe, notions of authorship within screen studies and the structure of the fields of literary and screen production have been marshalled and critiqued. In drawing together these paradigms, I offer a reinvigorated theoretical vocabulary for a project focused on screenwriters as creative workers in order to extend both theories of creative labour and theories of screenwriting. This vocabulary consists of a number of terms and discursivities – old and new, craft and creative, individualised and collaborative, atomised, partial and standardised.

This vocabulary enables a unique theorisation which centres on both the exemplary and idiosyncratic features of creative work and screenwriting work today. The particular dynamics of this case study can be seen in all their slippery glory within the various issues this review has illuminated: definitions of 'creativity', 'craft' and 'creative labour' as they are routinely deployed in discourse and theory; processes of both individualisation and collaboration within screen production and forms of writing in particular; the partial or liminal position of screenplays themselves (and therefore screenwriters as 'authors'); the various industrial 'modes' of screenwriting labour and the variety of experiences that screenwriters may have within this form of industrial cultural production. These are issues which will be further illuminated in chapter two in which processes of self-theorisation and self-mythologisation will be outlined in relation to the contested histories of screenwriting labour in Hollywood. Contemporary labour relations in Hollywood and in one of Hollywood's principal 'satellite' locations, London, will also be analysed.

Chapter Two - Making screenwriting labour intelligible: The phenomenon of the Hollywood screenwriter and the dynamics of contemporary screenwriting labour

```
I think there's a significant problem in that if you come
with an original piece, you can often be put in the
position of having to sell everything, sell all your
rights to it in order to get it off the ground, and then
you can be taken off your own project, and I think that's
morally reprehensible, you know it's legally reasonable
but it's really inappropriate, you don't buy a piece of
art and then go, I think I'll have this repainted by
Damien Hurst, if you want to commit to somebody's own
personal project then you have to commit to it in a
serious way, so there's a big problem and I think it's a
historic problem, that writers started off as being
studio hired hands.
```

(Sandra K. in conversation, 2009)

2. Introduction

Screenwriting as a historical phenomenon can be traced through the documented accounts of the screenwriter and the practice of screenwriting within Hollywood. This serves as an extension of chapter one, focusing on the processes of myth-creation that have built up around the subjectivity and persona of the screenwriter and filling out and further distinguishing the phenomenon of screenwriting as an exemplary, particular creative form. Building on the generalised image of the lone 'writer in a garret' associated with other forms of literary authorship, the iconic myth of the screenwriter borne in the early days of Hollywood cinema and now toiling in a gilded and Hollywoodised garret will be tracked and traced in this chapter. The features of this mythic persona - historically unappreciated for their particular skillset, sidelined and marginalised in screen production industries, supremely confident and yet wounded and isolated - has become central to

the phenomenon of screenwriting and the collective identity of the screenwriting community both in and outside Hollywood.[1]

Histories of Hollywood-based screenwriting[2] represent a scattered body of work but offer a number of insights into an ongoing process of self-theorisation and self-mythologisation on the part of the screenwriting community and commentators within this community.[3] Particular origin stories and grand narratives are repeated across the histories, and this myth-making project has served to solidify a particular self-perception on the part of the industrially-oriented screenwriter.[4] The crudest and most potent version of this phenomenon, the degraded, deskilled, marginalised screenwriter-as-supplicant, is evoked again and again in the writings of Hollywood-based individuals. For example, a quote from the seminal work of anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker is used in one of the few contemporary discussions of screenwriting as history and practice:

> the writers are part of the production of pictures rather than authors. A bon mot in the community is that 'writers in Hollywood do not have works, but are workers'…In Hollywood, the writer does not write to be read (1950, 150-1 cited in Maras, 2009, 52).

In this chapter I will echo these self-mythologising processes by 'setting up', to use a screenwriting term, some of the key foundational moments - from the early years of the 'scenario writer' and into the Golden Era of Hollywood filmmaking in the studio system - which have fuelled a standard historical narrative. I illustrate the investment that screenwriters themselves have in these histories, histories which are arguably circulated and re-circulated in discourse (for example, in the histories

---

[1] I would like to acknowledge that there is a highly gendered element to this 'mythic' figure which I am aware of and which means I deploy these 'myths' throughout this thesis with caution and with an ongoing concern about this issue. The histories of Hollywood screenwriting are dominated by male screenwriters (women were prominent in the era of scenario writing but had almost disappeared by the studio era) as figures and as authors - it is male screenwriters who are re-presented in filmic form as archetypal brash yet 'tortured' writers (this extends from films such as *Sunset Boulevard*, (1950) up to contemporary texts such as Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2004) and in fact, Kaufman himself plays to this masculinised myth). In chapter six, I use terms offered to me by interviewees such as screenwriter-as-'geek' which undoubtedly has masculinist overtones. Although I have not had room to give this issue the space it deserves, it is a fruitful area of theorisation I would like to return to in relation to theories of creativity as masculinity (see Nixon and Crewe, 2004 for some discussion).

[2] Often, these histories have flowed from writers themselves (such as Marc Norman) and writers based in Hollywood at different points in time have contributed to the self-mythologising process in numerous ways, through novelisations about Hollywood for example, often with screenwriters as central characters - Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1941).

[3] I make this distinction because some screenwriters have written key texts and thus speak from 'within' the community and other authors have made a name as expert commentators on the history – Tom Stempel in particular.

[4] This self-perception has also appeared in particular onscreen portrayals of writers from *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) to *Barton Fink* (1991).

themselves and in interviews with screenwriters from particular eras).[5] This is certainly the view of Maras who, in one of the few critical accounts of the discursive construction of screenwriting history, argues that these histories can be analysed in the first instance as particularist – that over time, writers have tried to "define a legitimate space for the screenwriter as craftsperson" (2009, 25) and have often used historical moments as sites to further define and proscribe their place(s) within screen production industries more widely.[6] More precisely, Maras argues that certain discursive concepts have structured this particularism such as the notion of the script as a written plan or 'blueprint' and the separation of conception and execution in the Hollywood Studio system which now "permeates our ideas about the script" (Ibid., 21). So he sees these foundational ideas playing out in various historical accounts, from Staiger's discussion of 'modes of film practice' to Stempel's straight chronological history. These accounts privilege the 'sovereign script' as central to film production processes and, of course, legitimate the screenwriter's role within those processes. For Maras, this means that alternative definitions of screenwriting which are less invested in the screenplay as written form or are more expansive in their definitions of craft and creativity[7] are purged from the popular historical and discursive record: "Any idea that the event of shooting, of writing with the camera, or with light, or with bodies, might function as a system of writing, falls by the wayside" (2009, 42).

So the key historical accounts that have proven durable and continue to serve as conduits for self-theorising processes are invested in particular concepts – the standardisation of screenwriting craft over time, the concomitant separation of craft from creativity, the brutalisation and marginalisation of writers, the politicisation of Hollywood-based writers in order to tackle marginalisation – all are discussed here as rhetorical devices which serve as mechanisms of intelligibility and collegiality for contemporary screenwriters. These mechanisms anchor screenwriting workers, enable them to more deftly calculate and navigate the industrial dynamics of contemporary screen production. They are also deployed in the locations in which screenwriting work is taught - screenwriting manuals and

---

[5] For example the Backstory series, edited by Patrick McGilligan offers a seminal collection of interviews with writers from each decade which bolsters the historical record with personal perspectives and insights from Hollywood-based writers in the 'Golden Age' (*Backstory, 1*986), in the 40s and 50s (*Backstory 2,* 1991), in the 60s (*Backstory 3,* 1997), 70s and 80s (*Backstory 4,* 2006) and 1990s (*Backstory 5,* 2010).

[6] For example, the movement of writers from East to West Coasts in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s is a site in which, Maras argues, particularist discourses about screenwriting as a unique creative profession were first circulated.

[7] As I stated in the introduction, I acknowledge that my focus on mainstream and anglocentric screenwriting history certainly excludes a number of independent, non-mainstream and avant-garde forms of screenwriting work that might exemplify the alternatives offered here by Maras. A number of filmmakers have explicitly rejected the notion of the 'sovereign' script (for example, Jean Luc Godard, a proponent of auteur theory in his writings and practice) or have pursued more wholly collaborative forms of filmmaking (see Murphy, 2010 for discussion of the decenter-ing of the screenplay in American independent filmmaking).

pedagogical frameworks rely on forms of industrial intelligibility and currency to reduce disciplinary and industrial anxiety - to offer 'all the answers' to budding and established writers.

I will flag up some key moments in the histories which have been circulated and maintained as central to the grand narratives which prop up the contemporary phenomenon of screenwriting work and which have radiated out from Hollywood, permeating other mainstream film industries in the process. This is a necessary strategy on my part to trace a genealogy of the industrial screenwriter from the Hollywood-centric histories to the British-based, 'professional creative' screenwriter working today. As I echo the documented histories and definitional anecdotes, I will illustrate where the investments lie in the kinds of stories that are told about the development of industrial screenwriting and where screenwriters have been positioned - and have positioned themselves - in these narratives.

2.1. Early histories – defining screenwriting work and workers

The general perception gained from reading accounts of the development of screenwriting as a form of work in the pre-studio era - the era of the 'scenario writer' – is a time of a proliferation of opportunities for budding writers in which creative roles in the new industry of screen production were characterised by multiplicity and multivalency.[8] This era is viewed as one of freedom and creative ferment – scenario writers, we are told, commanded prestige in this new writerly field, often juggled a number of creative roles, were prolific and rewarded for their originality and work ethic, were well-treated and respected. Roy McCardell is widely cited as the first person hired for the specific job of writing for motion pictures. As the histories make clear, his career mirrors the careers of contemporary screenwriters, a rhetorical technique which establishes palpable links between past scenario-writers and present screenwriters – he had previously been a journalist and also wrote novels and plays. He was taken on by the Biograph company on a salary of US$200 per week to write 'stories' and very quickly, this led to a demand for 'scenario writers' to write short scenarios for filming and then to the development of 'story departments' within each motion picture production company (Stempel, 1988, 4). Scenario writers in the silent era also read and evaluated story material from outside sources (much like the contemporary labour of 'coverage') and early writers undertook multiple roles within the company they were contracted to. These early

---

[8] An interesting parallel could be drawn here between this era and its defining features for scenario writers as creative workers, with the 'new cultural economy' in which flexibility, multivalency and so on are once again buzz-words for fulfilling and autonomous forms of work as I discussed in chapter one.

scenarists[9] exemplify familiar contemporary tropes of the new cultural economy such as flexibility. For example, Gene Gauntier, a prominent early writer, wrote, edited, acted, directed, made costumes, sets, props and performed stunts. As Stempel puts it, "For her first scenarios Gauntier was paid US$20 per reel while the director was paid only US$10, an indication of the relative value the company placed on writers and directors" (1988, 8). The figure of the early scenario writer offers a compelling central character in the origin story. Quotes and vignettes abound that serve to illustrate the freedom and playfulness scenarists enjoyed and exhibited. Gauntier wrote in the 1920s, "The woods were full of ideas…A poem, a picture, a short story, a scene from a current play, a headline in a newspaper. All was grist that came to my mill" (quoted in Norman, 2007, 26).

The historical record deploys facts and figures here in support of the free-wheeling scenario writer, illustrating the rapid turnaround of the work; anecdotes emphasise the dashing-out of a deluge of short scenarios and the increased demand for such work. Most stories were bought, filmed and released within three months and the high turn-over created a palpable demand for story material so by the mid 1910s, the rates of pay for scenarios were steadily increasing (Hamilton, 1990, 7). By the early teens, the mythic narrative is already preoccupied with the theme of the standardisation of the form and the work of scenarists is characterised as pioneering forms of continuous story-telling on screen.[10] This free-wheeling writing was also rapidly normalised to a single page for a one-reel film - very basic scenes were described and typed out and there was no written dialogue but there were written titles which were inserted between the filmed scenes in post-production. Thus the scenarios themselves are positioned as forming the framework and rudimentary structure for the subsequent photoplay and for the eventual standardised screenplay.

Coupled with the increase in demand for stories was a rash of books published on how to write screen stories, the very early precursors to contemporary 'How-to' manuals. These included Eustace Hale Ball's '*Cinema Plays: How to Write Them, How to Sell Them'* (1917), J. Arthur Nelson's '*The Photo-Play: How to Write, How to Sell'* (1913) and Epes Winthrop Sargent's '*The Technique of the Photoplay'* which went through three editions from 1912 to 1920 (Stempel, 1988, 14). As I will

---

[9] There is an interesting contemporary parallel here in that Hollywood-based screenwriters navigating the 'spec script' market now routinely sell scenarios/premises to television networks for established programs as they gain industrial currency. Jane Espenson discusses this in an interview about 'breaking in' to the industry on the independent radio program 'The Sound of Young America' in January 2010. Available at: http://www.maximumfun.org/sound-young-america/jane-espenson-caprica-executive-producer-interview-sound-young-america

[10] Interestingly, historical research has shown this work of the development of narrative design occurred both inside and outside Hollywood. Azlant (1997) provides a biographical discussion of the 'pioneers' of the Silent Era within Hollywood and Raynauld (1997) offers a French perspective on the 'progression of narrative construction and storytelling' in relation to early French screenwriting for example.

discuss in more detail in chapter four, the 'How-to' context for the teaching of screenwriting work is a central platform for the circulation and maintenance of standards and conventions and these early manuals indicate that this discourse is not a recent phenomenon. This early publishing period is often referred to within the wider context of 'scenario fever' which, fed by encouragement of public submission of story ideas, facilitated, "a goldrush mentality" (Azlant, 1980 cited in Maras, 2009, 141) and a "mass publication of handbooks between 1912 and 1920" (Ibid., 139).[11] Maras (2009) ties his discussion of early handbooks to the developing collective identity of screenwriters and his wider notion of the "particularism" embedded within the discursive formations of industrial screenwriting. He argues that early handbooks often made reference to the need to carve out a space for screenwriters, to draw borders around their craft and thus offer some protection from hostile directors, studio executives and so on. As with contemporary titles, Maras argues that many early How-To authors invoke a sense of 'insider knowledge' and "the particularist impulse informing the handbook genre gives it a pedagogic quality, separating players from non-players in a broader game of industry, in which industrial knowledge belongs to a social minority" (2009, 163). Thus the early development of the 'How-to' platform for the construction and teaching of scenario writing can also be read as a zone of intelligibility and collegiality. Here, the codes and conventions of the form, the elements of visuality which writing for the screen required, were carved out and legitimated.

A consistent theme in this early period of myth-creation is the perceived fluidity of roles within the film production business and particular early figures exemplify this flexibility – a flexibility which, arguably (and lamentably for many writers and commentators), recedes as the rigid divisions of labour in the Studio Era come into focus. Processes of rationalisation and standardisation are characterised as exemplifying the inexorable movement towards increased efficiency and continuity in screen production processes. For example, Thomas Ince, a prominent writer-director of this early period is widely cited as developing the classical narrative style of American filmmaking by emphasising continuity in his scenario writing and in the filming process (Stempel, 1988, 41). He listed scenes to be shot together and created schedules for cast and crew which other directors such as D.W. Griffith had not bothered with. For Staiger (1982), Ince's continuity scripts were integral to

_____

[11] It's important to note that the 'scenario fever' of the early twentieth century also spawned a rapid growth in the teaching of scenario and photoplay writing according to Azlant (1980, 131). This is in conjunction with the rapid growth in 'How-To' titles themselves: "Azlant observes that 'over *ninety* books in English on the silent scenario, many by accomplished scenarists or studio scenario writers, were published from 1910 through 1920' (1980, 134, emphasis in original) (Maras, 2009, 144). A number of texts were also published in the UK in the 1920s and 30s and Gritten (2008) argues that they played a key role in the development of narrative techniques in the age of the British 'talkie'. Again, there are contemporary resonances - I note in chapters five and six that a number of my own interviewees had previously or were currently writing 'How-to' manuals to supplement their writing work.

the separation of the conception and production phases of filmmaking which exemplifies a Taylorist division of labour and for Maras (2009) this theme is one which has shaped the particularist discourses of screenwriting. According to him, from the earliest moments in the history of screenwriting, the separation of conception and execution is a process used to differentiate screenwriting from other forms of dramatic/fictional writing. Ince's scripts were precise in their detail, including instructions on costumes, shots and blocking of actors and Ince reportedly rubber-stamped all his final scripts, 'Produce exactly as written' (Norman, 2001, 44). C. Gardner Sullivan (reportedly the highest paid screenwriter of the silent era) worked frequently with Ince and their collaborative work is cited as producing some of the first scripts which specified elements of visual composition. Hamilton cites one in particular:

> SCENE L: CLOSE-UP ON BAR IN WESTERN SALOON
>
> > A group of good Western types of the early period are drinking at the bar and talking idly-much good fellowship prevails and every man feels at ease with his neighbour-one of them glances off the picture and the smile fades from his face to be replaced by the strained look of worry-the others notice the change and follow his gaze-their faces reflect his own emotions-be sure to get over a good contrast between the easy good nature that had prevailed and the unnatural, strained silence that follows-as they look, cut (1990, 11-12).

Ince is also cited as ushering in a process which emphasised organisation but sidelined creativity and artistic freedom. Norman writes that "Ince took assembly-line techniques, perfected by manufacturing giants like Henry Ford, and applied them to the movie industry" (2007, 44). A historical figure such as Ince is deployed to illustrate the first signs of the degradation of the screenwriter's creative process under the strictures of an industrial production system. As Staiger writes, the application of scientific management to screen production leads to a separation which "destroys an ideal of the whole person, both the creator and the producer of one's ideas" (1982, 96).

Mack Sennett who produced comedies for the Keystone Company is another villainous character who looms large at this time, embodying the producer-driven desire to separate out the heads and hands of his screenwriter lackeys. He hired a team of 'gag writers' but the gags conceived to be filmed were never written down. Instead they were spoken to one another and then 'pitched' to Sennett. Norman writes that "Sennett nursed a perpetual mistrust of his writers...he built a tower on the lot with a glassed-in penthouse so he could glower down at his writers along with his other employees" and that he had an "aversion to the written word" (2007, 58). Again, these anecdotes

are presented as evidence of Sennett's calculated strategy of degrading his writers' craft and skills and maintaining a 'collective anonymous output' in order to control both story conception and production. For Norman, this illustrates an underlying antagonism between producers and writers, a theme which can be traced right through the history of screenwriting in Hollywood. The enlightened but vulnerable figure of the screenwriter is pitted against the brutish, efficiency-obsessed producer determined to control the outputs of their writers and to deny those outputs the 'creative' label, by effectively severing the ties between hand and head. No matter how crude these early characterisations, the rhetorical effect is to make the screenwriter intelligible as a player in the promising early days of the screen production industry - a maverick and a pioneer, embodied by the figure of the scenario writer, with the potential to command a central and multivalent position within this new realm of cultural production but also subordinated and almost immediately handicapped by those who recognise this potential but wish to deny screenwriters such centrality and flexibility.

By the late teens, independent production companies were beginning to form major studios and for the new studio moguls, vertical integration of the production system, including control of distribution and exhibition was the strategy which would clearly reap the highest profits. For the heads of production, control of a project could be harnessed through the script and a strict division of labour enabled greater control over the entire production process, according to Stempel (1988, 51). Tension was mounting by the early 1920s between writers and directors (who were again, being separated out within the early studio structures) and Stempel quotes William De Mille who argued, "the two crafts (writing and directing) became theoretically separated but never actually untangled" (1988, 56). MacDonald (2007) also emphasises this in his discussion of British silent filmmaking from 1910 to 1930, arguing that early British screenwriters 'picturised' the films they wrote as well as dramatically structuring them (i.e. they specified shot sizes and offered instructions for actors for example) but that by the 1930s, industrial practices inherited from Hollywood were 'rationalising' the dominance of the director as the principal 'author' of a film.[12] Again, the theme of separation of conception and execution serves as an intelligible device, ensuring a wrenching historical account of the newly-minted screenwriter as increasingly alienated from her own labour.

---

[12] MacDonald (2007) offers examples of the work of Elliot Stannard, in particular, his script for *The Bachelors Club* (1921) to illustrate this but also emphasises the lack of primary source material for early British screenwriting which hampers any authoritative conclusions being drawn here. He suggests at least, that auteur theory is a problematic theoretical lens through which to examine practices of early British screenwriting.

An additional theme which imbues these early foundational narratives is the tension between new and more established forms of authorship, a theme which is calibrated with the wider battle for legitimacy that dominates the subsequent discourse about screenwriting as a liminal literary form. The sense here from historians is that screenwriters increasingly sat uneasily between the worlds of literature (theatre-writing most specifically) and filmmaking and that this led to wider debates on familiar polarising terrain: art versus commerce, craft versus creativity, artist versus hack. Many histories describe the push in this early period (led by Samuel Goldwyn) towards the hiring of well-known authors and playwrights to write screenplays in order to lend the Hollywood industry credibility as a legitimate art-form. It is made clear however, that this was not initially a successful strategy. As Hamilton puts it, "The eminent authors [lured from New York] complained about the cavalier way in which Goldwyn's story department handled their material; the Goldwyn actors and directors were suspicious of their boss's new valuation of the writer's status" (1990, 18).

The hiring of 'East Coast' authors did lead to some telling consequences in that the rivalry between the New York literary establishment and the burgeoning industry in Southern California with its scenario departments was firmly established and circulated in subsequent foundation narratives. For Stempel this is important symbolically in that it strengthened the developing view (implicit within the early treatment of writers by producers such as Sennett and therefore worked into the mythology of the hard-done-by screenwriter) that screenwriting was (and is) not a legitimate literary and thus artistic form of cultural production. One of these 'eminent authors' Elmer Rice, is quoted in Norman, discussing the nature of the work:

> Apart from its photographic technology, in which I took no interest and which will forever be a mystery to me, I found that picture making was merely a greatly simplified form of playmaking. The absence of dialogue and the rather limited aesthetic and intellectual capacity of the mass audience for whose entertainment films were designed necessitated a concentration upon scenes of action: melodramatic, comic, erotic. Wit and poetry were of course excluded (2007, 62).

Schultheiss (1971) argues that this first 'wave' of writers from the East experienced a creative rupture in the shift from their theatrical roots to the new medium of screenwriting. On the one hand, this historical moment was characterised by an unwillingness on the part of the authors to understand and adapt to cinematic narrative structure and devices. He quotes William de Mille (a playwright who had come to Hollywood earlier than the other eminent authors):

The gentlemen from Broadway decided at once to disregard such picture technic as we had been able to evolve and to follow more closely their rules of the theatre…They disdained the close-up method of telling a story, thereby losing that value of greater intimacy which is one of the screen's advantages over the stage. They played most of their scenes in long ensemble shots which, from a screen standpoint, left many of their characters out of the action at any given moment. In short, while being compelled to retain all the liabilities of picture form, they rejected its few hard-won assets (1971, 15).

On the other hand, Schultheiss notes that some authors found too much room in writing for the screen, becoming "intoxicated by the freedom of screen style" (Ibid., 15). De Mille again explains this as leading to scripts in which action was often "in danger of being entirely lost in physical movement" (Ibid.) Overall, Schultheiss suggests that while this first wave of 'eminent' authors were considered unsuccessful, they injected a new rigour into the screenwriting profession and a sense that standards needed to be raised beyond the "loose scenarios hastily scribbled by studio hacks for careless directors" (Griffiths, cited in Schultheiss, 1971, 17). These early accounts serve as conduits for the establishment of the myth of the screenwriter and have proven strikingly durable. The figure of the 'flexible' scenario writer or the Eastern author lured to Hollywood and unable to adapt to this new form of 'picture technic' quickly come to signify the particular and enduring anxieties of screenwriting work: the push and pull of words and images which necessitate new forms of 'visual' authorship but which then complicate its 'literary' status; the connected push and pull of notions of craft and creativity as the conventions of the screenwriting form develop; the unsettling divisions between conception and execution or between writing and directing that industrial screen production rapidly produces. As the standardisation of screen production becomes more and more central to the origin story of the screenwriter, it is again, the themes of alienation and degradation of the writer that dominate screenwriting histories.

The standardisation of Hollywood narrative itself which aided the studios' overall push towards streamlined production and mass consumption of feature films offers another historical trope to which many commentators hitch anecdotes and events. Again, this presents evidence for the rapid erosion of artistic autonomy and creative freedom for the screenwriter as a new kind of writer. For Norman a fresh and archetypal narrative structure can be traced through the work of the early filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith and writers such as Gauntier and Loos, but also (as 'How-to' texts would highlight) back to Greek narrative. As he puts it,

a protagonist is introduced with a goal, a desire with which the audience can sympathise, and then an antagonist is introduced, as an individual or a representative of an opposing force, standing in his or her way. The movie becomes their conflict, and its sequences become the more or less linear escalation of the struggle…This seamless conflict built to a third-act confrontation-the climax-and ended with a resolution that fit the mode, death in a tragedy and marriage, most typically, in a comedy (2007, 63).

The advent of sound in the late 1920s is another seminal event which fundamentally shifted and ultimately, as historians argue, further standardises the work and content of screenplays. Gritten (2008) discusses this in the British context, illustrating that it was within early British screenwriting manuals that struggles over 'the technique of the talkie' played out. Within Hollywood, sound use was calibrated to an already-established professional practice for screenwriters; so, techniques developed that dealt with the new technological limitations (movement of camera and actors was restricted by the bulky recording equipment) and emphasised narrative continuity. According to Gritten, processes such as the development of dialogue writing were more contested in the UK by 'minority' filmmakers who "attempted to forge a specific medium of storytelling based on the primacy of visual movement" (2008, 277). By the early 1930s, scripts were much reduced in description of action in favour of dialogue (Stempel, 1988, 59).

Overall, by the 1920s according to the Hollywood-centric narrative, screenwriters were becoming well-versed in the accepted narrative template for scripts and in the limited genres which had developed. Gritten argues there was a "mainstream convergence in practice" in the 1930s, through screenwriting manuals in both the Hollywood and British film industries which established and maintained a "hierarchy of story values" - the cinematic dialogue serving the narrative arc as a whole (2008, 271). As Norman argues, a limited range of stories and settings provided an ideal economic model both in terms of the everyday needs of a production and the marketing of studio films. A single western set on the studio lot could be used again and again to produce a number of films that then fitted the expectations of an audience now used to this limited number of narrative frameworks. This also meant that the job of the screenwriter becomes straightforward, rote and predictable within the foundational narrative:

> screenwriters learned to mould and hew their output to fit the template and so save time, and it provided the front office with a basis to judge a writer's screenplay and a vague but finite vocabulary to use when it set out to change or improve it (Norman, 2007, 64).

Processes of myth-creation in relation to Hollywood-centred screenwriting also focus on the second wave of writers from the East, hired in the mid 1920s - including Ben Hecht, William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald - who had some productive success. An oft-cited telegram which is repeated with zeal by writers and historians comes from Herman Mankiewicz to Ben Hecht and reads,

> Will you accept 300 per week to work for Paramount Pictures. All expenses paid.
> The 300 is peanuts. Millions are to be grabbed out here and your only competition
> is idiots. Don't let this get around (Stempel, 1988, 64).

Here, the maverick screenwriter re-appears and the myth-creation is fuelled by a cheeky and unruly set of voices. This could be read as a discursive reaction to the perceived degrading and deskilling processes already underway – confidence and brashness appear within anecdotes about particular iconic writers that mask anxiety and insecurity. The key to 'success' as a contract writer at this time seems to be learning the form and style of the medium, along with the inner workings of the industry, as quickly as possible. Mankiewicz also instructed Hecht on the narrative rules of the time:

> I want to point out to you…that in a novel a hero can lay ten girls and marry a
> virgin for a finish. In a movie this is not allowed. The hero, as well as the heroine,
> has to be a virgin. The villain can lay anybody he wants, have as much fun as he
> wants cheating and stealing, getting rich and whipping the servants. But you have
> to shoot him in the end (cited in Norman, 2007, 90).

Here the myth fuels professional confidence for a screenwriter to compensate for degraded creative labour in an increasingly hostile industry. There is also evidence of more sophisticated processes of occupational differentiation. So, these stories illustrate the need to shed literary habits and adjust to the dictates of the screenwriting 'craft' and historians note that many of these authors had difficulty with the shift in style; some had trouble understanding the tone of speech needed for screen dialogue for example (Stempel, 1988, 63) but we are told that many quickly adapted in order to reap the large financial rewards available.[13] Ben Hecht described it thus:

> The writer intent on 'doing his best' has to expose that best to critical blasts that
> mow him down, two times out of three. And if he wants to keep serving his art, he

---

[13] Schultheiss uses Mankiewicz's example to illustrate the large pay packets which attracted this second wave of writers. He cites Pauline Kael who notes his base salary was US$40, 800 his first year and US$56,000 by his second. This is in contrast to the livings which the writers eked out writing novels and/or plays. Nathanael West described grossing US$780 in the course of three years and two published books (1971, 21)

and his lacerations must lead a sort of a hall-bedroom existence…The movies
solved such matters. There were no critics to mow him down. The writer of a film
is practically anonymous. It's a pleasant anonymity (cited in Schultheiss, 1971,
20).

Maras (2009) argues that this period marks a key historical moment which solidified the developing
discourses around the distinctiveness of screenwriting in comparison to other writerly forms. For
Stempel, the key point is that it was with this wave of writers working within the wider context of
the time that the myth of Hollywood as the 'destroyer of literary talent' along with the consequent
view (primarily from New York) of these writers as 'prostituting their talents', pervaded the
overarching view of screenwriting and the developing myth of the screenwriter from this point on.
This historical project is populated with rhetorical devices - particular themes, particular figures,
particular moments in time - that promote the increasing intelligibility of screenwriting work as it
develops as a new form of creative labour and a form of industrial writing. Arguably, as this work is
further degraded in the Hollywood studio era, this project becomes more concrete and coherent.

2.2. The studio era and the degradation of screenwriting work

The studio system was, of course, centred on the activities of the various studios who grew out of
this period and had oligopolistic control of the production process. Here we see the beginnings of
the centralised corporate control of industrial screen production that, whilst it saw a number of
iterations in subsequent decades, has continued to dictate the organisation of mainstream
filmmaking inside and outside Hollywood. At this point, the histories converge on a number of
powerful figures (the studios and their bosses) and a number of now-familiar and enduring images -
writers as 'schmucks', as inherently and necessarily replaceable. Each studio had complete control
over their labour force – directors, writers, stars and technical crew - and pioneered various ways to
maintain control. Each studio also pioneered particular styles which connect to the documented
experiences of the writers and directors who worked within them. For example, MGM was viewed
as the biggest and best studio of the period, particularly in relation to the talent it owned. It had the
most stars on contract and also hired the best-known writers wherever possible. For Stempel, "the
image of the screenwriter in Hollywood became that of the screenwriter at MGM" (1988, 70). It
was often the studio heads who instituted the various regimes of control within the studios and
serve as the necessary antagonists in the historical narrative.

At MGM, Louis B. Mayer, and subsequently Irving Thalberg had a lasting effect on the position of screenwriters within the industry generally. Thalberg both respected and charmed his writers according to Stempel but also pioneered an even more extreme division of labour. He developed the routine practice (which filtered outwards to other studios) of hiring more than one writer or teams of writers to write the same script, often without the others knowing it (1988, 71).[14] Thalberg and his producers would then shuffle various scenes from the many scripts into a shooting script and after the film was shot, it would often be further reworked or rewritten after preview screenings. Another strategy to maximise output we are told, was to assign "several screenwriters on several ideas per star at the same time, knowing some of the scripts would work, some wouldn't" (Norman, 2007, 15). Because films were strictly star-centred in this era, this was a strategy to have star vehicles lined up so that actors were shifted from project to project with no costly development time in between. Again, "more scripts were assigned than films budgeted" (Ibid.) leading to a large amount of redundant script material that would never be used but a highly efficient production system overall. However, this process clearly affected the view the writers had of their vocation as William de Mille (writing in 1939) explains:

> the writer naturally lost his sense of artistic responsibility. Constantly rewriting
> the work of others and knowing that his own work, in turn, would be changed and
> changed again, he simply did the best he could and took comfort in his salary
> (cited in Schultheiss, 1971, 26).

So we have a particular case here of a process of collective self-theorisation which articulates a set of views that are still routinely evoked by contemporary writers: that their work is never their own, that their writing is always at the behest of others and that the money is the only recompense for such brutal working conditions which would be unthinkable for any other mode of authorship. Interestingly at this time, the writers who were given credit on particular films were often those who simply worked on it last and had polished the shooting script or rewritten sections of dialogue. Writer Donald Ogden Stewart describes this situation and its consequences:

> The first thing you had to learn as a writer if you wanted to get screen credit was
> to hold off until you knew they were going to start shooting…If you could
> possibly screw-up another writer's script, it wasn't beyond you to do that so your
> script would come through at the end. It became a game to be the last one before
> they started shooting (cited in Norman, 2007, 142).

---

[14] Norman notes that this practice was called "following" within the business (2007, 135).

For the writers working in this milieu, this system was deeply problematic, especially as credits became more central to the reputations of individual writers. Stempel notes that it was at MGM that the first stirrings of what became the Writers Guild were felt (1988, 72). Because of Thalberg's management style, the films themselves are often viewed as episodic and disjointed, a possible consequence of the process of cobbling numerous scripts together in order to extract the final product.

In contrast, Twentieth Century Fox was viewed as 'the studio of the writer' which had much to do with its head of production for twenty-one years, Daryl F. Zanuck. His view was that stories were more important than stars and he focused precisely on the narrative line and 'movement' of the films he produced. Respected writers such as Philip Dunne and Nunnally Johnson worked at Fox for many years and worked collaboratively with Zanuck. Zanuck often had writers working serially but not simultaneously on Fox films (Stempel, 1988, 78-79). However, a derisive and suspicious view of screenwriters prevailed at this time amongst studio bosses. The head of Warner Brothers, Jack Warner, referred to writers as 'schmucks with Underwoods' (Ibid., 85) and is rumoured to have sneaked to the writers' rooms on his studio lot to see if the writers were typing.[15] Another anecdote of the time has the head of Columbia, Harry Cohn, listening to the clacking of typewriter keys from his writers and screaming 'Liars!' Jack Warner had strict rules about his writers' conduct:

> A writer was not permitted on the set without written permission from Jack Warner...A writer was never invited to see his rushes. He was never invited to a preview. If he wanted to see his own picture on the screen, he paid his money and went and saw them (cited in Norman, 2007, 136).

As the studio heads hired more producers to oversee the expanding production slates, they too utilised divisions of labour as Norman argues; for example, Harold Hurley, a Paramount producer, assigned different characters within a single story to different writers (Ibid., 139). Like the 'gag room' system of Mack Sennett, Norman notes that 'the oral tradition' was still key to the development process (because many of the studio heads refused to read the scripts themselves) and so writers were often subjected to 'conferences' in which they were forced to defend their decisions or agree to endless rewrites (Ibid., 140). Schultheiss quotes Raymond Chandler who vividly describes how the studio system debilitated 'the author's efforts of creation':

---

[15] An 'underwood' was the ubiquitous brand of typewriter used at the time.

It makes very little difference how a writer feels towards his producer as a man; the fact that the producers can change and destroy and disregard his work can only operate to diminish that work in its conception and to make it mechanical and indifferent in execution…That which is born in loneliness and from the heart cannot be defended against the judgement of a committee of sycophants…There is little magic or emotion or situation which can remain alive after the incessant bonescraping revisions imposed on the Hollywood writer by the process of rule by decree (1971, 25).

As I have argued, such descriptions from historical players serve to fuel the self-perceptions and wider industrial logics that foreground the degraded positions of creative workers within the mass production system of the studio era – positions largely dependent on the will of others, those 'others' who maintained economic control over film production. Norman offers concrete evidence to illustrate the particular effect this had on the perceptions of writers, noting that during the Studio Era, writers' contracts were different to all other 'Hollywood artists' agreements because of the insertion of two phrases. The first was "the studio, hereinafter referred to as the author", thus explicitly acknowledging that the studio rather than the screenwriter was the author of the film. Secondly, writers were contracted for "a work for hire", signalling for Norman that writers were viewed as undertaking piecework like any other hired hand (2007, 132-133).

Stempel notes that there were some independent writers of the time who were not tied to a single studio, such as Ben Hecht and Dudley Nichols who worked with high-profile directors (Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford for example) but generally, "Screenwriters were more and more limited to being involved in merely the first step in the creation of films. They would develop the ideas and have an overall concept for the film but they had very little control over the final film" (1988, 123). To remedy this, many histories highlight the ways in which writers developed strategies to wrest creative control within the system. Some worked to become writer/directors and individuals (such as Preston Sturges) were able to exercise unprecedented creative control.[16] From the point of view of the studio heads, the way to reward individual writers was to periodically offer them producing roles which mitigated against having to improve working conditions for all screenwriters. With the direct control of the Hays Code in the 1930s writers also exercised illicit freedoms within the

_____

[16] Sturges negotiated an individual contract at Paramount in the 1930s. His spec script *The Power and the Glory (*1933) was sold to producer Jesse Lasky and within the deal signed, the film would be shot as written and Sturges had complete creative control. He was also paid a percentage of the gross as opposed to a flat fee which set an important precedent (Stempel, 1988, 95).

system by creating euphemisms for 'unacceptable' content[17] and Norman writes that "sneaking clever, minor things past the Hays Office became an indoor sport" (2007, 145).

These anecdotes signal a deeper underlying strategy according to these limited histories - writers calculating and navigating within this mode of authorship to protect the core elements of their narratives. Donald Ogden Stewart describes the strategising of the time: "I used always to write three or four scenes which I knew would be thrown out, in order that we could bargain with Joe Breen for the retention of other really important episodes or speeches" (cited in Norman, 2007, 145).[18] Increasingly, unionisation also became a viable option for writers to gain and maintain creative control over their writing and outside the Hollywood production system the Communist Party was an institution in which writers became active in response to their struggles within the industry. At this juncture, the increased politicisation and the collective, explicitly labourist identity of the screenwriter within Hollywood blooms and subsequent privileged moments in the histories[19] serve to solidify this collective identity. These dynamics also work to mitigate against the processes of degradation and marginalisation that, by this stage, have coagulated around the myth of the screenwriter.

This collection of scenes and players from the early part of the limited, Hollywood-centric historical record sets up a number of rhetorical devices which animate the persona of the screenwriter and the language used to construct her/his work. These are also devices which I argue resonate in the domain(s) of contemporary screenwriting work; screenwriting as potentially flexible but also as degraded and deskilled; screenwriting as standardised and craft-oriented, in contrast to other forms of writing; screenwriting as lucrative but as also compromised and thus impure; as commercially but not artistically legitimate. These all conjure up an anxious and tortured 'screenwriter-as-myth' and this is important in that these devices work to make this form of work intelligible and knowable to producers, audiences and writers themselves. A sense of collectivity is also fostered even in this early phase; a sense of shared purpose in terms of the writing itself and its 'standards' which are taught both formally, in 'How-to' manuals, and informally, through anecdotal stories, for example; a

---

[17] The Hays Code was explicit about 'plot material' that was unacceptable for moral reasons at this time. Material considered unacceptable included adultery, 'scenes of passion', murder, vulgarity and 'suggestive dancing' (Norman, 2007, 143-144).

[18] This mirrors the more contemporary forms of 'theatrical' navigation in script development in the UK which I discuss in my analysis in chapter six.

[19] Such as the formation of the Writers Guild and the HUAC Hollywood Blacklist of the 1950s.

communal history involving key 'players' from the worlds of scenario writing, theatre and other forms of authorship; and a common set of antagonists: studio bosses, producers and critics.

As I have already stated, this historical project serves as a conduit for the increased intelligibility and collegiality of screenwriting as a form of work. As the various modalities of the work come into focus - degraded writer-for-hire, script doctor, elite literary export, prominent writer-director - a sense of industrial and professional confidence blooms. It is upon these early rhetorical foundations that the contemporary persona of the industrial screenwriter and the contemporary modalities of screenwriting work are rooted.

It is also within these foundations that particular forms of worker currency are established, led by standard forms of currency such as the awarding of credits which become important in the studio era. There are also more intangible but no less potent forms of currency which writers begin to trade and exchange. For example, the collection and re-telling of horror stories, whether in relation to a Mack Sennett or an Irving Thalberg or a contemporary studio executive, become a strategy to gain and maintain professional capital that can be used to leverage respect, status and confidence within the filmmaking community. This again signals the ways in which screenwriters as creative workers navigate and negotiate the terrain on which they work - terrain at least partly shaped by these historical dynamics.

I now shift gear and move into the contemporary period, the period that has been characterised as post-Fordist and flexibly specialised by some theorists, but one in which, I argue, continuities are as palpable as changes in terms of production organisation. This may seem like a chronological lurch and one that does not cover other key moments in the historical record that deserve extensive discussion - the HUAC Blacklist of the 1950s[20] for example, or the rise of the Hollywood 'Brat Pack'[21] in the 1960s and 70s. I acknowledge that there is much more I could say about the development of the screenwriter-as-myth and that key figures and moments are not given space

---

[20] HUAC - the House UnAmerican Affairs Committee, saw the interrogation and prosecution of a number of Hollywood-based writers for Communist and 'Un-American' activities in the 1950s and is employed in historical accounts to illustrate the political machinations of 1950s American society. See both Stempel (1988) and Norman (2007) for useful discussion of this.

[21] Films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) or filmmakers such as Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, as well as European filmmakers like Francois Truffaut, are all cited as signaling a new 'transgressive' era in the 60s and 70s that enabled new forms of more wholly collaborative screen production outside the corporate control of the studios. A screenwriter/historian such as Norman makes it clear, however, that this era and its frequently-employed labels such as 'freedom' and 'creative ferment' did not preclude screenwriters continuing to be sidelined and subordinated by directors' egos, fueled by the auteur theory which was also gaining traction in the USA at this time (see chapter one).

here. However, I maintain that this early historical period and accounts of it have offered a way for me to illustrate how the industrial screenwriting that developed within Hollywood became intelligible as a form of authorship, as a new storytelling method and as a new form of creative work. I have also been able to focus on the development of forms of collectivity and currency for mainstream screenwriting work; forms which are still maintained and circulated in the worlds of industrial screen production in order to mitigate against the vagaries of the 'new cultural economy'. I will develop this further by moving directly into the theory on contemporary labour relations in Hollywood and the UK and will continue to focus on the rhetorical devices which fuel the persona of the screenwriter.

2.3. Contemporary labour relations in Hollywood

Theories of labour relations within Hollywood are the starting-point for this next section. Here, the intelligibility and collectivity of screenwriting as work and as myth will be more firmly rooted in a discussion of the unionisation of Hollywood screenwriters as well as the hierarchisation of the Hollywood labour market more generally. Measures of disciplinary anxiety and currency evolve within this landscape in particular ways. For example, the above- and below-the-line distinction echoes a more pronounced and concrete creativity-craft dichotomy and begins to separate out labour market sectors and the work that is perceived to illustrate this division. Forms of worker currency (such as the collection of credits and compulsory agency representation) which are used as tools for reputation building are more firmly entrenched. As Christopherson argues, 'new hierarchies' develop and begin to dictate the experiences of screenwriters at both the individual and collective levels. What I will illustrate is that the screenwriter-as-myth remains at the centre of these ongoing processes of intelligibility and collectivity, even as we move into the current organisational contexts of the Hollywood and London -centric industries.

Scott (2005) argues that the history of the Hollywood labour market can be divided into two episodes, as the general history of the Hollywood production system often is: the classical Studio era and the 'new Hollywood' era in the second half of the twentieth century. Scott (and other theorists such as Christopherson & Storper (1986; 1989) and Ross (1941)) argue that, within the classical studio system I have outlined, workers were hired under contract to particular studios, labouring as permanent employees for regular wages. This status applied to all workers from stars to writers to manual workers and technicians. Scott notes that there was some temporary or short-

term employment in the early years ('extras' work for actors for example) and that the studios and independent production companies were attentive to an 'optimal' labour force, hiring and firing people 'at the margins' when needed. However, the developments in early union movements do offer varying experiences for so-called 'craft' workers as opposed to 'talent' or creative workers. I will briefly outline some of the historical features of the unionisation movement, another element of the mythic narrative which is central and particular to the history of Hollywood-based writers. The unionisation of 'creative workers' here is peculiar. As I outlined in chapter one, creative labour theory is largely premised on the assumption that creative work is non-unionised, (and therefore) is post-Fordist, flexible and independent. The Writers Guild(s) of America (East and West branches) have played a central role in the ongoing collegial orientation of screenwriters based in the USA and beyond[22] and have been the collective mouthpiece for screenwriters' working interests since its inception.

Union organisation for semi-skilled 'craft' workers began in Hollywood in the 1920s writes Amman and, in 1926, the Association of Motion Picture producers (AMPP), which represented the five major studios of the time, entered into collective bargaining with the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) and this continued into the 1940s (1996, 115). After World War Two, IATSE locals negotiated the Basic Agreement with the AMPP which set wage levels, benefits and working conditions for the various sub-sectors of film production work. This Agreement remained intact throughout the late Studio Era and into the 50s and 60s and was adapted to meet the needs of television production (Amman, 1996, 117).

Early attempts at unionisation on the part of 'creative' (or 'talent') film workers on the other hand were knocked back by the studios and Scott notes that in the late 1920s, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was formed as a 'company union', to thwart attempts at labour organisation on the part of talent workers (2005, 119). It initially consisted of five branches representing actors, directors, producers, writers and technicians. As Ross puts it, "Individuals were admitted to membership by invitation, on the basis of distinguished accomplishment in the production of films. This procedure ensured the control of the organisation by a select few" (1941, 27). The Academy had a highly fractious relationship with workers which led to a number of

---

[22] Susan Rogers notes in her report for the UK Film Council (2007) 'Who Writes British Films' that many British writers are WGA members, many more than the Writers Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) which has a more marginal status in the UK film industry. She also writes that many writers of British-made films were only contactable in the course of the research via a Hollywood-based agent.

attempts to unionise within particular subsectors. The independent union movement in Hollywood gained momentum in the 1930s, with the Screen Actors Guild formed in 1933 as was the modern form of the Writers Guild. The passage of the National Labour Relations Act in 1935 then legislated for collective bargaining.

For Scott, the second episode in the history of Hollywood production from the 1950s onwards saw a profound shift to the externalisation of the employment relation:

> In this new order of things, perhaps the majority of workers now assumed temporary or freelance status, being taken on by production companies as limited-term employees or operating on a commission basis, and moving irregularly from job to job depending on the fluctuations of productive activity (2005, 117).

In practical terms, these shifts led to a much greater hierarchisation of the Hollywood labour markets, a process with the potential to undermine the intelligible screenwriter-as-myth as collectively oriented. Whilst stars were released from their contracts in large numbers they were able to "fully appropriate the rents due to their celebrity" (Scott, 2005, 120) and thus quickly rose to the top of the Hollywood food chain. For the vast majority of workers however, uncertainty and insecurity became central features of production work and new strategies were developed to deal with these new experiences. Scott argues:

> The human resource management functions of the firm now gave way to the self-management of workers. Equally, traditional forms of advancement based on the building up of firm-specific human capital and seniority were supplanted…by the establishment of reputation as the main currency of worker evaluation (Ibid.)

So, another form of currency becomes central to the navigations and calculations that writers must undertake. Reputation of course ties into the disciplinary currencies I have already identified: credits as material significations of talent and ability; horror stories representing more intangible 'battle scars' which signal the long-term survival mechanisms of particular writers and/or their ability to weather bad treatment from other filmmakers whilst still producing reputable and lucrative work.

Scott (2005) and Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell and Wang (2005) write that a key element of this profound change from permanent to insecure workers was codified within the new

classification system which distinguished workers according to labour-market power and was then enshrined within the production budgets of the films themselves - a curious phenomenon which undercuts the collegiality that widespread unionisation signals in this context. So 'above-the–line' workers are considered to be the key creative inputs for a film (such as stars, directors and writers), have individually negotiated salaries and "are named explicitly as line item entries in any project budget" (Scott, 2005, 121). Miller et. al. note that these workers are viewed as 'creative' and 'proactive' (2005, 119). In comparison, 'below-the-line' workers are the mass of 'reactive' or proletarian workers whose wages are determined by collective agreements or wage schedules so it is at this level that costs for films will be sought to be cut wherever possible. These two tiers are now represented by separate labour organisations; talent guilds such as the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Directors Guild of America (DGA) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) represent above-the-line workers and unions, particularly the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE)[23] represent below-the-line workers (Amman, 1996, p. 114). Generally, the unions and guilds now bargain with the AMPTP (Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers) which represents the studios under the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and contracts are negotiated separately for each union or guild in three year cycles. Thus, whilst the histories of screenwriting work serve to unify screenwriters by emphasising collective myths and a common origin narrative, contemporary labour relations have witnessed increased uncertainty and fracturing within the screen production labour market. This fracturing illuminates familiar polarities. The craft/creative division casts writers (along with directors and actors) as 'creative/ proactive/above-the-line' and condemns other forms of filmmaking from set construction, art direction and lighting design to 'craft/reactive/below-the-line'; a crude but now firmly established division in all mainstream screen production industries.

Christopherson (1996) analyses the consequent shifts in the relationships between workers and firms in Hollywood after the 1950s and argues that, as the major studios divested themselves of once permanent workforces and began subcontracting production, there were concomitant changes in labour organisations; mechanisms such as health and pension benefit schemes and certification of skill and experience came under threat and the unions were forced to adapt. Particular strategies in response to changes in production organisation were a roster system to certify skills based on seniority and experience, health and pension systems independent of any one employer and a system of residuals payments for 'creative' workers (Christopherson, 1996, 103). Overall these

---

[23] IATSE have local branches based on both type of craft and geographical area.

changes made it possible to "maintain and reproduce a skilled and specialised labour force without long-term employment contracts" (Ibid., 104).

For Christopherson, the nature of work processes within Hollywood production and the culture of the industries also changed. In general, there was a dramatic expansion of the labour force but also differential growth within the above-the-line guilds and the below-the-line unions. From the 1970s to the mid-1980s the Writers Guild of America (WGA) grew from a membership of 800 to 6000 and membership continued to grow by 7% per year into the late 80s (1996, 105). Christopherson also argues that new hierarchies[24] emerged within the labour force at this time. She states,

> The talent work force became more heterogeneous with respect to gender and (to a much lesser extent) race and access to work and property rights. For example, a spilt emerged between 'writer-producers' – with entrepreneurial skills and property rights in the film or tape product – and a vastly increased pool of writers with dramatically varying access to work. This heterogeneity is contained within the talent guilds leading to serious differences between segments of the workforce whose primary interest is access to work and those whose interests focus on property rights in the form of residuals payments (1996, 105).

These 'new hierarchies' can be factored into the intelligible, collective screenwriter-as-myth. While on the one hand, their status as 'above-the-line', creative and 'proactive' workers bestows some prestige on the profession overall and fosters a continued disciplinary confidence which mirrors the brashness of the early screenwriters (and enables certain levels of job security and industrial clout in the form of the Writers Guilds), significant hierarchisation is now a feature of the profession and this opens up new fault-lines and serves to stratify workers within the field. Intelligibility and collegiality are unsettled by these new competitive dynamics and in contemporary pedagogical frameworks and How-to manuals, these are now heightened by a focus on individually-oriented, craft-oriented and 'enterprising' discourse.[25]

Generally, changes in production organisation led to concomitant changes in industrial organisation, changes which profoundly altered the culture of screen production work. For Christopherson, key to this is the new entrepreneurial culture which developed and contributed to new divisions of labour

---

[24] These again parallel Ryan's (1991) designation outlined in chapter one between 'contracted artists' and 'professional creatives'.

[25] For more on this see chapters four and five.

as well as new opportunities for acquisition of skills and working alliances across the production sector. As she puts it,

> The historical social division of labour between craft and talent, manager and worker, was undermined and new divisions, such as those between entrepreneur-property holders and wage workers, were constructed. This transformation created new tensions between individual skills and collective identities (1996, 108).

Whilst Christopherson downplays the division between craft and creative workers, or certainly suggests the division was increasingly bridged as production organisation changed, the differential experiences of the craft unions and talent guilds highlights the new agglomerations of power that developed within the 'new Hollywood' era. The majority of talent workers now belong to a guild but only half of all craft and technical workers belong to a union (according to Paul and Kleingartner, 1996, 161) and Scott does note that

> union (but not guild) density is widely thought to be decreasing at the present time, due in part to the great expansion of small, independent production companies able to sidestep labour-organising activities in manual, craft and technical occupations (2005, 133).

As production costs have escalated, the craft unions have struggled against cost-cutting measures that adversely affected their membership. Amman writes,

> Below-the–line unions argue that there is no link between rising production costs and below-the-line costs, claiming that increases in production budgets are due to rising star salaries. The fact that below-the-line costs are relatively fixed and hence lack the variability of other costs in the motion picture industry makes them easier targets for cost reduction (1996, 125).

Into the 1980s, the craft unions were forced to make a number of concessions in bargaining negotiations which served the studios and through outsourcing strategies the studios have increasingly found ways to subvert the unions altogether.

The above-the-line guilds on the other hand, have displayed a very different developmental trajectory, becoming in the new Hollywood era, 'indispensable' to both their members and employers according to Paul and Kleingartner (1996, 156). The guilds' 'three-tier' compensation scheme, developed in response to the changes in production organisation, sets minimum pay rates,

administers residuals payments to talent workers for the re-presentation of their work in new media forms and enables 'personal services contracts' for individuals which serves to "provide for the exchange of scarce, differentiable and perishable talent" (Ibid., 164). This system then provides real benefits for workers within the talent sub-sectors. New writers to the industry, for example, are guaranteed a minimum pay rate so they can build up skills and credits and gain worker currency and disciplinary capital, as they gain experience. Residuals cushion the impact of periods of unemployment and "relate the control of creative resources to their ownership" (Ibid., 171). Overall Paul and Kleingartner illustrate the interdependence between the talent guilds and the studios as well as the underlying tension that characterises their relationship. They have developed strategies such as continuous bargaining which is mutually beneficial but the residuals system is a frequent bone of contention, and, because the talent guilds wield considerable power, they are not forced into concessions on key issues. In 18 of 21 strikes by above-the-line guilds between 1952 and 1995, the issues of residuals was the major or at least a prominent issue (Paul and Kleingartner, 1996, 172). For Scott, the key to the smooth functioning of the industrial relations system as well as to its longevity is that it is not tied to a single employer but is now 'fully portable' both for guilds and unions and it offers for Scott both collective order and 'vibrancy' for the industry as a whole. This represents a new set of mechanisms of intelligibility, paralleling those of the early period.[26]

Scott argues that Hollywood's occupational structure can now be viewed as two overlapping pyramids, "one representing the manual, crafts and technical workers in the industry, the other - which has many more tiers in the upper ranges - representing the creative or talent workers" (2005, 127). Scott also writes that the labour market is characterised by an intricate system of occupational categories (now codified within collective bargaining agreements) that illustrates the myriad divisions of labour both above- and below-the-line and which then often links directly to rates of pay, credits awarded to various roles undertaken on particular films and prestige and status within the industry.

The creative pyramid of the labour system is characterised by chronic bloating at the base of the employment pyramid because, as Scott illustrates, there is a constant over-supply of

---

[26] There is reason to be cautious here as Christopherson (2008) has more recently argued. Figures over the past few years have shown declining guild membership. The 2009 Writers Report from the WGAW states that their membership was at 8131 down from 8275 in 2007 which represents a longer term decline in membership figures (WGAW, 2009, 13) and as I noted in chapter one, the advent of new ICTs for the distribution and exhibition of screen texts has undermined this model of 'full portability'. Hence, the most recent writers strike action 2007-2008 in which residuals payments for new media were a key negotiations issue. See Atkins (2008), Los Angeles Times (2008) and New York Times (2008) for helpful background and commentary.

'aspirants' (actors and writers often repeat the narrative of shifting to Hollywood to 'make it big') who are then slowly filtered through the system along various paths, either into routine 'day jobs' such as television writing, out of the industry altogether or up into the higher echelons, where reputation, credits, asking prices and interpersonal networks all play significant roles in maintaining one's status (Scott, 2005, 128). For theorists such as Blair (2001), Scott (2005) and Ursell (2000), such industrial dynamics lead to informal but complex working relationships based on interdependence; teams of 'multivalent groups' often move from project to project together and this can extend to creative collaborations in the upper tiers of employment between writers and directors or directors and producers for example. Such networking is also complemented for Scott, by other "instruments of social coordination" (2005, 130) such as the prevalence of intermediaries (talent agents, managers, casting directors), the proliferation of professional associations for workers such as the now non-partisan Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and educational institutions, from consecrated universities (such as UCLA and USC) to dedicated film schools or technical colleges.

Clearly, both historical and more contemporary accounts of screenwriting work and Hollywood labour market organisation illustrate how screenwriting has become defined, prescribed and standardised over time; how workers have learned the skillset that is particular to this form of cultural production; how mythic and material dynamics have contributed to the self-perceptions and navigations of the screenwriter in a capitalist-intensive labour market. For me, the juxtaposition of the early histories - those that rely on rhetorical devices, villains and heroes and whimsical anecdotes as much as facts and figures - with these contemporary labour market analyses is itself a reflexive rhetorical device, one that illuminates the key themes of this chapter: intelligibility, collectivity and currency. They serve as discursive and material mechanisms; writers wield them (standards, genres, mythic figures) as they calculate and navigate their career trajectories to fuel confidence, to banish anxiety, to build reputations, to secure future work.

These devices are also deployed in the locations in which screenwriting work is taught. For example, screenwriting manuals and contemporary pedagogical frameworks rely on certain forms of industrial intelligibility and currency to reduce insecurity and industrial anxiety, to offer 'all the answers' to budding and established writers.[27] However, as I will illustrate in chapters four and five,

---

[27] Gritten (2008) illustrates how British manuals served as an area of contestation but one in which the anxiety of the coming of sound to cinema is rationalised and contained.

these forms are now carefully calibrated in line with the rationalities of the 'new cultural economy' - intelligibility and currency are located at the level of the individual, atomised creative, the writer-as-entrepreneur and the writer as instrumental craft worker. And where mechanisms of collectivity are not as readily available - for example, in London collective organisation is not historically or currently the norm, for film workers particularly - the precarious dynamics of the industry are even more pronounced. Although British-based writers also align with the screenwriter-as-myth (as brash, as hard-done-by, as under-appreciated and so on) they are more often than not operating on a terrain of work increasingly colonised by discourse that further individualises and atomises them.

Finally in this chapter, I wish to more explicitly connect the Hollywood screenwriter (as myth and as contemporary worker) to the London-centric screenwriting labour market. I will illustrate the many ways in which the British industry is utterly immersed within the Hollywood industry in terms of political economy and myth-creation but will also highlight the particularities of the British context I have signalled above.

2.4. Modalities of labour for the screenwriter today - Hollywood to London

Today's Hollywood screenwriting milieu can be characterised as 'speaking back' to its collective history and the mythic persona of the screenwriter that this history conjures up and maintains - calling up those figures, events and conditions in their own navigations and calculations. As well as this, screenwriters are increasingly trying to 'speak ahead', that is, to engage with and adapt to the possible direction(s) of their work at a time in which the future of the screen production industries is often characterised as opaque or illegible. The advent of new technologies for the production and distribution of film and television has raised a number of questions about new models of remuneration for screenwriting work that can proliferate across a range of media and increasingly in online platforms.[28] Questions have also been raised about the sovereignty of the written script-as-blueprint in such a context (see for example Millard, 2010 and see more discussion on these trends in chapter six). Declining union membership in recent years also signals the potential reduction in the collective heft of the screenwriting labour force as well as the trend on the part of the large production companies and studios to hire non-unionised production workers. The lack of diversity within the Hollywood screenwriting labour market also continues to blight any mythic or real-world sense of industrial egalitarianism. The most recent WGAW Writers Report (2009) emphasises the

---

[28] See Atkins (2008), Banks (2010), Los Angeles Times (2008), The New York Times (2008) for key reportage on the 2007-2008 Writers Strike in which residuals payments for new media platforms was a key issue.

lack of change in the diversity of Hollywood-based screenwriters in the years 2003-2007. So, white male writers' median earnings increased 18.4% between 2001-2007 from US$95,000 to US$121, 500 and overall median earnings increased 15.8% since 2001 from US$90, 516 to US$104, 857 (WGAW, 2009, 14). "Women remain stuck at 28 percent of television employment and 18 percent in film employment" and the earnings gap in film actually grew" (Ibid., 1).

The internal logics of the Hollywood-based screenwriting labour market mean that there is now a number of distinct modalities of screenwriting within Hollywood. So, there is a feature film 'spec script' market in which unsolicited scripts are written, circulated, assessed (by script readers, another position which budding screenwriters routinely undertake to sustain an income), hyped (through the notorious annual 'Black List' for example[29]) and sometimes, produced. The feature film writing market is then, broken down into a number of distinctive writing roles. Experienced writers ('contracted artists' or hyphenates) are commissioned to write multiple drafts from previously acquired material or from their own spec scripts, with the possibility for their own revisions. However, more inexperienced writers ('professional creatives') may lack the disciplinary currency to see a project through from draft to draft; more likely, they will be forced to sign 'step agreements' that grant the producers on a particular project the chance to drop a writer at any point in the writing process if 'satisfactory' progress is not made. Levels of remuneration vary considerably between the minimum wages set by the USA Writers Guilds for writing a treatment or first draft in comparison with the very high retainers which are paid to the few 'sought-after' screenwriters at any particular point in time. Within the 2008 Writers Guild of America, West 'Schedule of Minimums', the delivery of an original screenplay including treatment[30] ranges from US$58,477 to US$109, 783. Figures for the top end of the pay spectrum are more difficult to accurately document[31] but widely cited examples in the last ten years include the fees paid to writer-directors such as M. Night Shyamalan, paid US$5 million for *Unbreakable* in 2000 (see Variety, 2008), and David Koepp, paid US$3.5 million for *Zathura: A Space Adventure,* 2005 (Laporte,

---

[29] The 'Black List' has been released each year since 2005 by a development executive (although it was initially anonymous). It circulates the top 100 'un-produced' screenplay titles online and routinely creates a huge amount of 'buzz' and has built up 'clout' over time according to Currid (2009).

[30] The 'Schedule of Minimums' is broken up into yearly periods from 2008-2011 and these figures are for the first period effective 2/13/08 to 5/1/09. See Writers Guild of America West (2008).

[31] A number of factors are influential here including the commercial sensitivity of these top-end figures for production companies and studios as well as for the established writers. But also and even more slippery, the notorious Hollywood rumor mill which thrives on such speculative figures serves to inflate hype and prestige around particular projects during the development process. Arguably, this further veils the material conditions of the pay negotiations that are conducted within the industry, distorting the perception both within and outside screenwriting labour networks about what screenplays and screenwriting work is 'really worth' and perpetuating such catch-all industrial axioms as 'nobody knows anything' (Goldman, 1983).

2004). Television writing offers another distinct modality - a model of contract-based and network-centred writing dominated by the writer's room and the show-runner.[32] Here the writing is shaped by the dictates of the television program in question and the writing itself is undertaken committee-style, in piecemeal forms (contracted writers are assigned to write particular episodes and scenes overseen by the showrunner) and with an underlying sense of seasonal stability.[33]

In the UK screenwriting labour market, these basic modalities also circulate but vary because of the particular structural and cultural determinants of the industry. As MacDonald summarises it:

> Overall the impression is of a field that is complex, US-dominated and small, competitive and insecure in terms of employment. It is, however, significant economically and attracts government attention ranging from financial support to regulation of content (2003, 180).

The UK Film Council reported that the turnover of the UK film industry in 2007 was £6.1 billion and total film production activity was worth £578 million.[34] The British industry is often referred to as a 'cottage' industry (as most other national film industries are) and one that is small-scale and structurally fractured in numerous ways. For example, it is London-centric[35], the workforce is well-educated, and as the Writers Guild of America (West) report illustrated in the Hollywood context, is overwhelmingly dominated by older, white men (see UKFC, 2007 and WGAW, 2009). A few prominent production companies and funding bodies dominate both film and television production; the BBC, Film Four and the UK Film Council are the three largest 'gatekeeper' public funding

---

[32] The term 'writer's room' refers to the office space in which writers work communally on particular television programs, usually led by a 'showrunner', the executive writer-producer and 'creative director' of long-running television series. Collins (2007) describes showrunners as typical 'hyphenates' to use Christopherson's term. The showrunner offers a model of the empowered writer-producer who exerts serious creative control in the screenwriting labour market and personalities such as David Chase (creator of *The Sopranos,* 1999-2007), David Simon (creator of *The Wire,* 2002-2008) and Matthew Weiner (creator of *Mad Men,* 2007-) are oft-cited. In the UK, Russell T. Davies (*Doctor Who*, 2005-2009) has been referred to as a showrunner (see Cornea, 2009). Note also the BBC uses the term 'Writers Room' for their writers forum - here they solicit screenplays and ideas and seek out 'new talent'. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/

[33] A rich resource on this form of writing is the blog of television writer Jane Espenson, a writer on television programs such as *Buffy, The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) who is now herself an executive producer on the science fiction drama *Caprica* (2009-). The blog offers ongoing commentary on breaking into the television spec script market, the workings of a writers room, the intricacies of writing jokes and so on. See: http://www.janeespenson.com/

[34] This second figure is compared to the higher figure of £753.3 million in 2008, a 23 % decline which the report notes was because of a reduction in inward investment due to a higher value for the British pound compared to the USA dollar and interestingly, the writers' and actors' strikes in the USA. Note also these figures then distinguish between 'inward investment' films (films produced and/or post-produced in the UK and funded largely by USA studios) and UK domestic features (66 were made in 2008). See UKFC (2009, 135).

[35] 78.7% of all film and video production was undertaken in London in 2008 according to the UKFC, a point reflected in my own empirical work, in which the majority of my interviews were conducted in London - see chapter three.

organisations in the UK setting.[36] Large independent producers such as Working Title often act as funding siphons and big budget co-production facilitators between the UK and USA[37] and a host of smaller independents offer slates of low-budget films. The UKFC reported that in 2008, there were 7970 film production companies in the UK (2009, 155), 150 of those with a turnover of £5 million or more annually.

MacDonald attempts to outline the size and organisation of the UK screenwriting workforce but notes that gathering statistics on this is problematic on a number of fronts. Using Skillset and Writers Guild of Great Britain membership figures, he noted in 2003 that "the profession of the screenwriter is represented by a very small number of people, even in relation to their own field of work" and estimated that 1500 screenwriters were employed on single or short-term contracts (2003, 162) and that 98% of all film production personnel were freelance compared to only 19% of broadcast TV workers (although TV drama departments often hire writers on short-term contracts). Skillset's employment census for 2009 measures work figures in the 'creative media industries' and noted that employment across the board had suffered a 'huge decline' in the past year. The occupational categories Skillset uses highlight some of the inherent definitional problems I have already addressed in chapter one. Skillset's census totals the number of people working in film production in 2009 but excludes freelancers; that figure was 1300 for all occupations within that category. For television production, the figures are higher and are broken down into terrestrial broadcasting (15, 750 employed in 2009), cable and satellite (12, 700) and independent production (21, 700) (see Skillset, 2009a). Assuming that screenwriters would fall under Skillset's 'creative development' occupational group, the figures here break down to 3300 employed within this category and 2150 freelancing in 2009.[38] Skillset also conducts a film and television workforce survey, the last of which was published in 2007 and this offers some more accurate figures:

---

[36] Clearly this is a key differentiating factor between the USA and UK industries (and most other national cinemas) - the provision of public funding for screen production and the concomitant ethical and commercial wranglings that such funding permits. I do not have room to elaborate on this here, although I realise it is a crucial issue. Theories of national cinema and the public funding of film production were issues I addressed directly in my previous research project (Conor, 2004) in relation to New Zealand filmmaking. For more on the current UK film policy and funding context see Hill (2004) and Schlesinger and Magor (2009). Garnham (2005, 26) makes the key point that the infiltration of 'creative industries' discourse in the context of UK film policy led to "Lottery-funded production consortia and the Film Council and the age-old, repeatedly exposed but persistent delusion of British film policy - competing with the American majors."

[37] Two of the highest-grossing UK/USA co-productions in the year 2009 were *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (US$934 million worldwide) and *Sherlock Holmes* (US$191 million worldwide). See UKFC (2010).

[38] Note that this body of data is limited in its usefulness because it is 'snapshot' style. It is based on employment figures gathered on only one particular day during the year of 2009. Thus, its permanent workforce figures may be fairly accurate but this data is unable to capture the intricacies of freelancing work, the kind which more and more screen production workers undertake. The response rate also needs to be considered - just over 1000 company responses to the survey (this was the highest response to-date for the Skillset Census). See Skillset (2009a).

> Those working in the production and script development departments worked on an average of 2.5 features in the previous twelve months, below the overall average for the film production workforce. They tended to work on a single production for a longer period than almost all other occupational groups, and their average working day was also longer than most (73% worked for 11 hours or more on an average day). As in the 2005 survey report, the majority (61%) had worked on other audio visual productions in the past year, most commonly television programs (33%), followed by film shorts (26%) (Skillset Film and Television Workforce Survey, 2007).

Mean income figures indicate that people working in production/script development[39] in audio visual production earned on average £36, 800 in 2007 (Skillset, 2007). The UK Film Council's statistical yearbook puts the number of people working in film and video production in 2008 at 21,113 and 46% of those were designated as 'self-employed' (UKFC, 2009, 174). These disparate figures offer only a partial understanding of the real-world dynamics of the UK's screenwriting labour market - a market in which many writers juggle roles, shift from project to project in different mediums and may operate at different points in their careers as both permanent employees and freelancers. British screenwriters move more fluidly between film and television production than in the USA largely because the industry is much smaller and the small pool of production money dictates it. According to Macdonald, modalities of screenwriting within the UK context are largely genre-bound and this follows on from the dominance of screen production by American finance and inherited ideas about screen storytelling conventions:

> The popularity (and potential for dramatic storylines) of genre TV series, in particular medical and police dramas, have created a major market for screenwriters. Screenwriters therefore have to work within clearly defined forms of moving image drama, based around four broad categories: single drama/ feature, serial/mini-series, open-ended serial/soap and series/'discontinuous soap'. This demands an awareness of (or of working within) popular genres (MacDonald, 2004, 168).

As I illustrate in more detail in chapter six, British screenwriters routinely pursue writing on multiple platforms - theatre, film, television, radio and online content. They supplement their income by undertaking other forms of related work such as teaching screenwriting, script editing, running training seminars and workshops and writing 'How-to' manuals. As I have already stated, British-based writers also align with, and emulate the myth-of-the-screenwriter (as brash, as hard-

---

[39] Note this category covers a huge number of occupations including writers and script editors for example, but also directors, producers, production assistants etc.

done-by, as under-appreciated and so on) in discussions of their work and the calculations and navigations that characterise their careers. Because they too, are operating in an industry dominated by Hollywood funding, Hollywood-oriented standards of structure, character and conflict within screen storytelling (which percolate through 'How-to' manuals for example) and Hollywoodised genre categories, British writers are conditioned to a similar set of devices of intelligibility and speak with and through these. So, screenwriting is potentially flexible but is also degraded and deskilled; screenwriting is standardised and craft-oriented (in contrast to other forms of writing); screenwriting is lucrative but is also compromised and thus impure; screenwriting is commercially-oriented and not necessarily striving for artistic legitimacy.

Although, as I have suggested, these themes can fuel a sense of collectivity and industrial confidence - through a sense of shared purpose and a communal history of the work - British writers are operating on a terrain of work where formal devices of collective organisation are not nearly as strong as in the USA. I also contend that because of the preponderance of impoverished creative industries discourse and instrumental/skills-based educational discourse (discussed further in chapter five) that feeds into creative industries policy-making, screen production workers including screenwriters are navigating work-worlds increasingly colonised by discourse and labour market conditions that further individualise and atomise them.

Recent developments highlight the desire in the UK and Europe for a renewed sense of collectivism within the screenwriting labour market. In November 2009, the first 'World Conference of Screenwriters' was held in Athens which brought together representatives from a number of the European writers guilds to discuss labour market issues affecting screenwriting.[40] This followed from the release of a 'manifesto' from screenwriters from the Federation Scenarists Europe (made up of 28 European writers' guilds) which advocates for the 'moral rights' of screenwriters.[41] Within the manifesto, statements are made which signal an attempt to claw back some of the ground lost by the marginalisation of screenwriters as authorial figures[42] over time:

'The screenwriter is an author of the film, the primary creator of the audiovisual work' and, 'The indiscriminate use of the possessory credit is unacceptable.'

---

[40] See Appendix for World Conference of Screenwriters Declaration in full.
[41] See Appendix for Federation Scenarists Europe Manifesto in full.
[42] This surely connects to the ubiquity of auteur theory in parts of Europe, particularly France.

The manifesto also calls for fair payment and the right for the screenwriter to be involved in the entire production process, a form of legitimacy for the creative centrality of the screenwriter. The organisation calls for more focus on the screenwriter in these capacities through funding, through the recognition of their work at film festivals, and so on. In response to these events, McNab described a new and 'powerful' sense of collective identity within the European screenwriting industry although the manifesto was characterised as more symbolic than material. The producer Kevin Loader is quoted in response with an invocation of economic 'realities': "I wouldn't get the money to make my film if I wasn't prepared to persuade my writers to sign their moral rights away" (McNab, 2009, np).

In a related development, the Writers Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) recently released a document titled 'Writing for Film: A Good Practice Guide' which offers good practice and contract advice for screenwriters writing films and those working with writers in the production of film. The aims of this document include: to encourage co-operation and good working relationships between writers and other film-makers; to enhance the rights and status of writers in the development and production process and, in particular, to safeguard original work; and to offer practical guidance as to what writers should expect, seek or accept in negotiating contracts and working on scripts (WGGB, 2009, 3).[43] The document also recognises the difference between working as a writer in Hollywood and the UK in relation to labour organisation:

> Blessed and cursed by the common language, the UK film industry has something of a poor-but-gifted cousin relationship with Hollywood, neatly reflected in the difference between the closed shop muscle of the Writers Guild of America and the effective but smaller scale lobbying position of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) (Ibid., 4).

Here is evidence of small-scale collective action to produce and sustain some form of collegial voice for screenwriters (particularly film writers) in an environment much less conditioned to widespread collectivism. Overall, the 'cottage' nature of the British industry and its fractious relationship with Hollywood signals that the devices of intelligibility and collectivity I have traced through histories of Hollywood-centric screenwriting, whether in mythic or concrete form, are less

---

[43] As well as offering detailed advice about the standard contracts offered to writers in the world of British film production, the WGGB also suggests a new kind of 'Joint Venture Agreement' which they characterise as a "...positive response to the relentless downward pressure on film budgets and the dearth of development finance." The joint venture agreement would "place the writer at the heart of project as an equal rather than a hired hand..." (WGGB, 2009, 28).

visible and prominent within the British screen production industry. Screenwriters in London orient themselves to the standard codes and conventions, often speak the language of both flexibility and marginalisation and grapple with professional and industrial anxiety in an industry in which the opportunities to undertake writing work that will lead to production are scarce and where remuneration is never guaranteed.

I now move into the fieldwork-based research chapters of the thesis, in which I examine a number of locations in which screenwriting work is constructed, taught and practiced. The themes of this chapter - intelligibility, collectivity and currency in relation to screenwriting as creative labour - will be the focus of the three fieldwork chapters which look at mainstream popular screenwriting manuals; UK-based pedagogical locations for screenwriting as learned labour; and the calculations and navigations of a group of 'professional creative' British screenwriters. But first I pause to consider the methodological concerns of this project. I discuss the 'situated knowledge' I have produced in the course of my discussions with screenwriters and teachers of screenwriting, my observations, and my own "split and contradictory self" (Haraway, 1996, 256) as researcher. This knowing but partial self 'sees together' with the equally split and contradictory figure(s) of the screenwriter I have illustrated here. It is an active 'politics of positioning' on my part. This "partial connection" (Ibid., 257) will then be deployed in chapters four, five and six to move across the locations and spaces in which I analyse screenwriting pedagogies, practices and livelihoods as they are lived and experienced.

Chapter Three - Research methods: Screenwriting as pedagogy and practice

    So are you a screenwriter yourself? Is that your
    background?

3. Introduction

At the moment when Sam P. asked these questions of me, early on in my fieldwork, my own optics as researcher, as non-screenwriter, as young, female academic, as 'split and contradictory self' were made starkly clear to me. I felt these questions exposed my deficiencies, my profound inability to visualise the community and practices I sought out. However, the questions also enabled a deeper reflection on my own position(s) in the course of this research and on my connections and collaborations with those screenwriters, screenwriting teachers, locations and texts with which I engaged. As I said in the previous chapter, I began to feel more comfortable with my partial perspective as it 'saw together' with the equally split and contradictory figure(s) of the screenwriter I encountered in interviews, in screenwriting manuals, in seminars, in films themselves. Thus in this chapter I stake a claim to my "situated knowledge" as Haraway (1996) calls it. I identify and discuss my reflexive position(s) as young, female and feminist scholar, as non-screenwriter, as precarious worker, as teacher, as writer. This is an active 'politics of positioning' on my part and is also a means for me to illuminate the 'partial connections' to the subjects and spaces of screenwriting labour I then analyse in subsequent chapters.

As I outlined in chapter one, screenwriting as a form of pedagogy and practice is both exemplary and idiosyncratic as a form of creative work in the 'new cultural economy'. Screenwriting bridges what are often viewed as discrete realms of creative practice such as 'filmmaking' and 'writing' and often denies or downplays claims to the term 'creative' itself, preferring concrete notions of craft to distinguish screenwriting as a particular vocation. Screenwriters navigate through and calculate their livelihoods, utilising strategies that promote intelligibility within their profession, circulate and re-circulate complex forms of worker currency and gesture towards the screenwriter-as-myth: supplicant, maverick and partial outsider. In order to gain purchase on the complexity and multiplicity of action and experience within screenwriters' working lives - that multiplicity which is

often driven by the specific industrial logics of screen production - qualitative interviews are employed as a primary data-gathering technique and this chapter will discuss interviews as a methodological tool in dialogue with the wider methodological concerns of this project.

3.1.Qualitative interviews as research tools

Interviews are a central facet of the qualitative research tradition and the routinisation of interviewing as a standard technique means that it has a prominent position in the 'hinterland' of much social science investigation as Law (2004) would put it. The centrality of the interview's position is articulated in numerous methodological handbooks:

> The interview is probably the most commonly used method in social science research. It is more economical than observational methods since the interviewee can report on a wide range of situations that he or she has observed, so acting as the eyes and ears of the researcher (Seale, 1998, 202).

The often taken-for-granted benefits of the interview as a revealing methodological tool are repeated in almost mantra-like form[1]: the ability to take us into the minds of individuals, to uncover their cognitive maps and views of the world for us as researchers to pore over, the ability to move beyond mere observation to direct interaction and experience. Researchers acknowledge that interviews are often best used in conjunction with other methods, such as participant observation but that interviews enable us to move beyond assumptions and into 'depth' encounters that provide material that could form the substance of the 'thick descriptions' which Geertz (1993) advocates within the postmodern ethnographic tradition discussed further below (see for example, Jones, 1985).

However, the interview and its centrality and its perceived hegemonic influence in qualitative research practices has been questioned in a number of ways which have emphasised its partiality while also facilitating more nuanced understandings of the interview's usefulness. Fontana and Frey contextualise the increasing ubiquity of interviews, outlining the 'interview society' as a phenomenon in which interviewing as a social form has gained widespread currency. They write:

---

[1] This echoes the mantras repeated in screenwriting manuals which often rely heavily on interviews with 'successful' screenwriters; see chapter four for more on this.

> The interview as a means of data gathering is no longer limited to use by social science researchers or police detectives; it is a 'universal mode of systematic inquiry' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 1)…It is as if interviewing is now part of the mass culture, so that it has actually become the most feasible mechanism for obtaining information about individuals, groups and organisations in a society characterised by individuation, diversity, and specialised role relations (2000, 646-647).

This interview society is, for Atkinson and Silverman, indicative of a 'Romantic impulse' in recent sociological inquiry in which individual experiences are afforded an authenticity revered over other forms of 'knowledge'.[2] This is highly problematic for the authors as it signals "a spurious sense of stability, authenticity, and security" (1997, 308).

The interpretivist critique found fundamental issue with interviewing, arguing primarily that what people said in interviews did not necessarily correlate with what they did in practice. This dichotomy between 'saying' and 'doing' meant for Becker and Geer that participant observation was a much more reliable research tool: "One can observe actual changes in behaviour over a period of time and note the events which precede and follow them…attention can be focused both on what has happened and on what the person says about what has happened" (1969, 330-331). Atkinson and Coffey acknowledge the 'unassailability' of Becker and Geer's stance, noting that it is hard to question the position that "the study of observable events is better accomplished by the observation of those events than by the collection of retrospective and decontextualised descriptions of them" (2002, 804). However, they do raise concerns (shared by others such as Trow, 1957) that Becker and Geer's argument seems to privilege one qualitative tool whole-heartedly over another (without considering the context-specific nature of various research projects) while also subscribing to a form of naturalism which, in endorsing participant observation over other kinds of investigation, grants it authenticity.

In addressing the critique of Becker and Geer, a number of alternative approaches have been suggested that attempt to move beyond reductivist uses of methods such as interviewing. 'Triangulation' was offered as a productive possibility in the 1970s (particularly by Denzin, 1970) in order to reconcile the perceived gap between participant observation and interviewing. Denzin suggested that using a 'between-method' approach that combined and triangulated data gathered in

---

[2] This could be connected to more recent debates that have questioned the categories of 'producer' and 'consumer', the rise of the 'Youtube generation' and the preponderance of forms of what Deuze and Banks (2009) term 'co-creative labour'. This point is well-made by Mayer (2008).

different ways could mitigate against the distortion of information that could not be avoided with the use of only one data-gathering method. However, for Atkinson and Coffey, this represents a simplistic and overly optimistic possibility, treating "the nature of social reality as unduly unproblematic and the relationships between the social world and the methods of investigating it as transparent" (2002, 807). For these critics (and others such as Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995 for example), the principle of reflexivity is the concept through which research methods such as interviewing can become more 'symmetrical'. Atkinson and Coffey go on to articulate a revised perspective on interviewing with this 'radical critique' in mind:

> interviews generate data that have intrinsic properties of their own…we need to treat interviews as generating accounts and performances that have their own properties and ought to be analysed in accordance with such characteristics… interviews are occasions in which are enacted particular kinds of narratives and in which 'informants' construct themselves and others as particular kinds of moral agents (2002, 808).

An alternative approach to the use of interview data has foregrounded the notion of interviews as 'active'. This draws on ethnomethodological perspectives and again sits within a tradition that has its roots in feminist critiques of the interview and the perceived relegation of interviewees to passive 'vessels of answers' positions. Holstein & Gubrium suggest that viewing interviews as 'active' offers productive and emancipatory possibilities for both interviewees and interviewers:

> The image of the active interview transforms the view of the subject behind participants. The respondent is transformed from a repository of opinions and reason or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of either form of knowledge. The subject behind the interviewer is similarly activated (2004, 150).

I took the notion of 'active' interviews on-board early in my research, determined to maintain an awareness of my own reflexive standpoint as researcher and keen to draw my interviewees into a process of collaboration for this project, collaboration being a key term invoked to distinguish screenwriting from other forms of writing. So for example, in early interviews, I was asking respondents not only 'who else should I speak to?' but also 'what should I be asking?', attempting to elicit their input on the kinds of issues they saw as being relevant to a project on 'screenwriting as creative labour'. I found this a constantly confounding process however; for example, I was aware of my own time constraints but quickly became bogged down with hours and hours of transcripts from lengthy interviews in which I felt I should let the writers continue to talk for as

long as they wished to. I found that most writers enjoyed talking once I had begun to ask them about their careers. Many only needed one question: 'How did you begin your career as a screenwriter?' to then find myself listening to a long and personal narrative about for example, beginning as a lover of film, a writer in other mediums or an actor. Especially early in my fieldwork and being fairly inexperienced in this method, I was loathe to stop the writers talking and learnt over time to be more focused in my questions, asking specifically about processes of collaboration or experiences of teaching and using manuals for example. I also agonised over what I perceived to be my placatory approach to questioning. I found myself goofily agreeing in my interview encounters much more than challenging (and possibly offending) my respondents on particular issues such as union membership (or lack thereof, for example) and became worried I was receiving 'rote' answers from people who were quite accustomed to being interviewed.[3]

More profoundly, I found interviews an agonisingly personal and sometimes painful kind of reflexive encounter.[4] They were marked by the intensity of the spaces in which the interviews were conducted (often in cafes where I would always buy the coffee, or in peoples' offices and homes), the stress over the devices I used (I always worried about my sound recording device in loud spaces which then meant I had difficulty transcribing them and lost precious time), my concern over my own 'performance' as competent researcher (if the interviewers referred to particular films or filmmakers I was not aware of, I sometimes pretended to know exactly what they were speaking about for fear of seeming unprepared or inauthentic). I grappled with all these issues throughout the fieldwork as I navigated the interviewing process as a reflexive and a 'collaborative' one. It was at these moments of uncertainty that I began to see my own 'splitting' of self and vision as Haraway (1996) describes it.

Whilst I was not engaged in a 'deep' ethnographic project, I have certainly immersed myself 'in the screenwriting field'. As well as my use of semi-structured, qualitative interviews with screenwriters and teachers of screenwriting as primary research tools, I conducted observations of screenwriting seminars, classes and industry assessment, I attended and participated in public events such as film

---

[3] Cornea offers a useful re-reading of this tension, noting that filmmaking practitioners are generally used to being interviewed and are not 'overly worried' about how they will be perceived by others, are used to talking and thinking about their work which can generate perceptive and thoughtful conversations (which I certainly experienced). She also notes that the more 'long-form' interviews offered by a researcher as opposed to short, sharp questions by journalists enables respondents to be more gregarious and meditative (2008, 120).

[4] This point gestures to methodological discussions around 'intimacy' within social research particularly in relation to a feminist research agenda and methodology. As a female researcher, I also worried if these personal concerns of mine were more acute because of my gender. On the issue of 'intimacy' in social research and interviews specifically, see for example, Birch and Miller (2000).

screenings and writer/director question and answer sessions, I read and analysed a large number of screenwriting manuals and I observed and recorded within online forums in which screenwriters exchange information, experiences and career tips. All this enabled me to not only gather a large amount of qualitative data but, more fundamentally, was crucial in my own processes of learning: learning the language(s) of screenwriting, new technical terms, historical figures and tropes, languages that define particular national spaces of filmmaking. I also had to quickly learn the structural intricacies and dynamics of the the London and Hollywood-based industries in order to understand the pursuit of production funding, the commissioning processes of particular British production companies, and the navigations and calculations which writers were describing to me. This immersion led to an optics, a 'politics of positioning' (Haraway, 1996) as I became more comfortable with the locations and texts with which I was engaged, as pedagogies and practices of screenwriting work became more intelligible to me, as these 'knowable' languages became a currency, just as horror stories serve as currency for screenwriters. It also enabled me to relax into my contradictory and split self as I encountered screenwriters or pedagogies of screenwriting in which contradictions and splitting (between creativity and craft for example) were rife and in which screenwriting selves were also partial, simultaneously insecure and hyperbolically confident.

To pause here for a moment, I'd like to turn specifically to the interrelated disciplines of cultural and media studies which have been particularly and fundamentally influenced by developments in postmodern ethnographic thinking. These developments have a direct bearing on how I have designed and undertaken this project and I will signal these specificities further below.

3.2. Cultural studies and the challenges of postmodern ethnographies

Within the cultural studies and critical theory traditions, qualitative enquiry has been conducted which is prefaced on its partiality and its explicit usefulness as an activist tool. Frow & Morris write:

> work in cultural studies accepts its partiality; it is openly incomplete, and it is
> partisan in its insistence on the political dimensions of knowledge. The mixing of
> discourses and genres in much work in cultural studies has to do with
> methodological impurity, perhaps with a certain fruitful insecurity about the
> legitimacy of cultural studies as a discipline, but perhaps too with the way cultural
> studies conceives its object as being relational (a network of connections) rather
> than substantial (2000, 327).

Frow and Morris' invocation of the political dimensions of much qualitative research is important here. There is an inherent set of political and emancipatory objectives within qualitative inquiry (which draws on feminist and Marxist research for example) that privileges what Geertz describes as socio-cultural 'webs of significance'.

For Kinechloe and McLaren, critical theory within a postmodern tradition accepts "the presence of its own fallibility as well as its contingent relation to progressive social change" (1998, 286). There is also an acknowledgement here of the inherent concerns of validity and rigour that are raised once political goals are invoked within the explicit concerns of a research project and for these authors:

> What is crucial…according to Carspecken (1993) is that researchers recognise
> where they are ideologically located in the normative and identity claims of others
> and at the same time be honest about their own subjective referenced claims and
> not let normative evaluative claims interfere with what is observed (Ibid., 293).

As Kinechloe and McLaren (1998) point out, recognising one's own situated position is an important strategy in laying out a credible framework for a qualitative research project which claims (in the use of interviews as a source of authoritative accounts of the social world(s) of its subjects) to offer a space for certain, perhaps marginalised voices (Haraway, 1996, terms them 'subjugated') to be heard. This echoes Coffey's call for ethnographic fieldwork to be "recast as a process where the self is central" (1999, 24). This process, she acknowledges, requires sensitivity and restraint:

> It is totally necessary and desirable to recognise that we are part of what we study,
> affected by the cultural context and shaped by our fieldwork experience. It is
> epistemologically productive to do so, and at best naïve to deny the self an active
> and situated place in the field (Ibid., 37).

Coming from a background in both cultural studies and critical theory,[5] my own positioning became clearer over the course of my fieldwork – as embracing the interdisciplinarity and 'fruitful insecurity' of cultural studies, anticipating the partiality and incompleteness of my research project and foregrounding a political position-taking because of and through this. A principal (set of) agenda(s) for my project became a group of epistemological and political ones: to contribute to a

---

[5] And here I acknowledge, as Gregg suggests, that I have been politicised within these theoretical traditions and by my exposure to academic theory itself. Therefore I am part of a generation of scholars for which "there has never been a time 'before' or 'after' theory" (2006, 3).

growing body of work which takes as a starting point and thus prioritises labour practices within creative/cultural production and concurrently asserts that this perspective (in the analysis of the processes of film production for example) has been a neglected one in research to date; a concomitant belief that screenwriting is an intricate and particular form of creative labour that has been side-lined in both academic work and popular discussions of film production industries for a number of reasons and a consequent desire to re-situate screenwriting as a subject with its own creative labour lexicon; and because of these goals, a desire to collaborate with screenwriters and teachers of screenwriting practice within this project, to be attentive to their experiences and the complexity of these experiences as they are articulated and discussed within interviews or within screenwriting classes or manuals.

But there were limits to this agenda and I was constantly reminded of the partial nature of this project and the knowledge(s) I was producing. For example, a number of times within interview encounters I suggested that screenwriters needed to disinvest from their own labour in order to 'give up' their projects to others (producers, directors, financiers). Whilst many respondents agreed, they often admonished me for taking a 'romantic' view of this reality - 'what's wrong with that?' I was asked more than once. The respondents often elaborated by referring to the 'realities' of the business, reminding me that screenwriting was a commercial form of writing and that normally, screenwriters such as themselves had little or no financial control on a particular project. Thus they had no business making petty claims to authorial control and shouldn't complain about 'hurt feelings' or become possessive about a script. Here I had to check my own, arguably lofty political theorising which had informed the questions I was asking, and pay more attention to exactly what kinds of accounts were being offered to me.

At this point, some further discussion is needed of postmodern shifts in ethnographic thinking and research agendas as this feeds into commentaries within cultural and media studies. What is pertinent are the key ethical issues which have been raised here about textuality and the dangers of polarities of understanding within postmodern evocations of ethnographic methods. Geertz, who, in his call for 'thick description' in investigations into culture, articulates a postmodern, interpretivist position which has been influential within more recent discussions of the epistemological optics of ethnography, writes:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical (1993, 5).

Morley discusses the shift to textuality within postmodern ethnography, led particularly by Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986), in which the contributors focused on the writing of ethnographies and thus the potentially oppressive relations set up between researcher(s) and researched within this highly artificial dialogue. For Morley, a principal concern is that this widely influential discussion within ethnographic research and thus cultural studies potentially de-sensitises us to 'non-textual and equally oppressive ethnographic relations' (1997, 128). The danger is that the subjects/others of our research projects become dangerously abstracted: "material otherness is reduced to semiotic difference" (Ibid., 130) and that this is a slippery slope within this line of thinking towards "a kind of ventriloquism in ethnographic writing" in which we begin to speak for our informants who are thus limited to the positions of mere vessels of knowledge to be mined and documented. Importantly Morley also notes (following Geller, 1970 and Winch, 1958):

the fact that the analyst finally produces an account of his subjects' activities which is not expressed in their own terms, and which may in fact be different from the account they would offer of their own activities, hardly invalidates it, but is perhaps precisely the necessary responsibility of the analyst (Ibid., 131).

Again, it is a reflexive understanding and attendance to the potential speaking positions and voices within qualitative research (and within interviewing particularly) that enables sensitivity to these complex relations. What is crucial and concerning here for Morley is that the backlash within cultural studies, led by scholars fearful and distrusting of micro-analyses (of media consumption practices for example) that spin out of the 'new ethnography', leads to a privileging of the macro which is "premised on a mal-posed conception of the relation between micro and macro" (Ibid., 126). This is an important point in that a gendered articulation is visible as Massey (1991) notes, between the micro (local, concrete, empirical) and the macro (global, abstract, theoretical). Overall for Morley, the concerns raised within the new, textual ethnography are productive but potentially disabling:

What is needed…as Haraway puts it, is 'an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for

recognising our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world' (Haraway, 1991: 187) – a recognition that the object of our would-be knowledge, while being really 'made up', is nonetheless 'real' for that" (1997, 136).

The concerns raised in focusing on one's subjective position in an ethnographically-inflected research project are also voiced by Probyn who argues that postmodern calls for 'pure discursivity' in ethnographic research in order to enable self-reflexivity often lead to ontological egotism. She suggests, instead, striving for "a self as a speaking position that entails a defamiliarisation of the taken-for-granted" (1993, 80). This means that modesty is required: "we can try to speak from a position of some modesty, from an angle that skewers the inflation of the academic ego" (Ibid., 81). As a feminist scholar, this point was an important one to carry with me in the ego-driven screen production industries. In later chapters, I highlight the 'compulsory' egotism that often characterises the ideal screenwriting persona as they navigate their work-worlds and at those moments when I was confronted by this egotism (in interviews or other industrial spaces in which I was an observer) my inclination was to shrink into the background rather than assert my own confidence and authority as academic.

Acknowledging and accounting for these challenges and the issues they raise signals that methodological attention must be paid to *both* the macro and micro, the polarities that inevitably congeal around them (masculine/feminine, rational/irrational, objectivity/subjectivity and so on) as well as the tensions between them. The need for 'fruitful insecurity' and 'methodological impurity' within ethnographically- inflected cultural studies is crucial here. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I certainly worried about my own insecure position as researcher and thus, as outsider, throughout this project and in many ways, this forced me to adapt to an 'impure' set of methods as the project advanced. I found it initially and continually challenging to access the London-based screenwriting community at all;[6] I had a few contacts (gained largely through my own piecemeal film theory teaching) but initially, I was able to generate few new avenues of inquiry. Many people never returned my calls and emails; some suggested I email questions to them but never replied to those questions; it often took months between my initial approach to a possible interviewee and

---

[6] And this was after quickly realising I had to limit myself to interviewing and researching in London. I initially had dreams of researching in Los Angeles as well, assuming I could easily offer my researching services to the Writers Guild of America West and gain access to the writers of my favourite HBO television programs and films but my own limited funds for living in London and my paltry annual research allowance meant I was geographically tied down. In fact, I had to basically self-fund to attend any conferences outside the UK; I did visit L.A. to attend the 2010 SCMS conference but again, was only able to do that because I folded it into a personal trip home to New Zealand.

then an actual interview; interviews sometimes sprung up within days of finding a new contact.[7] These access-related issues then spurred methodological improvisation and forced compromise. As a film and media teacher I found it relatively easy to gain access to observational locations such as screenwriting seminars and classes, public screenings and events where I was sometimes able to ask questions of well-known writers I had been unable to contact through traditional means.[8] I also began to read screenwriting manuals which interviewees had recommended to me (or which I had seen on the shelves of teachers' offices or in their reading lists) in order to further my 'language-learning' and soon decided to analyse them as 'ambiguous' tools for writers and teachers and as pedagogical locations for the construction of screenwriting labour. I also spent any spare moments reading published interviews[9] and online screenwriting blogs and fora to gain further 'impure' insights into the development of scripts which I had found it impossible to access 'on the ground'.

In terms of my own strategy of investigation, I was also constantly concerned about my total number of interviewees;[10] whilst firstly aiming for between thirty and forty interviews, I then found I had only conducted fifteen full interviews after a year of intensive searching and soliciting. On the other hand, these were interviews which often meant recorded discussions of an hour and a half (or more) after extensive research on my part (watching the films written by the respondents, reading their scripts if accessible, reading previous interviews they had conducted and so on), thus fifteen interviews had produced a huge amount of data I regularly felt myself 'drowning' in.[11] Overall, I conducted seventeen interviews, sixteen of which I recorded and fully transcribed, one more being

---

[7] Mayer (2008) also reflects on difficulties of access in her discussion of ethnographic fieldwork involving film and television workers, arguing that her attempts to 'study up' ie. to move up a production chain and gain access to more senior crew members or production company staff, involved working her way up this chain in order to fulfill a 'dues-paying' narrative which practitioners also used, and 'fucking up'. She acknowledges errors in judgement which meant she was alienated on particular production locations in which she was researching and was complicit within 'machinations of power and pleasure', feeling both 'used' and 'using' others.

[8] For example, contacting writers through their agents; and asking interviewees for further contacts through their networks of colleagues/friends.

[9] Cornea (2008) points out that the use of interviews in film and television studies has generally been restricted to audience studies but has recently expanded into the realm of 'production studies' which has traditionally been restricted to journalistic interviews. She argues that this tradition mirrors the wider split between practice/theory or industry/academia (a split I say much more about in chapter five), a split which she herself seeks to bridge through the use of interviews in her own study of science fiction cinema.

[10] Mayer (2008) makes reference to the inevitable 'numbers game' that afflicts this kind of research - citing how many interviews a researcher has conducted (or more so, how many 'big names') becomes a kind of academic bloodsport, one which I was acutely aware of, not least in my goal of proving my own credibility as new, young researcher.

[11] I would class all of my interviewees as 'professional creatives', following Ryan's terminology deployed in chapter one. Whilst some classed themselves as 'writer-directors', most did not have the clout to initiate projects or exert 'creative control' over those projects. Many were able to support themselves through their writing work but others' supplemented their income in a variety of ways (teaching, script editing, seminar hosting etc) and many had seen one or two of their works produced. The seventeen interviews also covered a variety of positions beyond 'screenwriter' eg. script consultant, script editor, producer etc.) See Appendix One for list of interviewees.

conducted but not recorded (see below for more on this) along with numerous informal conversations with industry 'players'.[12] I placed a large amount of stock in these conversations (seeing them as the most fruitful and meaningful sources of data) but soon recognised that this was part of my own cultural assumption (echoed in the wider critique of the ubiquity of the 'interview society') that self-disclosures within interviews are more 'authentic' than published interviews or an examination of screenwriting manuals for example. As I continued interviewing as well as simultaneously analysing screenwriting teaching resources and screenwriting manuals, I realised I was moving closer to Caldwell's call for 'situated, multi-locale' field studies. I was able to speak more authoritatively to screenwriters about their industry, I was able to ask more pointed questions about the efficacy of screenwriting teaching or manual learning, and I was able to compare the ways in which screenwriting was discursively and materially constructed across these locations, actively seeking out ruptures and contradictions between them. Thus I now see my interviews were (and still are) sources of professional anxiety [13] for me as researcher but also worked as 'situating devices' as Mayer argues (2008, 146). My ongoing struggle with the 'fruitful insecurity' and intensities I faced as 'contradictory and split self' was also inflected by my position as a feminist researcher within the cultural studies tradition and it is to feminist voices I turn to illuminate some further challenges faced during the fieldwork.

3.3.Feminist Voices

The qualitative research agenda I have outlined so far, one which foregrounds reflexivity, the building up of relationships of mutual trust and understanding between interviewees and respondents and the performative nature of interview encounters is also influenced by feminist critiques of interviewing articulated particularly by Oakley (1981). In an influential analysis of the 'masculine model' of social research and the interview as one of its primary instruments, Oakley dissects the 'textbook paradigm' of the interview in which "The person doing the interviewing must actively and continually construct the 'respondent' (a telling name) as passive" (1981, 35). For Oakley, this model signals a wider set of positivist and patriarchal values: "objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and 'science' as an important cultural activity which takes priority over people's more individualised concerns" (Ibid., 38). Again, the hierarchised macro/micro dichotomy is visible.

---

[12] Such as the Head of Research at the UK Film Council, the director of Women in Film and Television (WFTV UK), numerous pedagogues I met at conferences.

[13] Which of course interestingly mirrors the insecurity and anxiety I document and analyse as being an inherent feature of the working lives of screenwriters and screenwriting teachers. See chapters two, five and six particularly.

Oakley faced particular challenges within her own ethnographic research such as the development of close personal connections and relationships with her respondents, as well as the asking of questions by interviewees both of which conflicted with the 'detached' textbook paradigm. For Oakley then:

> the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production [must] be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives (1981, 59).

A key issue raised by feminist critiques of qualitative interviewing was the frequent differences between researchers' and interviewees' perceptions and understandings. As Bryman (2001) notes "the question of what feminist researchers should do when their own 'understandings and interpretations of women's accounts would either not be shared by some of them [ie. the research participants] and/or represent a form of challenge or threat to their perceptions, choices, and coping strategies' (Kelly et al 1994: 37 cited in Bryman, 2001, 326) was often raised. This resonated with my own experience, in which my perceptions of aspects of screenwriting labour (the work as forcibly disinvested for example) were often not shared by my respondents, and were rejected outright or scoffed at.

As Morley (1997) signals, Haraway's call for situated knowledges is crucial and connects with my previous assessment of my interviews as 'situating devices'. Haraway defines embodied, feminist objectivity within critical research projects as 'situated knowledges'. She perceptively notes that within research projects (and critical theory projects that outwardly purport to pursue actively political and partial research agendas are often premised on this) the pursuit and unearthing of 'subjugated standpoints' is the assumed goal. But she argues that "*how* to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language, with the mediations of vision, as the 'highest' technoscientific visualisations" (1996, 253).

Thus for Haraway, the agency of those studied must be foregrounded - as opposed to treating them as 'screens' or 'grounds', merely as receptacles of knowledge - however slippery and tricky this may be, because this agency "transforms the entire project of producing social theory" (Ibid., 259). And she makes a strong case for the potential of the critical feminist scientific project:

> Feminists have stakes in a successor science project that offers a more adequate, richer, better account of the world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions" (Ibid., 252).

I stridently believe it is necessary to both declare my own pursuit of 'situated knowledges' within Haraway's 'feminist successor science' tradition and to thus continue to flag up the partialities and *collective* agency this position entailed and required for this project. In my own feminist-inflected reflections on my research and writing about screenwriting work I have dwelled on a number of highly contingent and abstract phenomena as well as resolutely concrete practices and experiences. As I have talked to screenwriters about their writing I have often found parallels in my own (excruciating) writing process and this has fuelled a palpable empathy and affinity between my respondents and myself which was reflected in questions I asked in which I used this sense of connection as a form of currency.[14] I have also been acutely aware of my negotiated and contradictory position(s), both privileged and vulnerable, as academic and educator alongside the writers and educators I have collaborated with on this project. For example, I have faced some hostility from informants who saw my role(s) as academic, PhD student, young woman and non-writer as unassailable barriers to any understanding of the film industry let alone to writing for the screen as a hobby or career.[15] On the other hand, I have also felt entirely trusted and 'accepted' into the worlds of those I have talked to.[16] My pre-conceived notions about screenwriters as crudely subjugated and marginalised with which I began this project (notions fuelled by images of the 2007-2008 USA writers' strikes' which caught my imagination early on) have been alternately and

---

[14] I often responded to my interviewees' descriptions of their working practices in personalised ways, referring to my own solitary writing practices and/or my struggles with writing, my procrastination techniques, my shared love of *Doctor Who* or *The Wire*. Upon reflection, I see quite clearly that this both made me feel closer to the world I was researching (one which I simultaneously felt removed from in my position as 'academic') and was also a shameless attempt to 'connect' with the writers, to build a potentially spurious sense of trust and mutual understanding. This was then another source as anxiety for me as I wrote up my fieldwork data. I constantly questioned and re-questioned my decision-making over how I was using the personal stories and encounters that were offered to me in interviews, whether a sense of 'loyalty' to my respondents was hampering that decision-making and how the interviewees would then respond to my intellectualising of their working lives.

[15] And the particular encounter I am referring to here was one I read through a gendered lens at the time. As a young, female academic speaking to an older, male respondent, his references to me as 'young girl' and 'little lady' were ones I felt were designed to reduce my credibility at this location and keep me 'in my place'. I was so un-manned by this encounter that I forgot to record our question and answer session which increased my own feelings of unprofessionalism and in my mind, confirmed his low opinion of me. This was one of the first interviews I conducted and was one I struggled to recover from in terms of rebuilding my confidence as legitimate researcher. As the opening quote to this chapter illustrates, other interviewees also often asked if I was also a screenwriter i.e. was 'one of them', which I found discouraging when I then had to admit I was not.

[16] For example, most interviewees asked me to meet at their favourite cafes, in their offices or at their homes and so many of the interviews I conducted were in fairly intimate spaces - kitchens, offices, back gardens, sometimes with other family members around. Some interviewees invited me to events they were speaking at or participating in and trusted me enough to pass my name on to other writer friends/colleagues, characterising me as 'professional', 'capable' and conducting 'useful', 'important' research.

sometimes simultaneously reinforced and spectacularly blown apart (see chapter six for more detail on this).

Incorporating Haraway's ontological preoccupations (her 'politics of positioning') within my wider disciplinary framework provides me with the tools to embrace all these reflections as part of my role(s) as researcher, interviewer, collaborator and feminist academic and it is in fact, within the fissures and contradictions between my theoretical framework, my multi-sited fieldwork and the reflections of both myself and my interviewees that the most exhilarating and confounding insights have appeared, insights which have fuelled my focus on screenwriting as creative labour, pedagogy and practice within the new cultural economy. In order to more fully and reflexively account for these fissures and contradictions I wish to acknowledge the writings of Law, Urry and Mol and their discussions of mess, co-production and complexity in relation to research and knowledge production itself.

3.4. The co-production of knowledge and complexity studies

Law's discussion of 'messiness' in social science research enables a perceptive dissection of an empiricist view of research that "assumes there is a reality out there of a definite form waiting to be discovered" (2004, 22) and Law identifies some of these embedded assumptions about empirical 'reality' or as he calls it, 'out-thereness': that external reality is "usually independent of our actions and especially of our perceptions"; that external reality precedes us (Law calls this anteriority); that external reality has, or is composed of, a set of definite forms or relations (definiteness) and that the world is shared, common, the same everywhere (singularity) (Ibid., 24- 25). Thus in discussing the development of scientific 'knowledge' upon which the quantitative research tradition is centred:

> Similarities, overlaps, stabilities, repetitions, or positive relations between
> statements tend to increase their authority. If all goes well it may become possible
> to make statements that assert unqualified claims about substances and realities,
> pin these down, fix them, and make them definite (Ibid., 28).

Law argues that notions of natural (and by extension, social science) reality are forged and made stable, secure and unquestioned by a 'hinterland' of statements, texts, practices and 'inscription devices' which are routinised and thus made very difficult to undo in any revolutionary way. But

Law also argues that Latour and Woolgar's work (which he draws on) reveals that "Reality then, is not independent of the apparatuses that produce reports of reality" (31).

Law and Urry argue that research methods are always performative, that this is often overlooked in discussions of research and method and that a consequence of performativity in methods is, therefore that "they have effects; they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover" (2004, 392). I have had numerous encounters during my fieldwork in which this notion of performativity has been made plainly and (sometimes) painfully obvious, when my own performances as 'competent' or 'industry-friendly' or 'screenwriter-friendly' researcher have been well tested. For example, in particular interviews I attempted to challenge writers by asking them about the 'state of the industry' or asked them to explain how they viewed the concept of 'creativity' in their work or how they 'calculated' particular career decisions. These kinds of probes often led in interesting directions but also elicited eye-rolling or annoyance at my misunderstanding or shallow knowledge of their profession. I also saw my own attempts to exude competence and confidence reflected back at me; screenwriters and teachers often name-dropped for effect as they recounted their career highlights (or pointedly referred to 'big names' they had worked with but couldn't name, which simply heightened the drama of these disclosures) and recounted 'horror stories' which mirrored the 'bootstraps storyline' which Mayer (2008) identifies as integral to production studies research.[17] Respondents sometimes expressed paranoia and fear that their disclosures to me about industry players or particular projects might filter back into the industry through my work and affect their future working opportunities. In terms of performativity, I found myself 'playing to' these performances - showing I was impressed with the name-dropping or assuring informants I would preserve their anonymity and reputation for example.

In discussing the *productive* nature of social inquiry, Law and Urry (as well as Law and Mol, 2002) suggest that complexity theory is the most useful way to illuminate and trace the 'ontological politics' that all social research performs and produces. The authors see complexity theory as moving social research on, away from Euclidean–centred understandings of spatiality, temporality and so on, and opening up room for consideration of non-linearity, interference, multiplicity, partiality and non-innocence: "Method needs to be sensitive to the complex and the elusive. It needs

---

[17] I discuss this in more detail in chapter six. Tt mirrors the notion of screenwriting work as 'theatrical' which I identify and analyse as an important, reflexive technique for screenwriters as they navigate production and development meetings in which they themselves are often in 'defensive' positions.

to be more mobile. It needs to find ways of knowing the slipperiness of 'units that are not' as they move in and beyond old categories" (2004, 401).

Law and Mol guard against setting up a binary between complexity and simplicity but note that academic texts often work from a premise that bewildering complexity can be cleanly presented and discussed, thus, "What may originally have been surprising is explained and is therefore no longer surprising or disturbing. Academic texts may talk about strange things, but their tone is almost always calm" (2002, 3). To counter this binary-creating tendency, Law and Mol offer a number of potentially useful tools including again, multiplicity, the tropes of *flow* and *churn* and the possibility of non-classificatory lists and cases:

> There are then, modes of relating that allow the simple to coexist with the complex, of aligning elements without necessarily turning them into a comprehensive system or a complete overview. These are some of the ways of describing the world while keeping it open, ways of paying tribute to complexities, which are always there, somewhere, elsewhere, untamed (Ibid., 16-17)

Notions of multiplicity, complexity, flow and churn are in fact, integral to this project. The complexities of the new cultural economy, the 'hollowing out' of the term creativity in this context and Caldwell's suggestion that contemporary screen production industries are fuelled by 'serial corporate churn' are all central to the practices and pedagogies of screenwriting labour I highlight within this study. As I discussed in chapters one and two, studying screenwriting as creative labour highlights the multiplicity and slipperiness of that analysis - screenwriting is old and new, is experienced as a bewildering and constant movement between individualised and collaborative modes of work, is highly organised in some contexts but is also inherently partial and is increasingly churned up and degraded. I have attempted to document and make sense of these multiplicities and flows at particular sites of pedagogy and practice, using terms such as intelligibility and currency or durable dualities such as creativity/craft but have also not tried to resolve or simplify them. Instead I have analysed them in the context of the history of industrial screen production and the contemporary dynamics of the new cultural economy in which economised notions of creativity dominate but in which screenwriters embrace collaborative forms of creative and craft work and actively navigate and calculate through their careers.

Law and Mol's ideas have recently been echoed by Adkins and Lury who query the 'special relationship' sociology has had with the empirical, arguing that change is in the air, that the 'new economy' can now no longer be conceptualised as either Euclidean or linear and that, because of this,

> the capacities and complexities of diverse processes of signification in the making of the empirical must be understood within sociological enquiry and the 'immanence of movement' must be central to this re-imagined understanding (2009, 17).

In chapters five and six, the complexities and industrial flows that see screenwriters move from a Masters course to a development workshop are ones I have made material, building the chapter up from one location to another and connecting them by using screenwriting-style descriptions (courier 12-point font, screen directions such as 'fade in', character names) to re-invent the research encounters I had 'on the ground' and to reflect the particular forms of 'textuality' with which screenwriting distinguishes itself. Here, I have found my own way of 'paying tribute' to the world I have drawn from whilst trying to mirror the 'flow and churn' that writers themselves experience in their daily working lives.

Finally, and in order to draw together these methodological and empirical concerns, I turn to a brief consideration of creative labour research to date. I am preoccupied with the standard creative labour vocabulary that has coagulated within the growing 'hinterland' around creative labour and 'new cultural economy' research.

3.5. Methodologies within creative labour research

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews have become largely 'taken-for-granted' within the hinterland of creative labour theory and this inevitability has also served to solidify the creative labour vocabulary that has been used to 'make up' the theory itself. It is generally acknowledged within cultural studies that labour-focused research has been limited. As McRobbie puts it, "Creative labour has been overlooked in media and cultural studies in recent years to the point that almost everything but work has been the subject of extensive attention" (1998, 175). Beyond cultural studies per se, contemporary theorists have utilised qualitative research strategies including interviews to foreground working lives and subjectivities in postmodernised labour markets.

Bryman (2001) and Atkinson and Coffey (2002) both cite Hochschild's (1983) research into 'emotional labour' as an example of credible and influential qualitative labour research.

McRobbie reflects on important methodological questions for the field in her 1998 study,[18] writing that her case study could perhaps be characterised as 'merely empirical' (from Morley, 1997, cited in McRobbie, 1998, 176). She goes on to ask:

> What can be drawn from a small-scale case study of a strata of creative workers in one particular corner of the fashion industry? Can we legitimately move from the frame of the case study to the bigger frame marking the field of cultural production? Or do the sheer peculiarities of fashion in Britain restrict such a move? (Ibid.)

As I outlined in chapter one, particularism is a key issue both in theoretical and methodological terms and it illuminates an important paradox – creative labour or production studies research to date has generally produced particularised case studies (of fashion designers in the UK, new media workers in the USA, television workers in the UK for example) and attendant creative labour vocabularies for these case studies but both the methods and the vocabularies have quickly become routinised, have congealed around a central set of 'organising terms' (such as flexible, precarious, freelance, individualised and so on) and have been replicated without much innovation or attention to the 'immanence of movement', to the complexities within a term such as 'creative labour' itself. The most insightful and progressive methodological frameworks to date offer, for me, ways to theorise screenwriting as creative labour as precisely, a form of work within a particular context, the 'new cultural economy' in which 'creative industries' discourse problematises traditional dualities such as creative/craft or individual/collective.

Ross (2004), whose work I am looking to as an exemplary model of critical labour research, as 'affective intellectual activism' (as Gregg describes, 2006, 107) employed extensive participant observation of a new media workplace in New York for his account of the 'no-collar' workforce and also utilised interviews conducted throughout his time at the company 'Razorfish' to document what he calls the 'industrialisation of bohemia'. His 'on-the-ground' methodological approach enabled an extremely perceptive account of the material ways in which capital within 'new media'

---

[18] Like Hochschild, McRobbie used interviews (this time with fashion graduates/designers, fashion industry professionals, teachers and journalists) as well as textual analysis of newspaper/magazine articles, course curricula and so on.

workplaces found "the makings of a self-justifying, low-wage workforce, at the very heart of the knowledge industries so crucial to its growth and development" (Ross, 2004, 24). What is also compelling, troubling and therefore fortifying are the links Ross has made in his scholarship between the forms of labour he has observed and documented (in sweatshops in China as well as 'hipster' workplaces in New York) and affective academic labour.[19] Thus his theory and methods are inextricably tied to his role as activist and he is always immersed in the processes he seeks to understand. Ross continues to call for media and cultural studies to engage with the questions he raises: "…we need to start analysing how it is that contemporary media, or the so-called creative industries, have emerged as an optimum field for realising the long-standing capitalist dream of stripping labour costs to the bone" (2008, 137). Many times I have felt the ironies of undertaking research into partial, precarious creative labour whilst living forms of that labour - as international student, as doctoral student undertaking piecemeal teaching work of my own, as researcher with very limited funds to undertake research that would extend the reach and perhaps, the generalisability of my analysis.[20] I take the lesson from Ross that engagement, activism and an acknowledgement of my own complicity with the labouring I seek to understand is a key facet of a creative labour methodology that is productive rather than reductive. That again illuminates my own partial 'optics' as a contradictory and split self.

I would also like to flag up here the 'integrated cultural-industrial analysis' of Caldwell in his far-reaching examination into industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television production. Caldwell explicitly follows Geertz's call for interpretive anthropology, arguing that he sought to 'read over the shoulder' of film and television workers in order to understand the industry's "own self-representation, self-critique and self-reflection" (2008, 5). He also tips his hat to Marcus' (1986) call for 'situated, multi-locale' field studies, is preoccupied with a dialogue between macro- and micro- and pursues 'indigenous cultural theory' (following Willis, 1981). Caldwell employs the familiar multiple data-collection method: fieldwork 'on-the-ground' in Los

---

[19] Arguably, part-time, flexible freelancers, the 'self-justifying, low-wage' earners Ross identifies, also populate the academy within which a new generation of cultural studies scholars is emerging and I must place myself within this generation. Here I acknowledge my own conflicted position as an affective, precarious academic labourer which for me, deepens both my investment within the project and my own conflicted and complicitous position within the labour movements and markets I am documenting.

[20] I am acutely aware of the ongoing and intractable geographical limitations to my project that I have already mentioned. I discuss both the London-centric and Hollywood-centric screenwriting industries across my project but this means I am also investing in the continued ghettoisation of industries outside of the 'mainstream' corporatised filmmaking bottleneck. I have also spent a lot of time thinking about the extent to which I can connect the histories and experiences of Hollywood-based screenwriters with British-based writers; I often assume this is viable; in my analysis of Hollywood-centric screenwriting myth-making or in my analysis of largely Hollywood-oriented screenwriting manuals for example. But I realise these assumptions can and should be critiqued. I also believe my reflexive and rhetorical position is justifiable and I state this as I go if and when I think it needs to be reiterated.

Angeles, interviews, textual analysis, historical and archival analysis over a ten-year period and marshals a staggering amount of empirical detail within the project. What is compelling about Caldwell's approach is a number of specific, industrial insights which are directly applicable to my own project: he illuminates the complexities and (often mutual) hostilities that are evident between 'the academy' and 'the industry'[21] and which become material methodological concerns (in interview exchanges with industry 'players' for example); he highlights the particularities of the industrial contexts of screen production in comparison to other creative labour research projects such as Ross's (2004)[22] with much more depth and insight than in any other projects of this type to date; and, in order to make sense of his very large body of work which ranges across labouring sub-sectors, fieldwork sites, and texts, he foregrounds 'cultural heterogeneity and institutional specificity' and thus focuses on discrete sectors of the L.A.-centric production community and categorises artefacts and rituals he examines across three 'registers'[23] which makes for a navigable path through the breadth of data he uses.

I also employ a multiple data-collection method as I have said, combining interviews and observational data-gathering techniques with textual analysis of 'how-to' screenwriting manuals and supplementary research from published interviews with screenwriters and online resource gathering and recording from screenwriting blogs and fora. Interviewing will play a more central role in my analysis than some other studies of film and television production (such as Ursell, 2000 and Blair, 2001; 2003 for example) because participant observation was not as viable a possibility for supplementary data-gathering. Unlike the film and television production workers observed and interviewed for these studies, screenwriters work both in isolation and in highly restricted and closed collaborative encounters. I tried many times to find ways to observe development or script meetings for example, but these inquiries always fell through; producers, though often helpful, were extremely wary of having an 'outsider' present during production meetings and processes. Thus, I had to 'make do' by finding alternative ways to learn screenwriting languages, to understand how screenwriting is constructed and taught and to observe the ways in which the writers I talked to

---

[21] Pages 9-10 are particularly insightful on this and, for Caldwell, this is all part and parcel of "the sadly familiar rhetoric of mutual contempt that marks the apparent gulf between film/television, on the one hand, and intelligence/ objectivity on the other."

[22] Importantly, he distinguishes his own investigations from those of Ross arguing that "Ross's dot-com/new-economy/ new-media juggernaut consciously defined and organised itself in dialectical opposition to the Hollywood/film industry/ old-media context and tradition that defines and organises…[screen production] workplaces" (2004, 376, footnote 18).

[23] These are: A) Fully embedded deep texts and rituals which exemplify 'intra-group relations'; B) Semi-embedded deep texts and rituals which exemplify 'inter-group relations'; and C) Publicly disclosed deep texts and rituals', exemplifying 'extra-group relations' (see 2008, 347).

calculate and navigate their careers. This meant I spent a lot of time attending events in and around London: screenings and question and answer sessions at which I always tried to get one question answered; seminars hosted by interviewees; and large-scale public events such as film festivals. This then facilitated my immersion in a small but growing screenwriting research community which led on to further discussions with practitioners as well as researchers. I also made extensive use of online fora - screenwriters' blogs, interviews with screenwriters in relation to their recently released films which I then pored over - and news coverage about ongoing stories related to the topic area, such as the aftermath of the 2007-2008 writers strike.[24]

Conclusion - Producing partial, situated knowledge(s) about screenwriting labour

Within this methodological design, which has developed over the course of my study, I have sought out, established and documented a fresh set of encounters. I have employed discursive and labour analysis across a range of sites, from interviews and observational encounters to teaching curricula and policy documents. In my pursuit of the analysis of screenwriting as creative labour, my methodological approach actively embodies the terms I take up to analyse screenwriting as creative work: partial, collaborative, atomised, old and new. My invocation of them signals a commitment to Haraway's call for 'situated knowledges' and the terms reflect my own position as partial and collaborative as well as the position(s) of my respondents, my texts, my methods themselves. This methodological framework and the vocabulary which it *produces/is produced by* is also attendant to the tropes of complexity and multiplicity which Mol and Law (2002) and Adkins and Lury (2009) invoke. These tropes are particularly useful in an era in which the standard models of analysis (within critical sociology, cultural studies and social science more generally) must be redesigned and remade in order to reinvigorate the disciplines themselves and offer fresh insights on a topic - creative labour - subsumed by simplified, economistic notions of 'complex' terms such as creativity

---

[24] I'm well aware of the ethical and practical debates around the use of online sources, the credibility of such sources and the questionable efficacy of virtual ethnographies. I would not characterise this project as 'virtual' in any substantive sense but it's important for me to acknowledge how crucial particular online sources were for my own 'language-learning' and the evolution of my research agenda as a whole. It has also been noted that online fora are increasingly important for the international screenwriting community in terms of labour organisation, community-building, advice-giving and ongoing debate, see Banks (2010). I read hundreds of blog entries from a few blogs widely cited as 'useful' and 'credible' by my interviewees (and I only closely examined sites which had been endorsed by respondents). These blogs were Jane Espenson's blog on television writing in Hollywood, Craig Mazin's 'Artful Writer' blog which was a key conduit of debate about screenwriters' labour issues at the time of the 2007-2008 strike, the Writers Guild websites (WGAE and WGAW and the WGGB in the UK, whose blog I also checked regularly), *Creative Screenwriting* magazine (whose podcasts I listened to regularly) and the blog of Julian Friedmann who also oversees the 'Twelvepoint.com' site, formerly published as 'Scriptwriter' magazine. A number of my interviewees also had blogs which I 'checked in' with frequently. I cite these resources when necessary in subsequent chapters, treating them as no less credible (although certainly more informal) than other source material I employ. See Bibliography for website details.

itself. I now turn to the first of three fieldwork-based chapters, the examination and analysis of 'How-to' manuals as specific but contested pedagogical location(s) in which screenwriting is constructed and materialised as work. The manuals are analysed as a key site of exhortations to 'work on oneself' as a screenwriter and the analysis is particularly attendant to how the texts hitch individualised and collaborative modes of screenwriting work together in partial and intricate ways.

Chapter Four - Gurus and Oscar-Winners: Teaching screenwriting labour in 'How-to' manuals

```
In general I think the vast majority of books are kind of
useful for rewriting…so if you're in the second or third
or fourth or even fifth draft or something and you're
having some issues, you're looking for a wall to bounce
ideas off, reading a Linda Seger or…I don't know, who
else, a Robert McKee…but, if you're writing original
material, or even a first draft of an adaptation, I think
they are the worst thing you could possibly do, you know,
I really believe that.
```

(Sam P. in conversation, 2009)

4. Introduction

Screenwriting has been the subject of extensive literature in the last three decades in relation to both the techniques of industrial writing and the pursuit of profit and fame. This chapter demonstrates that 'How-To' screenwriting manuals feed directly into the 'new cultural economy' around screenwriting and screen production - they offer the opportunity to dream up and invent one's own career and offer blueprints for doing so. The chapter draws on textual analysis of a selection of the most popular manuals and analyses the discursive strategies the texts deploy to concretise and teach aspects of screenwriting labour, from story structure and formatting to pitching and rewriting. Here, I conceive of these texts as a set of specific pedagogical location(s) in which screenwriting is constructed and materialised as work. The manuals are discussed as a type of psy-technology and as a sophisticated form of career-based self-help. More specifically, the texts are analysed as a key site of exhortations to 'work on oneself' as a screenwriter and the analysis is particularly attendant to how the texts hitch individualised and collaborative modes of screenwriting work together in partial but intricate ways.

Screenwriting as a creative and craft-oriented career is propped up by the wealth of these 'How-to' texts that purportedly offer the tools and skills required to fashion a working subject-hood from scratch and they operate in a variety of modes. The texts have a self-standing status. They have a long publishing history[1] which is aligned with the standardisation of screenwriting labour in general

_____

[1] The history of this genre of publishing dates from the early days of writing for the screen and parallels the progressive standardisation of screenwriting labour within the industrial Hollywood complex and beyond. Space does not permit a full discussion of the genre's history but authors such as Maras (2009) offer good historical accounts.

and arguably they have played a pivotal role in this standardisation process; they are key elements of the curricula in a wide range of pedgagogical frameworks for screenwriting in higher education; and they themselves are educational tools, offering nominally easy paths to success and simultaneously offering an alternative to higher education courses. As Maras argues,

> The fact that the majority of script books speak to novices is particularly important…the bulk of 'how-to' books are, after all, primers to screenwriting that define writing for the screen, and access to it, in a particular way. This particularism works to define the shape of what qualifies, or does not, as industrial practice, as well as legitimate screenwriting; in other words, it regulates who can speak with authority and who cannot (2009, 25).

As was outlined in chapter one, screenwriting is a form of pedagogy and practice which continues to problematise notions of creativity, craft and authorship. The 'How-to' manuals construct and then speak to 'ideal' screenwriting selves by knitting together concrete conceptions and techniques of screenwriting work with the highly contingent and unpredictable aspects of the labour. They invoke the 'mythic' personae of the screenwriter as historical, particular and partial figure(s) which I outlined in chapter two. The 'How-to' manuals offer a particular platform for a collective, pedagogical voice which speaks to screenwriters-as-workers. The seamless industrial setting evoked by these texts may represent aspects of the real-world conditions in which writers must function but, overwhelmingly, they address screenwriters as individualised and atomised figures. This tendency towards individualism and atomisation fosters an acute sense of insecurity in the subjects of the 'How-to's'.

'How-to' manuals conceive of and discuss screenwriting work in a number of distinctive ways and I will begin by demonstrating their standard discursive strategies. Firstly, the fairly rigid structure and 'essential' elements of mainstream screenplays as they are dictated within the manuals will be examined. Concrete directives about story structure, characterisation, conflict and rewriting are all designed to mould and control the labour of the screenwriter at the level of the individual and act as coercive technologies, setting standards and expectations within the industry. Also, the manuals are a, (perhaps even the), principal site in which entrepreneurial skills are constantly invoked, skills that insist on the need to network, pitch and write with the market in mind, to encourage writers to 'play the game' within a corporate cultural production system. As well as functioning as powerful concretising and individualising mechanisms, I argue that the manuals utilise the contingent

discourse of collaboration to atomise, constantly reminding the screenwriter she/he is what MacDonald (2004a) calls a 'supplicant' in the industry which employs them.

This chapter is made up of two analytical sections. The first focuses on a range of popular, traditionally formatted manuals. Particular authors are prominently discussed within the section, these being the most popular and oft-cited 'gurus' of the genre such as Robert McKee, Syd Field and Linda Seger. A second section hones in on a sub-section of the genre by examining three manuals based solely on interviews with 'award-winning' or consecrated and successful screenwriters. They take the 'first-hand' accounts from their selected, elite writers and structure these accounts into chapters much like the conventional manuals. These interview-based manuals are not as numerous as the 'How-To' texts but provide a rich source of secondary empirical data, offering insights into who screenwriters are, the creative processes they employ, the craft skills they learn, their individual career trajectories and experiences, both positive and negative, in film production networks in the USA and the UK. These experiences are employed to reinforce the practical advice and offerings of the manuals but the interview texts also complexify screenwriting as both an art form and a commercial endeavour and expose some weaknesses in the traditional manuals' prescriptions.

Overall, and as MacDonald (2004a) analyses in detail, there is a 'screenwriting convention' laid out in 'How-to' manuals, a convention which produces a dominant discourse within what MacDonald analyses (using a Bourdieu-sian framework) as the 'field of screenwork production'. This convention permeates through every area in which screenwriting labour 'works itself out', from screenwriting courses and the industry assessment of them in the UK, to the techniques of script editors and readers, to screenwriters' daily working lives and their interactions with other filmmakers. As I argued in chapter two, like the standard, Hollywood-centric myth of the screenwriter and the historical themes which have been established and circulated for this figure, the manuals can also be characterised as *zones of intelligibility* where the codes and conventions of writing for the screen have been carved out and legitimated. Martin (1999) argues that the manuals' discourse feeds a 'culture of decisions' which is tied into the convention and Maras (2005) terms this the 'theory/funding nexus'. The screenwriting careers that the manuals dream up and offer are ones which are tightly circumscribed and standardised by this convention and I will show how the intelligibility of screenwriting-as-labour is constructed in very specific ways in these manuals.

4.1.'How-to' manuals as 'psy-technologies' and zones of intelligibility

'How-to' manuals of all kinds are an important site of the production of disciplinary techniques in relation to screenwriting labour. They invoke and then work to reinforce an 'ideal subjectivity' for a screenwriter working today and they build up a discursive framework for screenwriting as industrial creative labour. The manuals are, to use Rose's epistemological approach (as I signalled in chapter one), a type of psy-technology. They are a sophisticated form of self-help, offering aspirational possibilities and tools to budding writers. They provide advice from gurus, script consultants, script readers and screenwriters on how to *be* a writer, how to harness one's creativity, how to organise one's daily writing life, how to "Steal Fire From the Gods" as one manual claims (Bonnett, 2006). All these promises reinforce writers' expectations of their labour, of the industry and of 'how it works' (see Millard, 2006). They are zones of intelligibility for screenwriting labour in the new cultural economy.

Rose argues that modern power can be characterised using a Foucauldian understanding of "… strategies for the conduct of conduct" (1998, 29), so frequently power operates through the shaping of what Foucault termed 'technologies of the self' – 'self-steering mechanisms' (Foucault, 1988). Rose writes:

> Technologies of the self take the form of the elaboration of certain techniques for the conduct of one's relation with oneself, for example, requiring one to relate to oneself epistemologically (know yourself), despotically (master yourself), or in other ways (care for yourself). They are embodied in particular technical practices (confession, diary writing, group discussion, the twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous). And they are always practiced under the actual or imagined authority of some system of truth and of some authoritative individual, whether this be teleological and priestly, psychological and therapeutic, or disciplinary and tutelary (1998, 29).

The manuals call on writers to 'dream up' their careers as screenwriters – to develop and reflect on their process (in both creative and craft terms) and to discipline and master their story ideas, their individual and collaborative working techniques and their conduct within the film production industries. The manuals are also wholly taken up with highly technical practices; concrete techniques from crafting characters and conflict to writing treatments, step outlines and rewriting

are offered up as ways to 'work on oneself' as a writer, to make the screenwriting self "thinkable and manageable" (Rose, 1989, 248).

Rose also argues that a new strategic dimension of the psychotherapeutic is the subjectification of work (1989, 244) and the manuals offer a particular platform for the subjectification of screenwriting work and the discussion(s) of the various labouring techniques that will lead to success, fulfilment and autonomy. Rose locates psy-technologies within a broader 'enterprise culture' which has come to dominate neo-liberal Western societies. He argues that diverse ethical regimes within enterprise culture are:

> governed by a single *a priori*: the 'autonomisation' and 'responsibilisation' of the self, the instilling of a reflexive hermeneutics that afford self-knowledge and self-mastery, and the operation of all of this under the authority of experts who claim that the self can achieve a better and happier life through the application of scientific knowledge and professional skill (1992, 149-150).

Thus screenwriting manuals offer a dominant framing for enterprise culture within screenwriting work. Screenwriting selves are constantly called upon to function as autonomous and responsible workers and are reminded of the traits needed to 'make it' as a screenwriter - energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility (all traits identified by Rose, 1992, 146).

However, an ontological problematic also needs to be addressed here. To use Rose is to follow in the analytical tradition of characterising self-help "as symptomatic of an overarching set of psychological discourses that works to regulate and 'control' the individual through the appearance of choice and autonomy" (Cherry, 2008, 339). For Cherry, this indicates that an underlying assumption of such an analysis is that the self-help text is 'self-sufficient', that it "claims ontological priority over those functions through which it assumes meaning" (Ibid., 346). Cherry's insights are a useful counter-point here. In many ways, this discussion of 'How-to' manuals explicitly follows the tradition which uses a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality to highlight the ways in which such texts produce, contain and discipline working subjects. The added problematic is that such an analysis quickly seems reduced to polarities - constraint is implicitly counter-posed to production and freedom, instrumentalism to innovation, freedom to control.

However, I believe this tradition is an important one to follow in the first instance because it enables a sophisticated and situated account of the logics and discourses of the 'new cultural economy' as they play out within this particular literary sub-genre. The polarities which may appear when using a Foucauldian approach are analytically useful because they illustrate Pang's notion of the "complex social embedding of creative labour" (2009, 72). Self-help is an important trope but it is not the beginning or end-point of the analysis. Rather, I contend that screenwriting manuals are pedagogical locations for the production of discourses around creative labour and screenwriting labour in the new cultural economy. They exemplify the 'twisted economic logic' of late capitalism in which all polarities, from individual/collective to freedom/constraint are in fact, dangerously collapsed and conflated.

4.2. Genre and industry

Whilst there is a paucity of information about the shape, size and history of this genre[2] a few preliminary notes give a sense of both the origins and longevity of the genre, the contemporary publishing sphere and the prominent titles and 'gurus'. I'll draw here primarily on the work of Maras (2009) who offers one of the only widely available discussions of this genre and its origins.

Maras (2009) notes that in the early silent era in the USA, an extended network of screen writers, editors, reviewers and journalists ran question and answer columns in publications such as *Moving Picture World* and *Photoplay* which formed the basis of the 'advice-giving' context and address of the subsequent texts, such as Epes Winthrop Sargent's oft-cited (1912) *Technique of the Photoplay*.[3] This early publishing period is often referred to within the wider context of "scenario fever" which, fed by encouragement of public submission of story ideas, facilitated "a goldrush mentality" (Azlant, 1980 cited in Maras, 2009, 141) and a "mass publication of handbooks between 1912 and 1920" (Ibid., 139).

---

[2] Which conjecture would suggest is because of a number of possible factors: for example, the perceived populism and therefore illegitimacy of the genre within the wider frame of 'literature'; the questionable (via self disclosures) 'usefulness' of the texts to screenwriters and teachers who don't want to be perceived as 'book taught' as opposed to inherently gifted/talented/knowledgeable; the notorious opacity of the publishing industry in terms of 'sensitive' commercial data such as sales figures.

[3] This text in fact went through three editions in quick succession (1912, 1913, 1916) and as Maras notes, for Azlant (1980, 211) they form an archive, representing a "distillation and ongoing revision of public instruction" (2009, 148) and focused on correct format and notions of 'plotting'.

A key point is that this inception period established and mobilised the need for advice on 'How To' itself - that is, how to write for the screen. For Maras this is because of a number of discursive factors such as the immediate emphasis on understanding what the studios would accept in terms of scenario ideas and a focus on "adequate and inadequate narratives" (2009, 142). Early handbook writers (such as Esenwein and Leeds, 1913: 221-73) inform budding writers 'What you cannot write', 'What you should not write' and so on. These early texts were also preoccupied (again there are clear parallels with contemporary 'How-To' discourse) with technical details and specifications, down to offering advice on the correct use of paper and envelopes as well as providing sample synopses and scenarios to demonstrate format. There is also evidence of the early splintering of the genre, including the development of the selling and marketing sub-genre, a category still clearly in evidence in the slew of contemporary entrepreneurial titles discussed further below. Maras (2009) cites titles including *The Photoplay: How to Write, How to Sell* (John Arthur Nelson, 1913), *How to Write for the Movies* (Louella O. Parsons, 1915) and *Cinema Plays: How to Write Them, How to Sell Them* (Eustace Hale Ball, 1917) and uses key authors to illuminate moments in the historical/ discursive process of writing for the screen: France Taylor Patterson in the 1920s,[4] Dudley Nichols in the 1930s, John Howard Lawson in the late 1940s.

Overall, Maras ties his discussion of early handbooks to the developing 'collective identity' of screenwriters and his wider notion of the 'particularism' embedded within the discursive formations of industrial screenwriting. He argues that early handbooks often made reference to the need to carve out a space for screen writers, to 'draw borders around their craft' and thus offer some protection from hostile directors, studio executives and so on. Gritten's (2008) analysis characterises early British 'How-To' manuals as sites of struggle over the advent of sound in British filmmaking; here, the development of a particular professional practice for industrial writers is contested and debated within the manuals of the day. As with contemporary titles, Maras argues that many early 'How-To' authors invoke a sense of 'insider knowledge' and "the particularist impulse informing the handbook genre gives it a pedagogic quality, separating players from non-players in a broader game of industry, in which industrial knowledge belongs to a social minority" (2009, 163).

---

[4] An instructor in 'Photoplay Composition' at Columbia University, Patterson produced two titles in the 1920s, *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights* (1921) and *Scenario and Screen* (1928) and she "…takes up the task of formalising the idea of 'writing for the screen' as a particular craft activity, along with the notion of being trained for this activity" (Maras, 2009, 151).

Bordwell argues that contemporary screenwriting manuals represent a "consolidation of studio-era principles" in an era of decentralisation and commodification of production (2006, 27). Thus he talks of a 'flood of manuals' for aspiring writers keen to 'break in' to the industry and needing practical advice on the now pedestrian concepts such as format and plotting. As Bordwell goes on to argue, "Above all the script had to win the support of gatekeepers, the development staff known as readers or 'story analysts' "(Bordwell, 2006, 28). For Maras, Bordwell's discussion of handbooks is useful but limiting; it "becomes a reflection on structure, on the details of three-act structure, its source (as 'trade secret') and institutionalisation" (2009, 156) and for him, this is a depoliticised discussion which assumes the industry standards as opposed to critically examining or reflecting on them.

Figures and data on current 'How-To' titles have proven very difficult to unearth but some scattered information uncovers the following. A number of key publishers, based in Los Angeles, produce a large number of currently available titles: Silman-James Press (publishers of Froug, 1991; Trottier, 1998 and Aronson, 2001), Lone Eagle Publishing, Michael Wiese Productions (Vogler, 1998 and Snyder, 2005), Broadway Books (a Random House imprint) and Focal Press (Grove, 2001; and Dancyger and Rush, 2002). Deahl (2006) offers some scattered sales information which at least provides fairly recent ball-park sales figures. She cites Linda Seger who has written seven books and claims over a quarter of a million copies sold. She also notes that the 'guru' Syd Field (originally Bantam, now Bantam Dell owned by Random House) had 500,000 copies of his titles in print in 2006. Robert McKee's *Story* (published by Harper Collins) is in its 32nd printing in the USA and 19th in the UK (McKee, 2009). Vogler has sold in the 160,000-180,000 range and Snyder is in the 50,000 sales range (Michael Wiese Productions, personal communication, 2009). Deahl also notes the development of sub-genres and niche titles because of the glut of books now available so here we could witness a more specialised title such as Paul Gulino's *The Sequence Approach* (which sold 6000 in 2005-06, see Deahl, 2006). These fairly specialised titles are not mainstream hits but are surprisingly ubiquitous and have ballooned in number in recent decades. Key contemporary and 'classic' titles are now examined in detail and their discursive strategies will be laid out in relation to screenwriting labour.[5]

_____

[5] A range of popular and 'classic' manuals were consulted for this analysis, many recommended by interviewees and oft-cited in published interviews with screenwriters and in popular discussions of the screenwriting industry. Thirty two titles were consulted in total including the most popular and cited 'guru' titles such as Field (1994), Seger (1994) and McKee (1998).

4.3.Contemporary 'How-To' manuals

What follows is a discussion of the pedagogical and disciplinary mechanisms which the 'How-To' manuals analysed here exemplify and produce: rigidity of form and standardisation, entrepreneurialism, vociferous individualism and carefully orchestrated collaboration. The mastery of all of these as labouring techniques are consistently invoked and characterised as integral to the successful and fulfilling labour of the ideal screenwriting self. The analysis begins with a discussion of the rhetorical strategies the texts employ to speak to the screenwriter as individual worker. A number of concrete 'knowable' practices are consistently discussed within the genre and these are analysed as pedagogical and disciplinary techniques which materialise screenwriting labour. Secondly, I turn to the manuals as sites of the production of contingent, collaborative modes of screenwriting work. Rather than offering a counter-point to individualising discourse, I argue that the texts seamlessly link individual and collective forms of writing together; this process of mutual reinforcement means these texts are exemplary psy-technologies within the new cultural economy and they foster insecurity and atomisation within the screenwriting labour market. As I argued in chapters one and two, the 'new cultural economy' is now colonised by an impoverished conception of creativity as almost wholly economistic, as routinely hitched to notions of the 'knowledge economy', to discourses of innovation and skills development, to 'creative industries' policy which has now percolated through 'creative' pedagogies and practices in the UK. 'How-to' manuals are now well integrated into screenwriting pedagogy in the UK (as I will discuss further in chapter five) and this analysis illustrates both the centrality and the ambiguity of these texts as pedagogical locations.

The texts often provide succinct sets of steps or snappy inventories that break down the writing process (for example, *Power Screenwriting: The Twelve Stages of Story Development,* Walker, 2002 and 'Seven Steps to a Stunning Script: A Workbook' in Trottier, 1998) or in fact, the writers themselves. Berman offers '8 Basic Qualities of being a screenwriter': imagination, desire, discipline, confidence, perseverance, the ability to pitch, a positive attitude, punctuality and good follow-through (1988, 147). This address suggests unerring confidence in the genre's ability to produce fully formed writers and to launch careers. The genre's prescriptiveness is routinely placed in opposition to a pervasive sense that screenwriting is difficult and labourious and that the field of screenwriting hinges on veiled knowledge that purports to be uncovered and revealed by the manuals. Titles such as: *Secrets of Screenplay Structure: How to Recognise and Emulate the*

Structural Frameworks of Great Films (Cowgill, 1999) and *The 101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters: Insider Secrets from Hollywood's Top Writers* (Iglesias, 2001) perpetuate the notion that already consecrated films and writers can offer the 'secrets' that will enable new writers to break into the screenwriting field.

Many of the manuals are also highly intertextual, providing examples and analyses of both consecrated screenplays that have been critically and commercially successful and unproduced screenplays, usually that the manual authors themselves have written. For example, Webber (2000) includes her science fiction script *The Lawless Legion* as an appendix in her 'road map' text, Cox (Wolff and Cox, 1988) uses her treatment of *Camp Wildfire* to illustrate treatment form and style and Trottier (1998) includes a section of his spec script *A Window in Time*. In a somewhat oxymoronic turn, this suggests that an alternative profession to screenwriting in the cut-throat field of film and television production may be a writer of manuals revealing and explaining both the 'rules' and 'secrets' of screenwriting. This intertextuality also works to legitimate the advice offered within the texts; exhortations to work on oneself as a screenwriter, to mould and shape one's daily working life to a fairly narrow range of techniques and practices, are reinforced by the 'canon' of filmed screenplays within cinematic history.

4.3.1. Addressing the screenwriter as individual worker - rigidity of screenplay form and concrete 'knowable' practices

Initially, the manuals routinely spend time conceptualising screenwriting, generally focusing on defining the term 'story' and providing a trajectory from story idea right through to the finished product and the selling of the completed screenplay. These schemas vary somewhat in relation to the technical terms used or the focus given to one or another element of structure, character, dialogue or format but the trajectories map onto each other in a homogenous way. Robert McKee, the oft-described 'guru' of contemporary screenwriting practice, begins with a polemical description of what 'story' is and is not: "Story is about principles, not rules… Story is about eternal, universal forms, not formulas…Story is about archetypes, not stereotypes…Story is about thoroughness, not shortcuts…Story is about originality, not duplication" (1998, 3-8).

Manuals foreground the most basic elements of a story and revel in its inherent simplicity. The terms: 'Beginning', 'Middle' and 'End', the 'building blocks' of any screenplay are repeated

incessantly. This is often connected to the historical trajectory of the story as an ancient form of human expression and the work of Aristotle and his *Poetics* is a repeated touchstone for contemporary story structure. Many authors argue that Aristotle's work on story is still useful and that the classic elements of story have a proven longevity and universality so, whilst the genre collectively strives for the up-to-date and the new, it also relies on discourses of the ancient, the timeless, the old. In Michel Tierno's (2002) work, *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*, the timelessness of Aristotle's ideas are the subject – not only the Beginning-Middle-End structure but also the emphasis on 'unity of plot' and the uplifting, self-help mantra, 'plot is soul'. In fact, many of the 'classic' texts of the genre are prescriptive enough to precisely number the possible narratives that can and have been told in literary history. Christopher Booker's influential text, *The Seven Basic Plots*, identifies seven plots "which are so fundamental to the way we tell stories that it is virtually impossible for any story-teller ever to entirely break away from them" (2004, 6). These range from the 'rags to riches' plot and 'the quest' plot to the various forms of tragedy such as 'the hero as monster' plot and 'the divided self' plot. Booker emphasises the universal nature of story, suggesting that to understand the seven basic plots allows a writer unprecedented access to the "forms and forces lying beneath the surface of stories" (Ibid., 6). Universality is also invoked in the bluntest terms. Webber writes, "One of the first things executives and agents want to know is does your story have universal appeal?" (2000, 19).

The manuals are also immediately concerned with how ideas can be gathered and ordered and how a writer's creativity can be harnessed in the service of these ideas. Here we see a key site of self-help discourse on the nature of screenwriting labour as the manuals invoke it. The prescriptions surrounding how to harness one's creativity as a screenwriter are not unlike other forms of self-help which marshal and deploy techniques to both reveal and to 'put to work' the screenwriter's creativity and selfhood at the level of the individual. Aronson (2001) discusses the concept of creativity, the 'division' between an individual writer's imagination and their technique, and the craft/creativity dichotomy is tied to one's individual essence. She draws on the work of Edward de Bono (1970) and his theories of creativity in order to illustrate this. De Bono argues that there are two kinds of creative thinking. Firstly 'Vertical thinking' which is step-by-step and logical in nature and needs to be harnessed in order to ask practical questions in the writing process such as 'is a plot point credible?' (2001, 2). For De Bono, there is also 'Lateral thinking' which is 'generative, personal, associational' and 'stream of consciousness' in style. For Aronson, "Good writing happens when craft (provided by vertical thinking) and the writer's unique view of the world (provided by

lateral thinking) are inextricably mixed to produce a work of striking originality" (Ibid). From this conception, Aronson produces a 'Development Strategies model' with three prescriptive steps for the generation of unique and workable ideas for a screen story. Aronson finishes this first section by suggesting where 'good ideas' can come from and the derivative nature of these techniques stands in stark contrast to the need for 'striking originality' which is emphasised earlier. Firstly, Aronson argues that screen models can be examined such as popular genres and audience expectations of those particular genres. Secondly, mythic story models can be used (the most popular mythic structure from Vogler, 1999, will be discussed in more detail below). Thirdly, non-narrative triggers can be employed, argues Aronson, most obviously research into topics of interest, news stories, historical events and so on. Aronson's schema is one of the most comprehensive but other manuals raise similar concerns – particularly the need for research and the need to balance 'originality' with 'expectations'. Thus, on the one hand, the manuals' address is aimed at individual subjects and their practices only, on the nurturing of individuals' creativity and ideas. The particular challenges[6] of screenwriting labour are illuminated within this pedagogical realm. Aronson offers up a dichotomy repeated across the genre: screenwriting labour must strive for both originality and familiarity, the individual screenwriting self must produce a unique creative vision but must work on this vision within the standard and rigid narrative models already established within the film production industry.

One of the most uniform aspects of the screenwriting manuals, and a message which is replicated across all the texts without fail, is the recourse to structure. Structure is viewed as central to a successful, original and saleable screen story and the discursive employment of structure is a key technique deployed to concretise screenwriting labour. As William Goldman (1983, 195), a well-known Hollywood screenwriter writes, "SCREENPLAYS ARE STRUCTURE" [capitals in original]. This mantra provides the core concept for the teaching of the craft of screenwriting within the manuals and even more prescriptively, the structure itself is a largely unvarying one, the Three-Act Structure (which maps onto Aristotle's Beginning-Middle-End model). Syd Field, another prominent manual author and scriptwriting guru, argues early on in his text *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1994) that the paradigm and foundation for a screenplay is the three-act structure (7). Aronson (2001) uses the three-act structure as the foundation of her section on

---

[6] These challenges highlight the spurious claims to pure 'creativity' which screenwriting work highlights. They also also drive the need for screenwriting to distinguish itself from other forms of writing, to concretise itself as a profession and a vocation. The 'How-to' manuals are thus also a key set of locations in which these challenges are concretised and 'worked out'.

narrative structure and Seger (1994) proclaims of the model: 'Why you need it and what to do with it' (18). Pope (1988, xvii) declares, "Over time, this three-act structure has become the mortar and brick of drama." These sections are often accompanied with diagrams of the three-act structure which visualise the narrative progression and then map on the various elements of story structure which may again vary in terminology but not in fundamental construction.

Field (1994) identifies the three acts and their basic functions: Act One sets-up the story, setting and characters; Act Two is variously referred to as Complications, Development or Confrontations; and Act Three leads to the climax and resolution of the story. Hicks (1999, 11) refers to the three acts as Attraction, Anticipation and Satisfaction accordingly. Field identifies 'plot points' (also referred to as 'turning points') which provide the bridges between each act and take the form of an "incident or event that hooks into the action and spins it around into another direction" (1994, 114). The plotting of these various acts or points is often extremely precise: McKee (1998, 181) states that the inciting incident in Act One must occur within the first 25 percent of the story and many of the classic diagrams include percentage figures or numbers of pages that correspond to particular points along the plot axis. This lends the genre an almost scientific method and specificity (captured in Parker's 1998 and 2005 title *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*). The message espoused is that anyone can learn the craft of screenwriting by taking up the limited and repeated techniques offered, adhering to the structural calculations and formulae upon which so many 'classic' and 'successful' films are based. Again, this is an individually-oriented technique, one which writers are encouraged to master in order to 'succeed' in the collaborative stages of one's career path.

McKee breaks down the smaller elements of story structure as he sees them, from a beat ("an exchange of behaviour in action/reaction"; 1998, 37) and a scene to a story event which "creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a value and achieved through conflict" (Ibid., 31). He proclaims:

> The function of structure is to provide progressively building pressures that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must make more and more difficult and risk-taking choices and actions, gradually revealing their true natures (Ibid., 105).

This theme of building pressure or rising action is fundamental to a strong structure according to the texts and this is also often visualised in story diagrams which show the main 'action line' rising over the course of the three acts.

Alternatives to traditional structural models may be offered as evidence of progression and the possibility for autonomy but are also simultaneously revoked and contained. Overall, standardised story structure within screenplays is viewed as paramount;[7] many texts provide, along with detailed prescriptions and formulae, analyses of the structures of films that both did and did not 'work'. Consecrated works such as *Chinatown* (1974) are frequently dissected in great detail, as are more overtly commercial and highly profitable Hollywood films such as *Jaws* (1975). These analyses then lend the weight of the Hollywood canon to the manuals themselves and their various claims are deployed in the service of achieving success on the scale of the 'greats' of filmic writing and directing.[8] Screenwriting labour in this sense is presented as entirely knowable and intelligible, boiled down to an easily accessible and workable structure that can be learnt, practiced and mastered by the individual screenwriter.

Additional technologies which are laid out as essential elements of 'successful' screenwriting labour include the creation of characters and conflict. The discussion of character-building strategies often employs self-help discourse to exhort budding screenwriters to search for depth, originality, motivation and 'soul' within their characters. Most of the texts are in unison when discussing the centrality of the well-developed and empathetic protagonist to the story. McKee argues that the "energy of the protagonist's desire" is the 'spine of the story' (1998, 194). McKee also spends much time expressing the need to 'write from the inside out' in order to attain emotional truth within a screenplay; this means the writer must work inside the minds of his/her characters (Ibid., 152) and in fact, fall in love with one's characters (383). Vogler argues that the archetype of the Hero "represents the ego's search for identity and wholeness" (1998, 35) and that the hero's functions range from audience identification to growth and action. Seger writes about the creation of 'dimensional characters' and outlines three key dimensions: the thoughts of a character expressed in values and attitudes, the actions of a character and the emotions of a character (1994, 180). Some manuals employ pseudo-psychological jargon to lend their advice further legitimacy. Webber (2000,

---

[7] Millard (2006) refers to this almost universal primacy as the 'Gospel of Story' and Maras (2009, 174-178) also discusses this.

8 This technique also serves to connect individual manuals to the particular mythic films and figures that animate the collective history of the screenwriter as I outlined in chapter two.

19) suggests that budding writers use psychologist Abraham Maslowe's 'seven basic human needs' as a jumping-off point for character development, choosing a particular need (from 'survival' to 'esteem and self-respect') on which to build a character. Again, this is highly individualised in orientation. Writers, learning through these texts to be structure-oriented and to be aware of and attuned to their individual creative drives are also taught to draw their characters out of themselves, to know them and thus know themselves intimately. As with the use of Aristotle, there is again a sense of the ancient and powerful genealogy of stories and of characters within those stories; the reader is encouraged to tap into this genealogy and therefore draw on the psychological history of the human race itself.

In order to create both moving and dimensional characters and a tight and coherent structure, many 'How-to' authors stress the need for conflict as a central focus of a screenplay.[9] Unsurprisingly, the message is again echoed across the various texts. Hunter argues that conflict is "the heart and soul of screenwriting" (1994, 19). Seger (1994) outlines four standard levels of conflict: inner conflict (emotional turmoil for a protagonist for example); interpersonal conflict (between the protagonist and antagonist, between a mother and daughter etc.), societal conflict (between the hero and a community or society) and situational conflict (between a character and the forces of nature such as an erupting volcano or raging storm). Again there is some variation in instruction from text to text but an overall prescriptiveness; McKee (1998) identifies only three levels – inner conflict (related to emotions of characters), personal conflict (between characters) and extra-personal conflict (between characters and social institutions). Seger includes a fifth, 'cosmic conflict' between a character and a 'god' (1994, 174).

Thus, the manuals as a genre are a site of a particularly rigid, durable and 'knowable' set of instructions and exhortations based on individually-oriented discourse. They legitimate themselves by highlighting both their 'old-' and 'new'-ness and the careers they offer are based on individualised and canonically-oriented values. The texts also both produce and reproduce MacDonald's (2004a) 'screenwriting convention' and the nature of their address is one of the education and discipline of screenwriting selves.

---

[9] See the work of Millard (2006) who discusses 'central conflict theory' and its limitations.

4.3.2. Disciplinary techniques and screenwriting process for individual writers

Screenwriting manuals are littered with instructional discourse that, in their invocation of screenwriting labour, serve as pedagogical techniques that offer precise directions in order to discipline the writer's individual habits, processes and words. MacDonald (2004a, 84) puts it this way:

> The impression generated from these sources is that a writer must grasp an approach characterised as universal, unchanging storytelling principles, must learn how these are applied to the current industrial requirements (including terminology and practice), and then apply these with 'flair' or originality. The underlying claim is that the work will be admired once these elements are in place (2004a, 84).

In the most practical manuals, guides to the precise formatting of a screenplay are offered. Trottier's (1998) 'bible' for screenwriters outlines 'correct format for screenplays and TV scripts – a style guide for spec scripts' which includes detailed instructions on when to write in caps, the standard margin spacings, how much description is acceptable for characters and how to order dialogue. Wolff and Cox (1988) offer similar advice and tailor format instructions to the various forms of screenwriting they cover, from feature film scripts to sitcoms. Field (1994) offers similar lists of technical details and terms acceptable to use in a formatted screenplay. Interestingly, all these guides to screenplay format are very specific in their instruction to avoid writing camera directions. This points to the hierarchies at play that the writer must be aware of and Trottier summarises this nicely: "Please, I beg you, don't do this in your script! First, you may insult the director. Second, it breaks up the narrative flow and makes the script harder to read. Third, you take the chance of showing off your ignorance" (1998, 138). MacDonald notes that the prevalence of dramaturgical discourse (references to concepts such as premise, conflict, plot, climax, resolution) as opposed to visual information suggests that the industrial screenwriting convention dictates that the screenwriter should not stray into the directors' territory (2004a, 119). At moments of individual as opposed to collaborative focus then, the texts also make oblique reference to the key relationships a screenwriter will need to master, perhaps by **'**knowing their place' or at least by knowing 'the rules of the game'.

While most of the manuals offer clear and fool-proof paths towards these goals, using authoritative language to characterise such paths, there is also a strong sense of the need to be disciplined and

adaptable to particular processes unique to the work of screenwriting. As has been noted previously, research is considered an important step in the early stages of screenplay writing and this connects closely to the ordering of an individual writer's ideas and then the formulation of first an outline and then a more detailed treatment. For McKee, research should be undertaken in relation to the dimensions of a story's setting, period, duration, location and level of conflict (1998, 68). Seger suggests keeping a journal or using a tape recorder to record ideas as they appear and then ordering the ideas on index-cards (1994, 6) which she argues, helps in the formulation of a brief story outline. This is then developed into more detailed synopsis of the story, the treatment, which should be 8-15 pages in length and is used as a tool in the writing process and as a selling tool, especially to generate studio interest.

Field (1994) and many other manuals suggest a very similar development process: index-cards for ordering ideas and 'mapping' the story, the formulation of a 'step-outline' (a 'step' being equivalent to a page or longer of formatted script; see Hunter, 1994) and then the writing of a treatment which details the characters, settings, key scenes and sequences and overall structure and themes of the story. Walker argues that a treatment is a development strategy and a tool to flesh out a plot and characters in the early stages of writing (2002, 163). Aronson dedicates a chapter to treatment writing, saying they should usually be thirty five pages long and she stresses that a treatment is "Essentially a selling document" (2001, 279). Wolff and Cox (1988) also discuss the writing of outlines and treatments and again provide detailed specifications: an outline should be five to fifteen pages long (double spaced) and a treatment, fifteen to thirty pages. They also write that treatments should always be written in the present tense and usually contain some sample dialogue. Trottier is utterly precise in his workbook instructions: "Write a four-page treatment (double-spaced). Summarise the beginning of your story in one page, the middle in two pages, and the end in one page" (1998, 89). Wolff and Cox offer further advice which provides insight into the writing of treatments as tools screenwriters must use in order to 'play the game' in Hollywood:

> The treatment is the all-important in-between step that will determine whether or not the person paying you asks you to go on to the next step: writing the script itself. Many professional writers hate doing treatments because there is so much riding on a work that inherently provides an imperfect means of giving an accurate idea of what the script will be like, due to the completely different format and shorter length. However, treatments are a part of the business, so you might as well learn how to make the most of them (1988, 79-80).

These concrete strategies reinforce screenwriting as a highly structured, knowable and disciplined form of labour. As the writing process moves in a linear fashion from the preparation of a treatment to the writing itself, the labour process becomes more complex and affective within particular manuals. McKee discusses the process of 'scene design' and prescribes a five-step approach: a) defining the conflict, b) noting the opening value of a scene, c) breaking the scene into beats, d) noting the closing value and comparing it to the opening value and, e) surveying the beats and locating the turning point (1998, 257-259).

This highly prescriptive and technical discourse surely offers solace and comfort to those individualised, atomised and isolated 'selves' who are the subjects of the manuals' address at this level. Screenwriting labour here is, as Rose puts it, utterly "thinkable and manageable" (1989, 248). By following the steps, filling in the checklists, following the instructions, a budding screenwriter can produce a screenplay with the requisite number of pages and scenes, the correct font, the essential conflict between protagonist and antagonist, the beginning, middle and end. In many ways, the texts provide the easily-graspable tools to bring out the screenwriter in us all, whilst reassuring us of the universal and timeless techniques of screen-based storytelling. The pedagogical power of this genre to simultaneously produce individual careers (by offering the tools, advice and 'insider secrets') and mould those careers (by proffering and maintaining the convention) is only part of the story however. Whilst on the one hand seeming wholly individually-oriented, the genre is also awash with the discourse of collaboration and development, of screenwriting work as unquestionably collective. Here we see the oscillation between individual and collective labour that may fuel professional and industrial anxiety for budding and established screenwriters (as they try to simply secure another draft of a script for example); however, within these manuals, anxiety is actively purged with the deployment of particular kinds of disciplinary techniques.

4.3.3. Rewriting and collaboration as disciplinary techniques

Achieving mastery over the techniques of rewriting and collaboration is articulated in the manuals as both an individual and collective process; these collective aspects of screenwriting labour are characterised as self-driven in some cases but also as 'notes'-driven, as driven by the feedback and input of others. The majority of manuals stress that rewriting is a crucial element in the process of

screenplay writing (most dedicate at least one chapter to it) and begins early on with between five and six drafts for most screenplays. Initially, this will take the form of a writer rewriting their own early drafts. In *Gardner's Guide to Screenwriting: The Writer's Road Map*, Webber instructs writers to check three elements of a draft: structure, characters and dialogue. Because this manual uses 'road map' metaphors, she offers rewriting advice such as: "Are your 20th and 60th Streets strong enough to speed your story into their respective acts? Is your 40th Street a true midpoint, turning the story in an unexpected direction? "and "Does your driver appear on the first page of your script and stop on the last page? (S)he's who the audience is rooting for, so make sure the audience starts rooting on page 1" (2000, 110).

Rewriting a screenplay can also take the form of more subtle 'polishing' which we are informed, generally occurs later in the writing process and can involve changes in words or phrases, the shortening of dialogue, altering stage directions or other biographical details of the characters. Trottier writes that in the rewriting process one becomes a 'script surgeon' and this means the writer must:

> Whittle down the dialogue; remove unnecessary narration, flashbacks, dream sequences, and so on. You become an analyst in every way you can define that word. Once this is completed, polish your script until you are ready to present your wonder to Hollywood (1998, 92).

This step-by-step writing process, from outline right through to final draft, is a process largely dictated and perpetuated by processes of historical standardisation as I outlined in chapter two and, as many of the manuals stress, this is the method that must be employed, but one that still does not guarantee success. Wolff and Cox sum this up by introducing writers to the 'step deal' - this familiar form of contracted writing with a producer or studio means a writer proceeds step-by-step (from treatment to first draft to second draft and then to polishing) and is paid for each step as it is completed. However, if the producer "feels it is not going well" they can stop at any step in the process, pay the writer for any work already completed and then use the material the writer has produced for any purpose, usually future development with a different writer (1988, 79). While such business deals and working relationships are usually referred to as 'collaboration' in the manuals, such an insight highlights the integration of the partialised status of the writer within this pedagogical genre – obliged to follow a rigid set of 'steps' but with no recourse to protect the work they do produce and encouraged, nay forced to simply, 'take the money and run'. Thus the

discursive construction of rewriting and collaboration within the manuals often serves as a disciplinary and marginalising technology.

The rewriting process is inherently tied up in the collaborative nature of screenwriting. The various texts all describe or prescribe collaboration as a skill all writers must master or be willing to put up with in order to achieve a privileged professional status. This can take the form of 'fifty-fifty' partnerships with other writers in the production of scripts or collaborations with other creative inputs such as directors and stars. Field (1994) and Wolff and Cox (1988) dedicate chapters to collaboration and are at pains to argue that film itself is a collaborative medium.

Collaboration as disciplinary technique is discussed in a number of ways but a key technique is the recounting of a 'collaborative story' and the manuals use particular kinds of narratives in this context. Rather than collegial, longitudinal, and flexible collaborations (such as those often seen in independent and low-budget film production contexts for example) the 'collaborations' that the manuals describe are much more likely to be elite-oriented, standardised and hierarchised, with the writers, directors, producers and other collaborative workers knowing their (industrial) places. Field recounts an anecdotal story about the collaboration in the writing of the film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Kasdan, 1981):

> Lawrence Kasdan, the screenwriter…met with George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Lucas wanted to use the name of his dog, Indiana Jones, for the hero (Harrison Ford), and he knew what the last scene of the movie would be…That's all Lucas knew about *Raiders* at the time. Spielberg wanted to add a mystical dimension. They spent two weeks locked up in an office, and when the three of them emerged, they had worked out a general story line. Then Lucas and Spielberg left to work on other projects, and Kasdan went into his office and wrote *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1994, 231).

Field goes on to write that this is a 'typical' Hollywood collaboration, everybody "working together" for the finished product. This is constructed as the 'way things are' because as Field later warns, writers will be 'second-guessed' and rewritten and that that too, is the way the industry works (1994, 255). Again the partial nature of the writer's labour lies beneath such stories. Writers are those who perform the grunt work, those who are positioned at the coal-face and who are, we are constantly reminded, supplicative filmmaking inputs, facilitating only the first part of the

filmmaking process. Some authors offer more canny advice, suggesting, in the light of the difficulties writers often face in the rewriting process, ways to 'stay sane', maintain control of their work as much as possible and potentially negotiate a privileged position within the industry. Friedmann puts it this way:

> Realising that no script is ever perfect, or ever finished, is also a good way to keep sane. It helps you deal with criticism, with rewrites, and with stupid people, without necessarily costing you too much. You will eventually be judged by what is produced based on what you have written. While you may have little control over the actually production and direction, you owe it to yourself to provide the best script that you can. Rewriting is one of the ways of achieving that (2000, 60).

Field quotes a senior vice president of production for a Hollywood studio who explains his approach to hiring writers:

> In our company, we spend an unusual amount of time making sure the writer shares our point of view on the material before we make a hiring decision. If we all agree up front on where we're going, the writer will be much more open to input and in that way it becomes a collaborative process (1989, 124).

The use of the phrase 'open to input' as it then connects to the 'collaborative process' is telling here, again emphasising the writer's position as a hired hand in this example, in contrast to a more active, reflexive working self as evoked by Friedmann. MacDonald argues that the manuals, as the collective mouthpiece of the 'screenwriting convention', recognise that screenwriting is collaborative but characterise it as "*post*-the screen idea emanating from the writer as an individual" (2004a, 106). Thus, the idea is conceived, moulded by the 'controlling mechanisms' of the pre-established convention and then opened up to the scrutiny and 'collaborative' strategies of other creative inputs in the film production industry. As Macdonald goes on to say, "A writer learns and adopts normative practices in order to work within the industry and has no means of engaging critically with these practices unless they have sufficient status to do so" (Ibid.,150). For him, "a writer's general status in the workplace is as a supplicant, offering material and a level of skill to a market that is operated by others" (Ibid., 200). But the consistent employment of canonical voices within the manuals, particularly from 'successful' writer-directors (or 'contracted artists' to use Ryan's term, 1991) or Academy award winners always reminds screenwriting subjects of the

breakthrough possibilities the industry can offer and of the mythic 'greats' who have helped to carve out this particular, specialised career path.

Overall, the discourse of collaboration is consistently employed within the genre to rein in the individual agency of screenwriters whilst also confirming the partial status of screenwriters who, the texts inform us, will always have to be the ones to acquiesce first - accept changes, rewrite to others' requirements and so on - because of this partial status. On the other hand, the blunt end of this partiality is smoothed over by the tantalising and very real possibilities for privileged positions within the industry if the rules of the game are learnt and adhered to. Collaboration itself can be characterised as a technology of the self which is invoked within the manuals. It is, like rewriting, a concrete 'self-steering mechanism' that inculcates screenwriters into the accepted ways to conduct themselves and interact with other filmmakers within the industry, write screenplays which will be funded and produced and build reputations to secure future work and an industrial reputation.

The variety of practical writing tools I have discussed here which the texts offer also hitch together vociferously individualised screenwriting techniques with contingent collaborative discourse. Rather than producing a diluting effect however,[10] the texts harness the instructional language of collaboration in the service of fostering further competition, atomisation and insecurity for their readers. The modes of collaboration invoked are starved of collegiality and 'collaboration' as a discursive construct is simply used as an alibi to further atomise screenwriting workers.

4.3.4. Entrepreneurial discourse

Many texts are also primarily concerned with making a script commercially viable and an overarching exhortation from the manuals urges screenwriters to think and act as entrepreneurs as opposed to artists. The texts speak in a liberal-democratic voice that gives primacy to commercial concerns above all else and defines success in commercial terms. The enterprising nature of the genre produces an 'ideal' screenwriting self within a capital-intensive industry that these texts consistently invoke – the entrepreneurial writer who should spend as much time pitching, selling and networking as they spend writing.

---

[10] ...offering new insights into communal forms of creative practice for example as the Writers Guild of Great Britain's (2009) recent 'Writing for Film' guidelines suggest. See chapter two.

All the texts assume that a primary goal of their readers is a commercial one and the insistence of the genre's commercial address often precludes or effaces other creative goals such as self-expression, literary or authorly acclaim or creative satisfaction in its own right. Screenwriting selves must be commercially-driven selves. For Seger making a screenplay commercial requires attention to three elements: a) marketability (the writer must consider issues such as the script attracting and accommodating 'name' stars for example); b) creativity (which she characterises as originality within a script and a successful 'hook' early on) and c) structure (which must be 'tight' and 'smooth') (1994, 117). Wolff and Cox dedicate a section of their book to 'Turning the craft into a business' and from the very beginning of their text, ask their readers to 'check the saleability of your idea' (1988, 7) by asking questions such as: 'Does it have a hook?' (Meaning, can it be pitched in a single sentence?), 'Is the story topical and fresh?' and 'Does your story have a clear-cut and positive ending?' This text is even more prescriptive in that the writers offer advice on writing for a variety of commercial mediums as well, from movies-of-the-week to sitcoms and daytime serials. Trottier also dedicates a section of his 'bible' to the selling of a script including a 'strategic marketing plan' (1998, 208). Many more texts use their commercial orientation as their own selling point: *Writing Screenplays that Sell (*Hague, 1989), *How to Make Money Screenwriting* (Friedmann, 2000), *Raindance Writers Lab: Write and Sell the HOT Screenplay* (Grove, 2001), *Crafty Screenwriting: Writing Movies That Get Made* (Epstein, 2002), *Screenwriting for a Global Market: Selling your Scripts from Hollywood to Hong Kong* (Horton, 2004) are but a few of the available titles. This pedagogical genre turns on the enterprise culture invoked by Rose (1992), constantly reminding writers of their inherently industrial work, of the difficulty in making a living as a writer and of the need to 'play the game' in order to survive.

Particular strategies are consistently tied to the 'successful' selling of a screenplay – pitching, networking and meeting-taking for example. Friedmann declares 'Life's a Pitch' and whilst noting that there is not a 'pitching culture' within European film-making networks, argues that this then means that in industries like Britain's, "there is not enough preparation for this performance and too little importance is placed on it" (2000, 50). Friedmann goes on to provide a checklist to prepare a screenwriter for a pitch which includes 'knowing yourself', knowing the buyers, perfecting non-verbal communication and aiming for passion and clarity within a pitch. Many manuals tie treatment writing and pitching together, arguing that they are interrelated selling activities. Friedmann argues that treatments are "manipulative selling documents that every writer should be able to write" (Ibid., 29).

UCLA Screenwriting teacher Lew Hunter highlights the confusion inherent in the various terms used to describe 'selling documents' produced by writers such as step outlines, story outlines, spec scripts, treatments etc. Hunter writes:

> Many times I've been confronted by new writers in tears because someone wants to buy an outline they had submitted. The buyer didn't want the writer, only the outline; their plan was to have an 'experienced' writer 'go' to script. My advice has always been to try and make a Writers' Guild minimum deal to write the script, with larger dollars to come if the writer is asked to do even one word of rewriting on that first draft. That ploy often works (1993, 117).

Hunter, like many of the manual authors, offers extremely practical advice. The manuals 'tell it like it is' and employ a 'cruel to be kind' address. They do also acknowledge the many pitfalls that writers within a now intensely commercial industry will face in attempting to write for a living. They are canny and often helpful – the discipline they call for is often coupled with calls to be manipulative and savvy, to know what producers and executives want in a pitch meeting and to give it to them in order to retain control over an original idea or treatment. Overall, selling one's screenplay is tied to that screenplay being original and innovative yet finely attuned to what 'the market' wants. Retaining control of one's script requires a combination of taking notes/criticism whilst recognising that criticism from a producer may be disingenuous. 'Successful' screenwriting labour comes down to a bewildering set of exhortations to concentrate on the writing, the craft and the individual, creative drive alone. Simultaneously (and here, a separate 'selling self' is called into being) screenwriters must constantly write with the constraints dictated by collaborative networks and the market in mind.

As a form of career-based self-help, the manuals are a highly potent pedagogical vehicle for vociferous 'creative economy' discourse; here, screenwriting labour is as Pang argues, "intricately shaped to accommodate to and justify a condensed and twisted economic logic" (2009, 72). Screenwriters are addressed as autonomous and atomised individuals as opposed to social, community-oriented beings. Writers are placed within collaborative stories or testimonials as workers who must be 'realistic' about their industrial position, be prepared for the contingencies which notes from other filmmakers will produce and be accepting of the insecurities and relentless competition this can and will foster.

The ongoing conditioning of screenwriting labour facilitated by 'How-to' manuals is illuminated further by a focused analysis of a sub-genre which use interviews with 'successful' screenwriters to provide first-hand accounts of their labour processes and professional navigations. Much of these experiences and processes are employed to reinforce the practical advice and offerings of the standard manuals but the interview texts also *complexify* screenwriting as both a creative form and a commercial endeavour and, by utilising first-hand accounts, employ a more outwardly casual and contradictory 'shoot-from-the-hip' style address.

4.4.Interview texts as manuals

The pedagogical address of traditional 'How-To' manuals are replicated to some extent within texts based on published interviews with screenwriters themselves. Collections of interviews are not as numerous as the 'How-To' manuals but provide a rich source of secondary empirical data, offering insights into who 'successful' screenwriters are, the creative processes they employ, the craft skills they learn, their individual career trajectories and their collaborative experiences in the wider film production networks in the USA and the UK. Some of these experiences and processes reinforce the practical advice and offerings of the manuals but the interviews-as-texts also expose contradictions and fissures within the supposedly uniform generic chorus of the traditional manuals.[11]

4.4.1.Accounts of the screenwriting career - labour and discipline

Manuals based on excerpted interviews with screenwriters often begin with an outline of the backgrounds of individual subjects (posing broad questions such as 'How did you find yourself working as a screenwriter?) and this offers model(s) for typical and atypical career trajectories. Like the traditional manuals that establish the legitimacy and authority of the authors by including their spec scripts or recounting their experience as script editors, readers or writers, these texts both foreground the credentials and elite status of their subjects whilst also establishing that they were (at one time at least) jobbing writers just like anyone else. The texts also work to lay out the career paths which for these 'ordinary' writers, have led to 'extraordinary' success. So, many screenwriters in these texts describe themselves as writers and many begin their writing careers within other

---

[11] Four indicative texts are examined here: Iglesias (2001); Engel (2000) and (2002); and Katz (2000).

literary fields, particularly working as playwrights, novelists or journalists. For example, Engel recounts for us, the career paths of Robert Benton (writer of *Bonnie and Clyde,* 1967) who was initially an art director for *Esquire* magazine, Ron Bass (*Rain Man,* 1988) who was a novelist and entertainment lawyer and Bo Goldman (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* 1975) who wrote for Broadway for example (see Engel, 2000). Established novelists or playwrights, we are told (who already have a claim on a consecrated creative position), may often be initially approached by film producers who are interested in adapting novels or plays into screenplays and this can lead to offers of adaptation or television writing work, as happened for William Goldman and Alan Ball respectively (see Engel, 2000).

This is viewed as one possible career path. However a compelling alternative is the dogged, hard-working writer who simply 'makes a go of it' as a screenwriter in the enterprise culture of Los Angeles-centric film writing. So other subjects discuss writing 'spec scripts' and breaking into the industry on their own. Michael Schiffer (writer of *Crimson Tide,* 1995 and interviewed in Iglesias, 2001, xxiii) narrates his story of 'hitting his limit' as a novelist and then driving to Hollywood aged thirty five to become a screenwriter. As the film production labour market was characterised in chapter two, freelancing careers as screenwriters often begin with writers working 'day jobs' in some other profession or in a very low-paying industry job whilst also writing spec scripts in their spare time and then attempting to drum up studio interest in their original projects. Ron Bass describes working by day as an entertainment lawyer and then writing screenplays after hours; we are told he wrote four scripts in a year and a half and then had enough 'material' to attract his first deal (see Engel, 2002, 45). Marc Norman's first industry job was delivering mail at Universal Studios which lead to small rewriting work for producers he met on the studio lot (Ibid.,153). Gerald DiPego worked as an 'educational and industrial film writer' and was then able to get a spec script 'on the right desk at the right time' (Iglesias, 2001, xix). Some day jobs may provide more direct links into the production industry (as in Norman's experience); writers can work in 'coverage' as Stephen Gaghan did (see Engel, 2002, 191), reading and assessing novels for the possibility of filmic adaptations and can also be hired by production companies as script readers, reading and recommending spec scripts to over-worked studio executives and producers. Many interviewees also mention practical training such as attending film school at UCLA or USC in Los Angeles and attending screenwriting classes such as Robert McKee's 'Story' seminar. All of these 'origin' stories highlight, as traditional manuals do, the need for hard work and discipline at the level of the individual along with the requisite need to 'work on oneself' whether through training

or through 'knowing' the industry and its networks. Whilst an element of luck is required (in getting one's spec script noticed for example) the constant work required to know oneself, know the industry, know who to send scripts to and know 'what the industry wants' is constantly reinforced.

Interview-based manuals particularly emphasise the possibility that screenwriters can also work as directors and the experiences of writer-directors (or 'contracted artists' to return to Ryan's terminology, 1991) serve as evidence that they can generally exert much more creative control over their scripts. Frank Darabont, writer of *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), discusses the development of the project in his interview with Katz (2000, 16); he describes the studio wanting to replace him as director with a more established director but his contract enabled him to retain his directorial position. Ron Bass (Engel, 2000), a powerful Hollywood-based screenwriter, discusses his strategy of hiring a 'team' of writers to help him research and write for projects which will carry his name alone, offering another alternative for gaining and maintaining power within the industry. The documented accounts of the autonomy and privileged positions of certain writers perpetuate the notion that creative autonomy and control *is* possible and accessible if only one works hard enough, both at writing and individual working habits and at the collaborative and entrepreneurial activities associated with it.

In contrast to the relatively few writers with sustained clout and power within the industry, many jobbing screenwriters (Ryan's 'professional creatives', 1991) are chronicled within these manuals, screenwriters who have worked as 'writers-for-hire' (offered projects by a studio to write or adapt) or 'script doctors' (hired regularly to rewrite or polish other peoples' scripts that are viewed as having problems that need 'fixing'). Marc Norman (co-writer of *Shakespeare in Love*, 1998), argues "The way to have a real career as a writer is to hire yourself out" (Engel, 2002, 149). These texts suggest (through writers' own voices) that relatively secure, working lives may also begin in an ostensibly more collaborative context, by writing on contract for film or more often television production companies which can enable the development of writing skills. But this is also discussed as being potentially demoralising work. Mark Andrus, co-writer of *As Good As It Gets* (1997), describes working on contract for producer Norman Lear and building up valuable skills early in his career while also having some financial security (in Katz, 2000, 115). Alan Ball on the other hand, describes working on a sitcom as a problematic experience: "For two years I worked on *Cybill* and really hated it and then I went back for a third year because they threw so much money at me. I felt like a whore" (Engel, 2002, 169).

The profiles and careers of 'professional creative' screenwriters within these texts vary widely, offering a heterogeneous commentary on career opportunities and trajectories for screenwriting labour at the level of the individual. Most importantly, the published interviews with screenwriters provide a myriad of pedagogically-oriented insights into the daily calculations and navigations that (even) 'successful' screenwriters go through and/or are subjected to. To some extent, these processes and craft practices mirror the advice of the 'How-To' texts but the documented experiences of screenwriters also offer a variety of narratives and themes. Generally, they are consistent in their characterisation of top-level screenwriting and consecrated screenwriters as highly partial and precarious creative workers.

Coupled with stories of both fulfilling and difficult experiences on individual projects, the interview texts also offer glimpses of the 'daily grind' of the screenwriter, the hard labour that structures the writer's day to day work. Writers routinely express the difficulty of writing, the amount of planning that is required and the toil of getting to first draft stage. Tom Schulman describes his early stages of writing thus: "I usually write a screenplay over a few days – a few days that follow months, even years of planning what I'm going to write…It's a kind-of all-night, trancelike torture" (Engel, 2002, 106). Bo Goldman expresses a similar experience, "The pain that you go through to free a story is incredible. I do enormous amounts of research" (Ibid., 142). Leslie Dixon also provides similar insight, "To this day, I've never felt that my work pops out of the gate fully formed. So much of it is diligent and grinding application" (Ibid., 35). The notion of screenwriting as hard, isolated toil is then linked to the discipline of the medium itself and the discipline required of the writer in order to produce the requisite number of drafts, rewrites and scripts themselves.

Writers within this sub-genre again provide different perspectives on how screenplay form affects their work. Schiffer (in Iglesias, 2001, 17-18) describes his love of the screenplay form: "I love their compression, their visuals and their canvas. This sort of tight internal reflexivity is really exciting and fun and very exacting." Iglesias himself preaches the need for a writer to cultivate 'good habits' and discipline and his advice reflects the pedantic voice of the 'How-To' manuals. He states:

> Ron Bass works an average of fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. Eric Roth
> likes to wake up in the middle of the night, write for a few hours, take a nap and

start again in the morning…Akiva Goldsman goes straight from bed to his computer and writes non-stop for ten to twelve hours. The rest of our panel with a couple of exceptions, are disciplined enough to keep regular hours, eight hours a day, five days a week, *like any other job.* (2001, 26) [my emphasis].

In fact, Iglesias' text dedicates an entire section to 'Discipline' and provides a veritable checklist of necessary habits that can aid in the process, ranging from writing regularly to writing with or without music, exercise and nutritional awareness, creating a writing schedule and setting writing goals (2001, 65-90).

The interview-based texts describe, using privileged testimonies, the often bewildering strategies of calculation and navigation that individual screenwriting workers should strive to master – from cheery optimism that the vagaries of the industry are simply 'the way things are' to the clever negotiations with executives or producers which enable rehiring as well as firing and the routine and almost mundane discussions of the screenwriters' taken-for-granted position 'at the bottom of the heap'. This again invokes the mythic persona of the screenwriter as embattled and embittered, as martyr, as maverick, as knowing supplicant.

4.4.2.(Mysterious) creativity and (concrete) craft

Interviews with screenwriters are also preoccupied with the craft and creative processes of screenwriting and as the manuals do, provide a myriad of insights into the strategies and skills which individual, established writers employ in their work. In some instances, interview material sits closely with the advice of the manuals and in other cases, screenwriters themselves offer advice directly at odds with the prescriptions of a 'guru' such as Robert McKee. Certain elements of the creative process are invoked by screenwriters in interview texts regularly, particularly notions of instinct and other suggestions of 'inherent' creativity. The interviewees also discuss elements of process which are learned craft skills; structure in particular as well as the various stages in the process, from first draft to polishing which writers use to hone themes, characters and dialogue for example. Many interviewees also agree that watching films and reading scripts can help in finding a unique voice and sharpening one's craft while they also generally lambast the various manuals and seminars.

Many screenwriters at these locations articulate in varying ways, the instinctual nature of the writing process and this theme is at the core of the 'creative' aspects of screenwriting for these writers. Such insights also work to build up a mystique around the process, a mystique similar in character to the 'secrets' of the industry which the standard manuals describe. As Iglesias says, "No one can tell you what this mysterious creative energy really is. It's not a formula" (2001, 4). Ron Bass puts it thus: "When I write it's really like auto-writing; it's not quite a conscious act where I have to think, 'And then he says and she says'. No I'm not doing that; I just am everybody. I'm being it and watching it and am not even aware that there's a process going on" (Engel, 2002, 59). Horton Foote uses the word 'instinct' to describe his work (Katz, 200, 67) as does Leslie Dixon: "So much of what you have to do here is by instinct" (Iglesias, 2001, 30). Holden Jones also invokes the idea of 'trusting one's' instincts but attaches this not to one's inherent creativity but to more practical considerations, "you need a strong commercial instinct" (Ibid., 124).

These texts also foreground craft skills and the interviews simultaneously conjure images of successful writers as talented craftspeople. Swicord is quoted: "Writers have the sort of mind that puts together narrative in a way that has a beginning, middle and end. They notice cause and effect, that because this thing happened, that other thing is happening" (Iglesias, 2001, 5); such a quote suggests that a mysterious alchemy of instinct and craft skills is required. Interestingly, subjects of interview texts often directly reject the manuals as sources of inspiration or aid in learning the craft of screenwriting. Iglesias expresses this in no uncertain terms, arguing that 'how to be a screenwriter' books and seminars lead to "formulaic spec scripts flooding an industry that abhors formula (at least when it comes to buying spec scripts)" (2001, 28). Writers echo this sentiment, often pitting their instincts against the formulaic models that the seminars and books peddle: "I tried reading a copy of Robert McKee's *Story*…it felt like trying to understand human beings by analyzing their DNA. It was so full of little charts and graphs and rules, it was mind-boggling" (Ibid., 30). DeSouza agrees, arguing:

> All those 'How to play the Hollywood Game' seminars that teach you how to sell a script in 30 days, or how to get past the reader, contribute largely to this 99 percent of crap. With a few exceptions, the most successful films are the ones that break the mould (Ibid., 127).

In saying this, other writers acknowledge the utility of particular books or courses to their early development. Akiva Goldsman (Ibid., xxi) attended McKee's Story seminar and other writers cite both particular books (such as Aristotle's *Poetics*) and various writing courses as useful in the early

stages of their screenwriting careers. This suggests a hierarchy within the genre itself and a point at which the complexity and multiplicity of the published texts is illuminated. The message is that 'true' writers will never need a book to help them 'dream up' their career, that the work is innate and instinctual and that learning or teaching creativity is oxymoronic. Yet these texts undoubtedly purport to teach and advise through experience at both the individual and collective levels.

The interviews highlight both the ways craft skills can be learnt and the substance of these skills. Most writers interviewed by Iglesias, Engel and Katz agree that writing is 'self-taught' and is 'learnt by writing'. They do often suggest watching films and reading published scripts in order to recognise both well-crafted films and films that don't 'work'. Eric Roth says, "I learned by just being a film buff. I loved movies and I knew the language. The rest you learn by writing" (Iglesias, 2001, 31). In particular, writers agree that it is structure that can be learnt and this seems to extend not just to the structure of a screenplay itself but also the structured process that one must undertake from first draft through to final draft and polishing, again reinforcing the normative screenwriting convention identified by MacDonald (2004a).

Some writers are very specific about the processes they use early on in a script's life in order to generate ideas and then a first draft. Ron Bass calls his process 'matrixing', stating that he notes down "every idea that comes to me, whether it's about plot, structure, character, dialogue, theme or tone" (Iglesias, 2001, 44). Robert Benton describes a similar concept: "the first draft merely blocks in the characters, roughs in a story line that works and hopefully establishes a beginning and ending that is satisfactory" (Engel, 2002, 37). Some writers distance themselves from processes which the manuals signal as 'sure-fire' strategies for success. Nicholas Kazan, for example, states "I don't use cards or any structural diagrams. I just write notes and outlines, thoughts about characters, dialogue and scenes" (Iglesias, 2001, 44). However, comments from writers just as easily provide insights that directly mirror the prescriptive style of the manuals. Akiva Goldsman (who recommends McKee's screenwriting seminar) presents what can only be described as a sure-fire formula:

> Four acts, or really three acts but the second act is really two acts…and they're generally 30 pages long and they generally have cycles of rising and falling action. Or you can say something happens on page 30, something bigger happens on page 60 and something really depressing happens on page 90. And then something totally amazing happens on page 120" (Ibid., 52-53).

Overall, the consensus is that solid research and outlining inevitably leads to the start of the first draft, at which point 'storycraft' as Iglesias puts it becomes imperative. This then leads to the rewriting process, the assumed next step in the standard structure of the craft. Scott Rosenberg provides a clear link between the process of outlining and the craft of screen story structure: "When I feel ready, I sit down with a legal pad and I number it 1 through 70 and I write a simple sentence for each beat of the story and I end up with an outline where I know what my first act break and my second act break are" (Iglesias, 2001, 53). Discussion of structure and 'storycraft' inevitably leads to a similar set of concepts as the manuals prescribe. Elements such as the three-act structure, 'Aristotlean' techniques and notions of rising tension and conflict are all invoked and repeated. Iglesias (2001) refers again to Maslow's human needs as Webber (2000) does in her manual and specific snippets of instruction or advice pepper the interviews as well as less concrete insights that still invoke a sense of 'instinct'. For example, DeSouza argues that a great story is "a delicate balance between foreshadowing and thwarting the audience's expectations" (Iglesias, 2001, 130) while Swicord's top tip is to read dialogue aloud because "That's how you know if someone would really say something" (Ibid., 137).

As in the manuals, universality is also presented as a key concern of storycraft and for Iglesias, this seems to provide a substitute for the concept of commercial instinct. He argues, "If you write for the market, you eliminate the magic, and all that's left is perspiration and that's no fun. However, with this in mind, you should still think about the universality of your script" (2001, 126). The formulation of an outline or first draft of a screenplay is quickly eclipsed by the often more complex and fraught processes of rewriting that soon envelop a screenwriter and, as in the manuals, screenwriters themselves are preoccupied (whether willingly or not) in the strategies of rewriting which inevitably follow. Overall, whilst dissension is a common discursive tool within interview-based texts (offering different perspectives on the use of structural models, numbers of rewrites required or the efficacy of traditional manuals for example), the screenwriting convention is nevertheless reinforced. The familiar concepts from conflict to structure to 'write to be rewritten' are utilised in the interview texts as in the traditional manuals and this in fact, simply serves to tighten down the disciplinary mechanisms of the convention. If even 'Oscar-winners' use step outlines or Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, new screenwriters are further conditioned by the consecrated writers' standard technologies and tools.

4.4.3.Commentary on collaboration

Because the interview collections are generally concerned with the careers and 'stories' of individual writers, detailed narratives on the writing and development of particular projects provide the bulk of information and these narratives range from positive experiences that the writers often speak of as providing 'turning points' in their careers to negative and traumatic experiences which they struggle to recover from. Most of these individual accounts are framed in pedagogical terms as acutely symptomatic of the 'collaborations' that the writer engages in during the development process. Notably however, 'collaboration' itself is a malleable term in this context. While some writers certainly describe elaborate script meetings and discussions with producers and directors that lead to further drafts or rewrites, collaboration may also occur at a distance – with no contact between the 'original' writer and subsequent writers or other 'contributors'. Mark Andrus describes his experience of 'working with' James L. Brooks on his spec script, *As Good As it Gets* (1997) a process which amounted to Brooks rewriting Andrus' original. After watching a rough cut of the film, Andrus says: "I was just sitting there in love with what Jim Brooks had done to this" (Katz, 2000, 118). Brooks by turn also found it a positive individual experience, noting that he went from a position of producer who was polishing the script only, to becoming 'lost' in the work: "respecting what Mark had done…I think the two of us formed this extraordinary alchemy, because we're very different, and yet we each did personal writing and poured our hearts out, so that we ended up, I feel – and I think he feels as well – like a real team" (Ibid., 105). Such an experience is still isolated for the writers at this location – Andrus and Brooks did not have story or development meetings - but both emerged satisfied with the final product and the 'melding' of their writing in the single film as this text recounts the tale.

This type of experience is often presented as instructive example – Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard worked in a similar 'distanced collaboration' on *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and again reflect positively on the end result (Katz, 2000, 175-191). Satisfying individual experiences are also evident in direct collaborations, between writers and directors for example. Goldman discusses his healthy working relationship with director George Roy Hill which produced both *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *The Great Waldo Pepper* (1975). For this second project, Goldman describes the beginnings of the project in Hill's love of old aeroplanes which led to discussions on the set of *Butch*, the gestation of the project and the writing of it by Goldman and Hill (Goldman, 1983, 225-231) who both received credit. For the novelist John Irving, his three-

way collaboration with director Lasse Hallstrom and producer Richard Gladstein on the screen adaptation of Irving's novel, *The Cider House Rules* (1999) meant equal control and a fulfilling experience. In fact, he expresses real enjoyment of this secondary and collaborative career as a screenwriter, in contrast to the solitary work of fiction writing (Engel, 2002, 84-86).

Of course, such experiences are also tempered by a number of individual narratives of 'development hell', of personal projects worked on for years and then treated brutally by studios or producers and of routine firings and re-hirings. The currency of the horror story reappears here, as 'battle scars' are employed as pedagogical tools to orient readers to the 'tough realities' which all writers must expect. The individual reactions of screenwriters at this location to such treatment are again heterogeneous. Ron Bass describes the 'ordeal' of his involvement on *Rain Man* (1988), a project he had been collaborating on with Steven Spielberg and Dustin Hoffman. Bass abruptly discovered that Spielberg had walked away from the project, to be replaced by Sydney Pollack, and Bass describes his realisation that he was 'toast'. Bass then received a call from the producer, Mike Ovitz who told Bass: "Well yeah, he's [Pollack] gonna fire you. But he wants to know if you'll come down to Universal and meet with him for a day so he can pick your brain." Bass then reflects on this, "I know that sounds brutal and cruel but I got it and totally appreciated it" (Engel, 2002, 55). Bass was then re-hired when Pollack walked away from the project and was replaced with a new director and, for Bass, the lesson of this experience is to always walk away graciously from a project rather than bitterly so as to keep the doors open for future work. Bass's elite status effortlessly reinforces this advice and the assumption is that success comes from employing such a 'gracious' and acquiescent working subjectivity. Amy Holden-Jones echoes this sentiment:

> The thing about rejection is that you should never make the people who reject you
> feel particularly guilty about it. Often, when they move on from you to someone
> else who doesn't work out, if you haven't made them feel guilty, it leaves the door
> open for them to bring you back (Ibid., 190).

The 'realities' of the industry are sometimes evoked in less personal terms but are the constant backdrop to writers' daily lives at the 'top end'. DeSouza says: "For me, the problem is not the rejection, but the random factors of the industry…half the time it's a horrible experience because the movie gets cancelled and the other half it's a horrible experience because the movie gets made anyway, completely reinvented" (Iglesias, 2001, 22). Such a common narrative highlights the vagaries of the industry and the effects this may have on individual screenwriters while also

suggesting that, again, writers have to 'play the game' in order to maintain a reputation as a docile, 'friendly' writer. Thus, the predominant solution is to ride with it, to be cheery in the face of cruelty (as Bass is) and to grow a thick skin. Other screenwriters describe similarly brutal treatment that is not so easy to brush off. Holden-Jones illustrates this in few words, "they massacre your work" (Iglesias, 2001, 214), and Robin Swicord describes a particular experience of hers in similarly emotive language: "I felt I was watching my child being dismembered" (Ibid., 203). Iglesias' collection (*101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters*) discusses 'handling rejection' as a habit a writer must overcome and presents quotes to back this up. Akiva Goldsman says, "I used to handle rejection poorly and get depressed. I'd climb on a bed under a blanket and go through a fugue of self-pity that generally would last a couple of days. Now, I wait" (2001, 200). These feelings of depression and rejection are frequently repeated and most writers interviewed at these locations argue that it is a key part of the profession that one slowly becomes accustomed to. Surviving the routine slings and arrows of the industry comes to resemble a rite-of-passage, a form of industrial currency as I suggested in chapter two, a necessarily torturous path that will eventually lead to success in all its forms.

Marc Norman describes a more direct reaction to the vagaries of the industry and one which neatly summarises the simultaneously precarious and powerful position of the 'professional creative' screenwriter as they negotiate the industry:

> I'll tell you one thing I've noticed and it's absolutely true for me. My best writing has been on the scripts I wrote as suicide notes to the industry – sort of 'Fuck you guys, I'm outta here. This is the last script you'll ever get from me. I'm tired of this. I'm going to put everything I know into this one and if you don't buy it, See Ya!' I've reached that point I'd say, five, six, maybe seven times, I've been so frustrated and pissed off, so self-blaming, so disgusted with what I've gotten myself into and the shame of what I had to do for a buck (cited in Engel, 2002, 158).

While, on the one hand, the published interview manuals may then offer a more nuanced and 'realistic' portrait of the ups and downs of the work than the traditional 'How-To's, they persist in foregrounding particular pedagogical and disciplinary techniques for screenwriting selves that promote a conservative and utterly intelligible conception of individual screenwriting labour – structure, discipline and entrepreneurialism for example. They are also self-consciously ambiguous and partial in address – offering stories that pivot on both empowerment and degradation, creativity

and craft, art and commerce. They offer 'practical' mechanisms for making a living and these consistently link up to the workings of 'the industry'; experienced writers instruct 'newbies' to write with the pitch in mind and to learn to pitch effectively, to network with other creatives, to join a guild and thus ensure some security, to find and secure an agent and maintain a good working relationship with them, to be savvy and confident and know when to fight for their corner. In short, these texts use canonical voices to frame and teach screenwriting work as a constant struggle but one that can potentially offer unlimited rewards.

4.5. Conclusion: The disinvestment of screenwriting selves

Within the 'How-to' genre as a whole, an overarching and persistent theme in the construction and conditioning of screenwriting labour is that screenwriters are under-appreciated for their craft and talent. This is not surprising considering these texts all serve a 'career-creating' function but one that is highly ambiguous – they sympathise with their subjects, they coddle and mould individual egos and they also state the facts, tell it like it is and pull no punches. It is often made clear that screenwriters are under-remunerated in comparison to other above-the-line creatives, that the chances of maintaining control over one's work from inception to production are slim, that the chances of having one's work considered, read or produced at all are negligible, that competition is fierce. Screenwriting selves are in some cases urged to accept their subordinate position, accept the standard 'write to be rewritten' principle, give everything up but with the possibility that they'll gain 'everything' eventually. They are reminded that they can and will be easily forced off a project if they don't perform, or even if they do perform but are fired by an ego-driven director or star. Experienced writers or other creatives who offer advice within the manuals discuss the need to embrace collaboration, to not be bitter or have 'an attitude' and then present and embody the rewards for doing so: job satisfaction, creative fulfilment, material wealth, critical praise and career longevity. They represent a set of locations in which the historical screenwriter-as-myth - degraded, tough, unappreciated, embattled, canny, necessarily over-confident, martyred - are again invoked and perpetuated through the tools and advice offered by gurus and Oscar winners.

A principal function of this genre then, is a pedagogic one, an industrial pedagogy based on the discipline and industry-orientation of the individual writer. The texts work within a self-help tradition that consistently encourages the writer to disinvest from their own labour in order to

survive and prosper, in order to navigate the constant and bewildering movement between individual and collaborative working practices. The texts invoke individual careers, describe and prescribe screenwriters' labour practices and processes, orient them to standard collaborative and entrepreneurial techniques within the industry and function as a site of 'technologies of the self' aimed at screenwriting selves. Rose (1992) quotes Foucault in his original conception of technologies of the self arguing that they are techniques "'which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being' (Foucault, 1988: 18)" (Rose, 1992, 144). Here, these operations on body and soul are tied to the physical and mental labour of the screenwriting practices and processes which the manuals prescribe – from harnessing one's creativity to employing the correct and standard format and writing stages to selling oneself and one's ideas.

The manuals may foster a sense of community and solidarity for screenwriters, by offering canny advice from 'successful' writers and by harking back to 'mythic' figures or films in the collective history of screenwriting work. In the context of this analysis however, I argue this is an illusory tendency. These texts primarily foster the further atomisation of their readers precisely because they speak to writers as autonomous and 'belaboured' individuals, to use McGee's (2005) phrase. Rose's arguments lend weight to this position because, as he implies, psy-technologies govern citizens as individuals as opposed to social beings. This is echoed in Rimke's analysis of governmentality and self-help literature, in which she states: "Self-help literature, which exalts the individual over the social (and negates the inherent sociality of being) is elaborately consistent with the political rationalities promoted in advanced liberal democracies" (2000, 62).

The 'How-To' manuals atomise and partialise the screenwriting selves they speak to by knitting together concrete conceptions and techniques of screenwriting work with the highly contingent and unpredictable aspects of the labour. The seamless industrial setting evoked by these texts may represent aspects of the real-world conditions in which writers must function but this tendency towards individualism as opposed to genuine collectivity encourages an acute sense of insecurity in the subjects of the 'How-To's'. As I have shown, the 'How-To' manuals employ a number of discursive tools; they employ notions of timelessness and universality, they speak to writers as both vociferously individualised but compulsorily collaborative, they address writers as entrepreneurial beings and they bind all these concepts, traits and tensions to the screenwriting selves they produce.

How then, do the pedagogic and disciplinary functions of the manuals both feed in to and differ from the pedagogical frameworks for the teaching of screenwriting in the UK and the experiences and self-disclosures of screenwriters themselves? This will be the analytical focus of the next two chapters, and in particular, the ruptures between the prescriptions and techniques of the manuals and the daily experiences of working writers will be examined. It is within these ruptures that professional insecurity looms, where over- confidence is deployed to temper such anxieties. These ruptures are central to the particular logics of the British screenwriting pedagogical and labour markets. I will now focus on the ways in which screenwriters as creative workers navigate and calculate, perhaps with 'How-To' manual in hand but just as easily armed with contempt for manual-learning and with a commitment to 'real world' industrial experience.

Chapter 5 - Pedagogical locations for screenwriting: Teaching screenwriting labour from the Masters course to the development company

```
I'm inclined to pre-empt any teaching process with a
government health warning which is: I'm going to talk to
you about stuff which is based on enormous prejudice, my
own experience, which is very limited, which has often
been miserable, sometimes wonderful…I'm passionate about
films but I have very subjective tastes. So you need to
be immensely sceptical about everything I say.
```

(Sam P. in conversation, 2009)

5. Introduction

In the above quote, a writer and teacher succinctly expresses their pedagogical position in relation to the teaching of screenwriting and the words used to describe it are telling: limited, prejudiced, personal, passionate. This chapter follows on from the analysis of 'How-to' screenwriting manuals in which I argued that this genre and the various texts that constitute its collective voice, function as psy-technologies and pedagogical tools within the mainstream screen production industries. They employ a number of discursive techniques - they invoke notions of old and new, both individualised and collaborative, partial and entrepreneurial – tying all these concepts to the screenwriting selves they produce. The variety of practical writing tools the texts offer hitch together vociferously individualised screenwriting techniques with contingent collaborative discourse. However, rather than producing a diluting effect, the texts harness collaboration in the service of fostering further competition, atomisation and insecurity for their readers.

This chapter will identify and discuss a number of key sites in which pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting are assembled and maintained in the UK - where screenwriters, both budding and established, engage and work with these frameworks and in which the manuals are often key learning tools. On the one hand, the parallels with the 'How-to' analysis are clear – I will illustrate that pedagogical frameworks of many kinds are at once standardised, individualised and collectivised. I will discuss where and how creativity and craft are defined within these frameworks and will consider where these durable polarities can be located. I am also preoccupied here with how the pedagogic and disciplinary functions of various locations for the teaching of screenwriting in the UK can be analysed alongside the experiences and self-disclosures of screenwriters

themselves - those who, like the writer-teacher quoted above, actively reflect on their own pedagogical frameworks, their own limited, prejudiced, passionate knowledge and experiences. I will be using empirical data drawn from a number of in-depth interviews with British-based screenwriting pedagogues (many of whom are or have also worked as writers). These interviews produced a large amount of data on the practicalities of teaching screenwriting – course content and design, resources used, strategies for teaching particular aspects of screenwriting work and establishing and maintaining links with government bodies and industry. The analysis also draws on other forms of data-gathering and evidence, particularly ethnographic observation, the collection and examination of 'deep texts and artefacts' (as Caldwell, 2008 puts it) such as sample course outlines and is designed to emulate Caldwell's 'integrated cultural-industrial method of analysis' as outlined in chapter three.[1]

I will begin by discussing some key concerns and preoccupations of early pedagogical frameworks and pedagogues using the historical work of Polan (2007) as a strategy to illustrate some of the foundational Hollywood-centric rationale(s) for the teaching of industrial screenwriting as a form of creative and dramatic writing.[2] Particular sites in which pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting are established and maintained will then be identified, illustrated and discussed: the Masters course (and associated stand-alone seminar); a Skillset assessment process; a 'Creative Training' process and the private screenwriting consultancy.[3] At each site I will knit together interview data, observational and textual data gleaned from within and between these locations to illuminate where creativity and craft are located and discussed, how standards are viewed and maintained and how individualised and collectivised modes of screenwriting work are both necessarily separated out (for

_____

[1] I would like to stress here that this is by no means an exhaustive account of screenwriting pedagogy in the UK. As Appendix Two shows, there are a vast number of locations, institutions and companies which purport to teach aspects of screenwriting craft and creative practice, much like the vast array of 'How-to' texts on the market. I offer here an analysis of a selection of locations I was able to observe and participate in/around during the course of my fieldwork and I again hark back to Haraway's (1996) call for 'situated knowledge' to locate myself *somewhere* - in this case, at a number of key pedagogical sites - whilst also acknowledging that my knowledge production is partial, is delimited by the locations and interviews I was privy to.

[2] Here I am drawing a parallel with my argumentation in chapters two and four - setting up the Hollywood-centric foundations for the construction on screenwriting work in pedagogical discourse (as I did with 'How-to' discourse) and then moving into the contemporary UK setting where I have conducted research 'on the ground' and have been able to view these industrial norms at work. I'm well aware that there are potential problems with this approach, that a linear trajectory from discourse or myth or labour market conditions in Hollywood cannot be directly drawn to London/the wider UK market. However, I see this as a valuable and productive rhetorical strategy on my part; enabling me to focus on industrial processes of screenwriting, on the overwhelming influence Hollywood has on discourses of screenwriting labour and on the economic, cultural and discursive connections between Hollywood and London in terms of mainstream screen production.

[3] Note that 'Creative Training' is a pseudonyms for an industry-based programme that is anonymised in this dissertation. This was the most efficacious strategy to preserve confidentiality for informants.

the benefit of the individual student, consumer and worker) and hitched together (to prepare student writers for careers as collaborators and filmmakers).

Overall, I will argue that an internal and unofficial set of discourses is circulated within and across these frameworks. These discourses play into broader discussions about the value and efficacy of media education, the balancing of academic and vocational forms of screenwriting education and the desired links and relationships to amorphous notions of "the industry". These discourses are deployed to again make screenwriting work intelligible and knowable as it is taught but they are also anxiety-producing; they foster new forms of professional insecurity which manifest themselves in particular ways in a general site such as the Masters course or a more specific location such as the specialised screenwriting seminar. I will also illustrate that these unofficial discourses become formalised and institutionalised in official curricula and government initiatives (such as forms of course assessment) and thus are now self-perpetuating across these locations.

As I have already argued, the dynamic interplay of these concepts highlights the "twisted economic logic" (Pang, 2009, 72) of late capitalism, the 'social embedding' of creative labour in which individualised and collective modes of work and other associated dichotomies - craft and creativity, pleasure and pain, art and commerce - now collapse in upon one another. I will illustrate how this interplay manifests itself within these pedagogical frameworks and associated discourses (both unofficial and official) and will demonstrate how pedagogues navigate the terrain of screenwriting teaching as creative work.

5.1. Early pedagogies and pedagogues

The narrative(s) of the development of early pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting in the USA offers a useful beginning point because they clearly illuminate early rationales for the teaching of 'photoplay making' as a new creative writing form in the twentieth century and provide a compelling account of the kinds of epistemological questions that were asked early on about the nature of screenwriting as an activity and vocation. In this foundational era and in Polan's discussion of two early pedagogues and their differing techniques and teaching philosophies, there is also evidence of the establishment of a number of polarities that have proven highly durable in the wider processes of standardisation for screenwriting teaching: craft versus creativity, theory versus practice, visual style versus linguistic style. Polan argues that from the early days of film studies, aesthetic appreciation and practical instruction were welcomed simultaneously (2007, 27).

Polan argues that early pedagogues such as Frances Taylor Patterson (at Columbia University) invoked in their courses an overarching sense of industriousness which linked up with notions of craftsmanship and that: "Such a crafts pedagogy was an example of that growing concern with the therapeutic and with the bolstering up of the self against the ravages of the contemporary world" (2007, 26). There is an obvious trace here of the self-directed careerism that has already been analysed within the manuals,[4] signalling that from the earliest days of screenwriting teaching, both craft and creative-oriented discourses have been preoccupied with the individualising tendencies of the work.

Polan offers a wealth of practical evidence in relation to the design of the earliest courses in photoplay composition and one obvious point is that these courses mirror contemporary frameworks. Polan profiles Victor Freeburg, one of the first teachers of photoplay construction at Columbia University (1916-1919), and provides a sample description of one of Freeburg's 'elementary courses' which was itself part of an extension program:

> This course is concerned with the methods of preparing dramatic plots, old and new, for the motion pictures. The photoplay is studied as an independent art of dramatic expression, in some respects inferior, in others superior, to the stage play. Special attention is paid to the art of arousing and maintaining interest, the proper dramatic arrangement of incidents and situations, the various methods of delineating character, the effective use of mechanical devices, and the pantomimic and pictorial qualities of a good photoplay. Films will be exhibited and analysed before the class, and visits will be made to the studios of first-class motion picture companies. Each student is required to write finished, technically correct scenarios of at least one adaptation and one original photoplay (2007, 46).

A more advanced course

> is designed to give a limited number of scenario writers an opportunity for development of individual genius and for a general study of the finer problems and possibilities of the photoplay. There will be discussion of such topics as the psychology of dramatic characters, symbolism, allegory, the spectator's imagination and the dramatic use of settings (Ibid., 46-47).

Interestingly, the stage play is invoked in Freeburg's course as the obvious predecessor to the photoplay and, for Polan, Freeburg represents a pedagogue preoccupied with the aesthetic and

---

[4] And as has already been noted, Patterson was one of the early pedagogues who also wrote photoplay composition manuals, see chapter four.

therefore creative potential of cinema: "The assumption that cinema became art when it offered images and stories of a harmoniousness that transcended the givens of worldly experiences would guide Freeburg's pedagogy" (2007, 51). In contrast, Patterson's pedagogy "emphasised plot construction and character over pictorial beauty, and she clearly saw her role as instructing writing students to craft effective narrative more than to create visual pleasure…" (Ibid., 58)

Polan emphasises Patterson's practical and industrial focus (her manuals reflected this) and the manifestations of this within her teaching. For example, she actively brought guest lecturers (writers, directors) into the class, and regularly screened films for analysis (such as *Nanook of the North,* 1922 and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, 1920). Patterson's elementary course

> stands as a fairly straightforward pedagogy for script writing: the photoplay process proceeds from the inspiration of an initial premise (and, even prior to that, the influence of other arts and existing narrative formulas) to its elaboration into a narrative, and then its translation into proper photoplay format (from synopsis to detailed continuity script) (2007, 68).

It is also interesting to note, as Polan (2007) does, that Patterson offers early evidence for the emphasis on photoplay writing as inherently collective and part of a wider filmmaking milieu. So, in her 1928 manual titled *Scenario and Screen*, she provided chapters which described the work of other filmmaking professionals such as director, producer and cameraman and "It was as if the book were informing prospective writers that they certainly might have important roles to play in filmmaking, but that they also needed to learn their relative place in a production process that would delegate equally important roles to other kinds of talent" (2007, 77).

For Polan, the differing approaches of Freeburg and Patterson illustrate an initial philosophical divergence between artistic and instrumental orientations for screenwriting teaching; a divergence which continues to structure and fracture the discourse of screenwriting pedagogy in contemporary discussions, course curricula and assessment processes in the UK. Generally, screenwriting has been taught within film school contexts within the UK and USA which have traditionally located the subject within creative, film-as-art arguments as well as vocational, skills-based training courses. The wider UK educational context has seen a large-scale expansion in vocational training

in recent years.[5] By definition, vocational training was once taught through UK colleges and polytechnics that focused on ostensibly 'traditional' craft occupations but a large number of these institutions were granted 'university' status in 1992. This has since spawned an ongoing debate between higher education factions (the Russell Group, the 1994 Group and Million+ - see footnote 3 below). Crucially for this project, these political and ideological developments demonstrate that the discourse and practicalities of vocational education have been aggressively applied to the 'creative industries.'[6] McRobbie and Forkert (2009, 24) note, in relation to fine arts education that, "Most UK art schools are now also part of large universities, and with government interest in creative industries this means that the changing world of the corporate university impinges particularly in these departments." An interlinked trend here is the steady growth in popularity of vocational courses. In 2008, it was reported that 'work-related' courses continued to grow in popularity, with three million 'vocational qualifications' awarded in 2007 and a doubling of student numbers in five years (Woolcock, 2008). The rise in vocationalism has been described as a 'hangover from the 1980s'[7] but these kinds of arguments are also routinely rebutted as 'complete snobbery' by pedagogues from the Million+ group (Tony Higgins, cited in Coughlan and Diamantopoulos, 2002).

The enduring creative versus craft chasm, central here to debates about the principles of higher education, is itself integral to the ways screenwriting teaching is discussed within and across

_____

[5] The specificities of the British context cannot be underestimated; higher education has been stratified in the UK, represented by the titles of various 'groups' of institutions. The hierarchy includes the 'Russell Group' universities (self-defined as the top twenty, research-intensive British universities, those that receive the bulk of research funding in the UK), the '1994 Group' (which represents another nineteen smaller research-led institutions) and the 'post-1992' universities (or 'Million+') which are rooted in college and polytechnic backgrounds. This perceived division between 'A-List' academic institutions and more vocational or craft-oriented institutions which gained university status in the early 1990s continues to structure and animate the debates about changes in higher education provision in the UK. This division clearly maps onto other dichotomies which this dissertation is concerned with: (lofty, privileged) art versus (material, crude) commerce and (lofty, privileged) creativity versus (rote, semi-skilled, vocational) craft. I should note here that film schools such as the National Film and Television School (NFTS) and the London Film School (LFS) are also key institutions outside of the traditional 'university' sector in which screenwriting is taught amongst other filmmaking production skills of various kinds. The NFTS notes that from its inception in the mid 1970s it has rejected 'vocational school-style' teaching in favor of 'in-depth training' in all aspects of film and television production. Again, a process of hierarchising institutions based on pedagogical approach is clear here - film schools trade on their reputation as specialised, holistic, industry-connected training institutions to distinguish themselves from the wealth of new degree courses in screenwriting now offered through traditional or newer universities. See National Film and Television School (2010) and Appendix Two.

[6] For example the Million+ group published a report in 2008 titled 'Creative Futures: Building the Creative Economy through Universities' in which the 'new creative economy', as the Department for Media, Culture and Sport defines it, is re-stated and tied to the 'commercialisation of creativity'. In the report 'innovative' skills such as entrepreneurialism, business nous and the 'need for flexibility and diversity' are identified as priorities that universities should be teaching students who strive for these 'creative futures'. See Million + (2008). For a useful critique of consultancy-based 'innovation' vocabularies, see McRobbie and Forkert (2009).

[7] This comment is attributed to Tim Thornton, Head of History at the University of Huddersfield in Coughlan and Diamantopoulos (2002) who voices the fear, in the same article, about a growing divide between academic and vocational training.

locations.[8] To this basic polarity are hitched other presumed divisions: art versus commerce, theory versus practice, academia versus industry. This brief introductory picture is certainly glossing over many ongoing and fundamental debates around the provision of higher education in various fields of study but it serves my purposes in flagging up the historical reach of contemporary screenwriting teaching as well as the tensions and polarities that hover like spectres in both historical and contemporary frameworks. These polarities - between creativity and craft most importantly – are both instructive and obfuscating and I will elaborate more on them in the next sections in which I isolate and examine a number of sites in which contemporary pedagogical frameworks and associated discourses of screenwriting work are produced, reproduced and circulated.

5.2. Locating pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting in the UK

The following analysis isolates four key sites of the production of pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting. I observed, participated in and interacted with all of these sites in the course of carrying out this project and the observations, interviews and 'deep texts' that were produced and collected are knitted together here in order to demonstrate the functioning of these sites and the ways in which they are discussed and evaluated by writers and teachers of screenwriting practice. The sites are: a Masters (MA) course (including focused discussion of a specialised 'How-to' screenwriting seminar); a Skillset course assessment process; a 'Creative Training' process; and a private script development company. In certain respects, these four sites are very different in orientation, purpose and substance and those differences in structure and formulation will be highlighted but I will also attend to the connections between them. I see the movement in this chapter from one location to the next as mirroring the movement of many contemporary aspiring screenwriters in the UK who now often begin their career trajectory on an MA course (one that may have interacted with industry organisations such as Skillset in formal or informal ways) and as they develop skills and tacit industry knowledge, move into more specialised and advanced locations such as a 'Creative Training' process or private development context.

In each section, I utilise fieldwork data to describe the site and its substantive elements in relation to the broader concerns of the project. I will analyse each site as a producer of standardised screenwriting techniques and labour; as a producer of individualised screenwriting discourses; and

---

[8] This also relates to the more fundamental questions (repeated across disciplines which purport to teach forms of 'creative writing' more generally) concerning whether 'creativity' and 'writing' can be taught at all. See Menand (2009) for a fascinating discussion.

simultaneously, as a producer of specialised discourse in relation to collective screenwriting processes. Overall, I argue all these locations are breeding grounds for informal and formal discourses about screenwriting education and they also further 'bed in' the craft-creativity polarity which animates and also agitates screenwriting as pedagogy and practice.

5.3. The Masters Course

The Masters (MA) Course is a key site for higher education and vocational training for screenwriters in the UK, for the production of screenwriting labour and discourses about that labour. These courses are now offered through traditional film school channels and some universities who have opened up degree courses in media studies, creative industries and the like.[9] Many media and film related courses at undergraduate level such as honours degrees offer papers (and in some cases, whole courses) in the standardised elements of screenwriting craft. However, MA courses now represent an advanced and dedicated arena for the development of screenwriters who work exclusively on screenwriting skills over the course of one to two years, engage in extensive peer-to-peer discussions and evaluations of screenwriting work, practice entrepreneurial skills such as pitching, reading, watching and assessing canonical examples of 'successful' scripts and their subsequent films and are often offered mentoring opportunities with experienced writers. The large and complex pedagogical map for screenwriting training in the UK also includes a wide variety of short courses and specialised training programmes offered by private institutions, some partly-funded by public agencies such as the UK Film Council.[10]

The majority of students who pursue MA study enter a course with some knowledge of standardised screenwriting techniques such as format and/or storytelling principles[11] and many have previous industry experience or can at least produce creative writing samples in some form. As Joshua P. stated, particularly the 'early' students on their postgraduate screenwriting course in its first years

---

[9] Even within this designation (between film school and university) we see an ideological distinction - film schools such as the NFTS and the London Film School distinguish themselves (and are distinguished by others) as specialised training institutions with strong industry linkages, equipment and technology for the teaching of writing, directing, producing and so on (with further linkages between these roles) and dedicated spaces for filmmaking pedagogy - studio space for example. Universities are often viewed as more recent 'upstarts' in the realm of screenwriting teaching, offering practical screenwriting training to complement film theory courses or providing screenwriting training as part of 'creative' teaching programs which have directly responded to the 'creative industries' drive in UK policy-making.

[10] See Appendix Two for indicative pedagogical location list.

[11] Selection criteria for students on a sample MA course supplied to me by a respondent included: A broad knowledge of current trends in contemporary fiction, theatrical films and television drama; an exciting vision for their creative life and what kind of mark they wish to make on television drama and/or on their nation's film industry: and an original voice in their creative writing. MA in Screenwriting (Fiction), 2005.

were 'mature' and had been 'in the business' but were retraining because of the economic context of the late 1980s. The students were described as, "highly motivated, quite experienced, very good quality students." In a 2005 critical appraisal document for the sample MA course I examined (using resources provided to me by an informant), it is made clear that a 'widening participation policy' in subsequent years led to a wider range of abilities within cohorts of students (from 'brilliant to difficult') which had both 'pluses and minuses' for the course as a whole.

The sample MA screenwriting course outline I examined in detail (along with supporting critical appraisal and Skillset assessment documentation) was obtained through a respondent and parts of it are referred to here with the specific details of the institution removed. Along with the detailed information about the course's content, I was able to view a course review document which offers key insights from industry-based reviews and student feedback about the efficacy of the course, its structure and application. The aims of the programme outlined at the beginning of the course documentation highlight the professional standards and industrial relevance of the course and the importance of a sense of 'community' among the students. These aims are also explicitly brought together in further explication of the nature of the course:

> Creative writing and critical feedback are the core of the coursework on this course...effort is made to ensure that script analysis and the theory of screenwriting impacts on each individual's creative development. One of the course's strengths lies in the large number of professional writers and development personnel in the course team, people who make a living mainly through pursuing their specialist craft. Students, therefore, will probably work with at least ten different people in project development over the passage of the 2-year MA course, gleaning different insights into the development process (MA in Screenwriting (Fiction) Programme Specification, 2005, 4).

The durable dichotomies - between artistic, imaginative or creative notions of this form of writing (and thus, teaching) and the more instrumental or practical conceptions of screenwriting as necessarily professionally oriented and rooted in concrete industrial knowledge – are structuring devices in the ways that pedagogues describe the history and contemporary contexts of their teaching (as Polan illustrates in relation to early American pedagogies). One pedagogue (Joshua P., one of the few who did not also self-identify as a writer) described in an interview the development of contemporary screenwriting education in the UK and in doing so, immediately set up the dichotomy between the 'artistic' approach to teaching screenwriting which was dominant up to that

point[12] and a more market-driven approach which focused on standardised form and structure. This informant also saw a strong connection between contemporary, vocational screenwriting courses at postgraduate level[13] and the rise of USA-based screenwriting 'evangelism' originating from screenwriting manuals. This was "the time when Syd Field and Robert McKee suddenly started coming up" and, because there was a 'vacuum' in terms of literature that could be used to teach, he argued forcefully that an American 'orthodoxy' quickly took hold of pedagogical frameworks and discussions around the design and implementation of screenwriting teaching in the UK. For this teacher, the orthodoxy represented a 'closed discourse' that offered clarity and a set of norms which serve to satisfy students and industry (and certainly makes teaching easier, more structured and routinised) but was a source of concern: "it's extremely difficult to engage with in terms of a critique, unless you look as if you're rejecting the whole thing which is clearly nonsensical."

This experienced teacher who had 'fallen into' the teaching of screenwriting and had learned to enjoy the teaching immensely, found himself in the precarious position of both needing the 'orthodoxy' and clearly struggling with its limitations and rigidities. He lamented the centrality of the manuals within screenwriting teaching, arguing that they were unavoidable teaching tools "because a) there are so many of them and b) they cover so much central ground" but their ubiquity had, he argued, inevitably led to a 'narrowing' of options and a general process of 'normativisation.' Joshua P. also linked the 'narrowing of options' to the contemporary ubiquity of screenwriting software packages such as *Final Draft* but it was not only described in terms of lament. The software was characterised as important in terms of enabling students to quickly get to grips with technical details such as average shot lengths, which could then help to more easily determine the configuration of dialogue in particular scenes for example.

To have the standards of screenwriting teaching (in both manuals and higher education courses) referred to as an 'orthodoxy' immediately signalled that whilst the manuals could well be analysed as a site of standardisation and the discursive construction of screenwriting work, screenwriting teaching could not also be presented as a homogenous or near-homogenous site for the deployment of standardised screenwriting models. It is an arena of pedagogical reflexivity in which multiplicity

---

[12] Joshua P. referred to this perspective as the 'Cherry Potter approach', Potter being a prominent pedagogue and manual writer based at the National Film and Television School.

[13] The early 1990s marked the beginning of this contemporary environment for him and note that this maps on to the post-1992 moment when many vocational institutions in the UK were granted university status.

and uncertainty abounds – individual screenwriting teachers with variegated backgrounds[14] and different teaching philosophies[15] exemplifed a *lack* of confidence in dealing with the complexities that come with developing and teaching a broadly 'vocational' as well as 'creative' form of writing. However, *over*-confidence was also clearly evident, illustrating professional insecurity as much as lack of confidence does. Many teachers with extensive experience as either writers or educators (or both), viewed vocationalism and craft skills, close links with industry and practical experience as paramount; as the best and only set of approaches to the teaching of screenwriting and the uncertainties it engenders.

The multiplicity evident within this site of the production of screenwriting labour was illuminated numerous times – Joshua P. also described the teaching of an MA Screenwriting course as akin to 'riding two horses': "On the one hand, you're saying, ok, there's a vocational need for an extended and quite in-depth exploration of your own creative powers" and the other part of it is "how does this fit in with an orthodox MA understanding?" He cited comments from early reviews of the course which highlighted this concern – that is, industry-based reviewers asked, how can 'MA standards' be measured and assessed for scripts produced on a course? Some answers to this question are situated within the programme structure of the sample MA programme specification in which, by 'Phase III' of the course, students will be producing a 'professional treatment', a 'commissioning strategy document' and a feature-length screenplay; a body of work that in principle, could enable the writer to get an agent or drum up interest in a particular script, written up to 'professional' standards. Within the critical appraisal document for the sample MA course, the objectives on completion of the MA course include:

> a developed creativity, confidence and professional competence; a developed
> critical perception of what succeeds in scriptwriting in general and within their
> own work in particular; a critical understanding of the market context and its
> practices and a professional application of marketing and funding (MA in
> Screenwriting (Fiction) Critical Appraisal, 2005, 7).

---

[14] For example, a few informants had trained at UCLA in Los Angeles in writing and producing programs; one had begun as an actor and then theatre director before moving into screenwriting and then teaching; another had worked as a theatre and television director before becoming a teacher and private development consultant.

[15] Joshua P. described colleagues that had come on-board as MA Screenwriting course leaders with starkly different pedagogical approaches ranging from artistic orientations based on aural Scottish story-telling traditions to more industry- and orthodoxy-oriented, focused on industry connections, notions of genre, audience sectors/markets and so on.

Another area of discursive and practical concern that came up in more than one discussion was the frank knowledge on the part of screenwriting pedagogues that, although screenwriting courses are foundationally vocational, hardly any subsequent graduates will ever 'make it' as a screenwriter; very few will have the 'creative voice' and 'talent' required to write scripts that will be produced. Another informant, Sam P., stated this confidently: "you know, this is the fifth year of the course, we've now had, I don't know, sixty or so writers through the Masters, is there one person in there that is a genius? No…there's probably half a dozen that will get some movies made" Linda L. was very clear that an MA course could not be viewed as a 'cure-all' or an 'automatic feeder' into a screenwriting career and argued, "a course can only do so much…and it is difficult because the courses never normally last long enough to give people that trajectory of time it takes to really incubate the skills"

The general consensus across the fieldwork interviews was that *individual craft skills* could be taught in the context of an MA course, along with *professional skills* designed to orient screenwriters to industry and audience expectations – these 'concrete' skills offered particular examples of pedagogical confidence:

> teaching is about…understanding those craft skills and techniques and understanding how to write a screenplay…but then actually paired with that and I think as important in some ways the mentality of thinking of yourself as a professional and as a professional entity.[16]

Sam P., a teacher and writer, offered a personal insight into his preoccupations as a self-described 'fledgling' teacher:

> my course primarily is about, more and more, lots of pitching: tell me a story, I don't buy it, that's not plausible, or you lost me, I was really interested in this character…and so by doing, the writers, the storytellers should begin to understand…the word that I, they probably take the piss out of me for using most of the time is rhythm, I'm always talking about rhythm.

Often, the sense from pedagogues was that 'self-education' on the part of students was as important as any craft-based skills that could be taught using a manual. This centred on the need for individual students to be aware of their audience, to have 'movie business literacy'[17] in relation to concepts

---

[16] Linda L.

[17] Linda L.

such as genre and 'marketability', again, perceptibly concrete concepts that inspired confidence and at times, over-confidence:

> I mean, I think one of the most interesting bits of information if you are looking at the teaching of screenwriting…if you like, the strategy of how to develop as a screenwriter and to self-educate, it's a very simple piece of information, from Steven Spielberg and that is that the most annoying questions he asks writers all the time: What is your audience feeling now? That's what you have to constantly ask.[18]

Many conversations I had about MA-based pedagogy were focused on individualised modes of screenwriting which were of course, dictated in part by the necessarily individual models of assessment for all courses. This was most clearly articulated in comments which described the 'compulsion' of the writing vocation, the urgency of which serves as a discursive tool from within the profession to explain the proliferation of screenwriting courses per se and the small odds on 'success': "Writing is not a job or a hobby, it's an addiction without a cure,"[19] "there is a masochism to it". Joshua P. went on to liken the life of the writer to a horse or car race – "there's only one winner" and you risk your livelihood "because you might be the one, you might be the one who can say, my writing got me into that."

I was concerned to ask all the pedagogues about techniques employed to teach collaboration within MA courses. This was a technique on my part to move away from discussions about teaching the perceived 'straight-forward stuff' like format and structure and into the realm of the more ephemeral and 'mysterious'; collaboration as craft and creative act, specific techniques and practices such as rewriting, development and the consensual shaping of a screenplay. Questions on this topic were often brushed off or identified as difficult to answer ("it's like one of those how long is a piece of string?"[20]) and the generality of the term 'collaboration' perhaps contributed to the perception that this was difficult to describe let alone to teach. Yet informants still answered confidently, often saying that when teaching writers one can stress that they "have to go in being able to invest themselves kind of fully, but at the same time too, being able to understand that you're part of a team".[21]

---

[18] Sam P.

[19] This quote, paraphrased by Joshua P., is acknowledged as originating from BBC Writer's Room, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/

[20] Linda L.

[21] Linda L.

The term 'teamwork' came up in other interviews, one in which collaboration was described as 'easy' to teach, "Its just teamwork.." but which was distinguished from 'development' which is "much harder to teach".[22] Joshua P. described attempts in an earlier version of an MA course to facilitate collaborations between writers, directors and producers on production courses but stated that it led to 'umpteen problems', particularly because directors had a tendency to 'run off' with their own or the writers' ideas. This was echoed by another pedagogue, John S., who described the difficulties in facilitating collaborations between writing and directing students on an MA course because directors are often egotistical and want to write their own material but don't have the skills to do so.[23] He went on to argue that film production courses "don't want to take on that industrial dimension…they like it being more like an art school where it's about self expression" but that a good screenwriting course must be imbued with a sense of 'industrial, social and creative context'.[24] Jane M., was very clear that collaborative techniques were not covered in her MA course:

> with the MA students we don't do anything really collaborative, other than that they read out their work and give feedback on it…because I suppose at that stage, when you're writing shortish stuff, it's not really until you get to produce that you're thinking about collaborating that much…so I haven't come across that.

The overarching picture from my discussions of MA-level screenwriting teaching was that notions of 'collaboration' and 'development' lacked the clarity and materiality of teaching individual craft skills, screenplay format and business skills; clarity and materiality being essential attributes within the quantifiable bounds of a higher education course (and within reviews of such courses).[25] Many informants acknowledged that the best strategy, and one that also helpfully promoted links with industry, was to invite industry 'players' in for guest lectures in order to describe specific

---

[22] Joshua P.

[23] Note here that this is not self-evident although it was often described to me in these terms. For example, Redvall's (2010) work on the Danish film industry and particularly, the Danish Film School illustrates how the School successfully shifted from an 'auteur' tradition in which the director was considered the sole author of screen works to a 'collaborative auteur' tradition in which screenwriters and directors are encouraged to work together and screenwriters have gained more visibility in the national film culture.

[24] John S.

[25] For example, in the critical appraisal document for the sample MA course, a strength of the course is identified as being centered on the notion of 'professional practice' which is quantified at 30% of the mark of most modules in the course as a whole (MA in Screenwriting (Fiction) Critical Appraisal, 2005, p. 26). 'Professional practice' is defined in a number of ways but includes correct formatting of work, time management in relation to workload and assessments, 'complying with the story and script development process' and the ability to pitch ideas in an articulate, coherent and concise manner.

experiences of collaboration and development[26] and more general issues around funding, the structure of script development deals and so on.

As well as the use of guest speakers from industry as a practical pedagogical tool which also served to reassure students of the vocational usefulness of an MA course, another practical technique routinely referred to by pedagogues and within course outlines was the specialised screenwriting seminar or workshop used on MA courses in which 'gurus' or well-known writers and teachers led day-long seminars (along the same lines as Robert McKee's).

5.3.1.Flashback: An MA screenwriting workshop/seminar

```
Fade in:
A researcher (yours truly) sits in a chilly room with a group
of MA screenwriting students and creative writing students.
The screenwriting teacher of repute, Tess K., stands at the
front of the room, drinking coffee and shuffling papers.

                        Tess K:

Excuse me, I've just got off a plane so the jet-lag might
slow me down…but let's get going…


I sip my own coffee and begin to take notes as Tess K. flies
into action. Snippets of axioms fly and I struggle to get
them all down…


                        Tess K:

        If you're a good screenwriter, you're invisible
                            …
        Horrible things happen to you…in this vocation
                            …
        Everything you write has to be real but unusual…
```

As part of my fieldwork, I participated in part of a day-long screenwriting workshop led by Tess K., a prominent 'How-to' teacher which served as a moment of participant observation and 'immersion' for me as researcher. Tess K. spoke to a group of students on an MA screenwriting course as well as

---

[26] For example, Sam P. maintained a website for his course which included links to video interviews with experienced screenwriters and producers speaking about collaboration to the MA classes.

some MA Creative Writing students. Tess K. was very confident, funny and well-practiced; she introduced a number of diverse concepts which were tied to her own perspective as an experienced teacher and writer. These included phrases such as 'creativity under pressure', the notion of 'the spark'[27] and the 'mentor-antagonist film'. Much of the morning was also taken up with ideas very familiar to me from the manual-based analysis – the three-act structure (Tess K. described it as the screenwriter's 'workhorse') and the Hero's Journey, action and relationship lines within a screen story and the notion of creativity as a combination of imagination and technique.

A brainstorming exercise led by Tess K. entailed small groups producing fragments of story ideas facilitated by random words and phrases; groups brainstormed around 'buried treasure', 'egg', 'unusual robbery' and 'twenty reasons to murder your partner'. This exercise was related to established genre categories and 'story beats'. Another concrete exercise used a scene from the script for *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Tess K. had added excess dialogue and screen directions to the excerpt and the class was required to edit the scene down to its barest (yet still coherent) form.

This specialised location was in many ways, the opposite of the iconic McKee seminar dramatised in the Charlie Kaufman penned film, *Adaptation* (2002). It was 'low-fi', conducted in a small room with a dodgy computer and powerpoint presentation in front of a small audience, with the teacher's suitcase propped in the corner. Tess K. explicitly distanced herself from the 'gurus' (referring to them as such) but also legitimated her own credentials to educate on this topic by discussing personal stories from her own writing life and her additional work as a script consultant. She invoked the standard polarities such as craft versus creativity in her own discursive practice, introduced new ones such as 'real versus unusual' as easily-graspable teaching tools; she employed concrete learning tasks and facilitated group discussions.[28] My lasting impression from this experience was the use of such concrete concepts and axioms by Tess K. to both stir up anxiety ["Horrible things happen to you in this industry!"] and simultaneously, to placate and soothe it by offering techniques to inspire the confidence she herself exuded (the 'Real but Unusual' mantra). This encounter offered an environment in which I witnessed the small-scale production of industrial anxiety, the simultaneous deployment of confidence and over-confidence through a select few

---

[27] In a pitching session, when the eyes of your audience 'light up', a writer has successfully created 'the spark'.

[28] All this was remarkably similar to a different observation I conducted, at a later stage in the fieldwork, of a 'genre' lecture as part of another MA Screenwriting course at a London-based university. Here, I found a similar range of concepts deployed, highly practical group discussions which referenced and analysed produced films [*Alien*, 1979 – was the key example used] and a powerpoint slide show was used with key dramatic theorists such as Egri (1960) quoted. The pedagogue here was Louise R.

concrete axioms and concepts and the use of the craft-creative polarity to structure pedagogical discourse.

5.3.2.Calculating pedagogical careers

It's important to note that the role of the screenwriting pedagogue is often an inevitable stage in a screenwriter's career path – teaching screenwriting offers some financial stability for writers who may be struggling to survive through writing alone. Tess K. embodied this multivalent careerism, citing work as a screenwriter, novelist and script consultant in the course of her seminar. Sam P. described his trajectory into teaching as "a simple tale…to do with 'dosh'" and one which enabled him to be able "not to write for money". Karen H., was, when I spoke to her, simultaneously completing a PhD, teaching part-time, writing a 'How-to' manual, conducting bespoke seminars for private development organisations and writing a commission for a European production company. Jane M. was also teaching part-time and writing a 'How-to' book as well as her own spec scripts and said,

> for the past twelve or thirteen years I've not been teaching full-time, so I've just been doing the teaching to get some income, or not been teaching at all and taken time out, just so I've got time to write as well, because I think otherwise it's really difficult.

Evidence for the active calculation over one's career as a screenwriting pedagogue came up in every interview which offered moments of both palpable insecurity and necessary over-confidence. All the interviewees were very open about the fact that writing was their first love, their priority, that this was the work that sustained them whereas teaching was a means to an end.[29] The compulsion to write was also often invoked as a reason why calculation was necessary – the vicissitudes of the industry could never be predicted (here, professional anxiety was palpable) but teaching and offering seminars or writing books offered steady income streams that could mitigate against those unpredictabilities, the result of the flow and churn of the industry.[30]

---

[29] For example Louis R. was very clear to stress her early experience in Hollywood in the 1970s and the fact that she was first and foremost a writer and secondly, a teacher. For her, this was central to her self-perception as plugged into and respected within the industry rather than compromised by the academic preoccupations of her particular institution.

[30] One of my informants, Karen H., who was writing a 'How-to' book, was using the new connections gained with her Hollywood-based publisher to attempt to 'break in' to the Los Angeles-based writing market. This was a calculated strategy on her part (the planned move to L.A. had already been postponed once) although she also expressed fears that she might be pigeonholed as a 'How-to' book writer as opposed to a serious screenwriter.

At the pedagogical site of the MA course, and within particular pedagogical scenarios such as specialised seminars, the need for structure, concretisation and quantification dictates that screenwriting labour is framed and taught in terms of individual techniques with an emphasis on instrumental and vocational views of screenwriting in opposition to artistic or free-flowing, creativity-based orientations. These two perspectives are necessarily separated out in discourse and in the classroom. Discussions about what an MA course can and should teach, how aspects of screenwriting work should be taught and the relative weight of academic and vocational approaches to the writing also signal an ongoing process of differentiation and definition. So, screenwriting teachers are constantly working in both formal and informal ways to distinguish this form of writing from other forms (by using and showing films, encouraging screenplay analysis and dissection, emphasising industrial knowledge and so on), to justify their own MA courses and pedagogical positions.[31] The fact that this polarity is routinely circulated, re-circulated and maintained in discourse at this location guarantees that this form of writing is now positioned forcefully in the vocational, industrial and commercially-driven camp, distinguishing it from other perhaps 'loftier' forms of creative writing.

I have highlighted the largely informal but practically-oriented discourses that are produced by screenwriting pedagogues and are perpetuated within this location – in the reflexive discussions from the teachers themselves, in their course documents and evaluations, in the classroom discussions and teaching exercises. I have also demonstrated how important pedagogical reflexivity and more specifically, over-confidence is for these individual pedagogues as they struggle with the uncertainties of this mode of teaching and the flow and churn of the industry itself. The next step in the tracing of UK screenwriting pedagogy is to examine how it is circulated and formalised within official locations. Here I turn to the Skillset assessment process as a 'formalising' site.

_____

[31] An interesting point to make here comes from McGurl who also discusses these anxieties in relation to North American creative writing programs and relates this to the more general 'can writing be taught?' question. McGurl argues that not having a clear answer to this question (which often breeds professional anxiety as I've illustrated here) keeps alive "the belief that all this training and socialization never really touched the heart of the imaginative process" ie. it distinguishes these kinds of programs as creative. For McGurl, this is evidence of the "institutionalization of anti-institutionality" and these programs offer universities the chance to function as 'difference engines (in Menand, 2009).

5.4. Skillset MA course assessment

In the last decade, Skillset has emerged as locations for the maintenance and circulation of discursive and material frameworks for screenwriting teaching in the UK. Skillset describes itself in a document from which I will be drawing:

> Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Media Industries and exists to encourage the delivery of informed training and practice-based education provision so that the UK's creative media industries maintain and enhance their creativity, productivity and competitiveness (Skillset, 2008-09, 4).

Skillset was established in 1993, and in 1997 was one of the first National Training Organisations to be recognised by government. As a Skills Sector Council,[32] Skillset is required to, among other things, "Develop convincing evidence and share best practice to promote the business case for skills investment and the more effective use of people in the workforce" (Skillset, 2009). Whilst a Masters course is a location which both reflects and maintains the perceived gaps between academic and vocational notions of the teaching of screenwriting, Skillset represents an industrially-oriented and 'employer-led' institution, government-funded and focused on 'practice-based education provision' within the UK's 'creative economy'.

A Skillset Masters course assessment process illuminates a very specific location for the discussion of more formalised and state- and industry-sanctioned screenwriting pedagogies. Skillset describes this process in this way:

> [Course assessment] ...aims to create standards of excellence in professional training for screenwriters by establishing and promoting a model of best practice mutually agreed upon between higher education course providers, the UK film industry and the strategic bodies representing film, skills and development issues (Skillset, 2008-09, 7).

---

[32] A Skills Sector Council (SSC) is an 'employer-led organisation', representing UK-based employers in training and skills related issues. The UK Government has identified four key objectives for every SSC: reducing skills gaps and shortages, improving productivity, business and public service performance, increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce and improving learning supply, including apprenticeships, higher education and national occupational standards, see Skillset (2009). Here we see a connection to the argument of Banks and Hesmondhalgh I referred to in chapter one. They identify a recent 'educational turn' in the UK government's Creative Economy Programme (CEP) which promotes employer-led and individual skills discourses and policies and represents "an instrumentalist reduction of knowledge and creativity to national economic assets" (2010, 428). Thus educational policy as it relates to the 'creative industries' is constituted, they argue, 'under the sign of economics' alone. In an earlier analysis, Garnham also makes this point in relation to the shift from 'cultural' to 'creative industries' discourse in UK arts and media policy-making and the effect of this shift on education and 'skills' based training (2005, 27).

An MA course (film and television writing courses are eligible for assessment) is approved for three years and such a process offers a number of 'benefits' including: 'use of the Skillset logo', 'promotion as an approved course on our website' and 'access to a list of industry speakers.'

Any approved course is required to conform to an ideal model which is laid out in Skillset's guidelines. So a course must cover particular specified ground such as:

- Clearly define the knowledge, skills and standards of achievement the UK industry expects of its professional screenwriters;
- Give guidance to course providers in developing course content, assessment modes and criteria in accordance with industrial practice and expectations;
- Actively promote industry involvement in the delivery of accredited courses, and thereby enable the industry to identify screenwriters of enhanced professional potential via such courses;
- Enable students to improve their employability by identifying courses that will develop their knowledge, skills and level of achievement to industry-accredited standards.

(Skillset, 2008-2009, 7)

In advance of a site visit, industry-based assessors examine student portfolios that are needed in order to provide evidence of the efficacy of learning outcomes specified in a course curriculum. The course content required for approval is explicitly laid out in three areas of a writer's 'development': 'creative processes, screenwriting skills and professional studies' (Skillset, 2008-09, 14). These three areas are then examined in an assessment process under four headings: learning outcomes, course requirements, resources and staffing. Skillset defines and describes 'creative processes' like so:

> The aim is to support the steady maturing and application of a student's own
> distinctive 'voice' (its likely presence identified at the time of recruitment).
> Through a process of theoretical, analytical and practical work, students should
> grow to understand the sources and stimuli which give rise to their own writing,
> and acquire the ability to command and exhibit their voice in screenwriting
> formats appropriate to their studies through the deployment of images, language
> and sound (Skillset, 2008-09, 20).

The writing in the students' portfolios is examined in the assessment exercise in terms of creative processes. The assessors seek evidence of the 'development of the creative process' and the students' ability to 'self-assess' (Ibid., 21) over their time on a course. They look for the ability from individual students to: generate a range of original script ideas; develop a range of ideas and select

from them for different audiences and formats; and engage intellectually and emotionally with script subjects.

In terms of concrete 'screenwriting skills', a number of pedagogical elements are sought within a course including the teaching of: 'Theme and premise; arena/world of story/dramatic universe; distinctions between film and television writing; formats, genres, styles; dramatic structure, characterisation and character action; developing dramatic conflict; dialogue, description and writing styles; visualisation' (Ibid., 24). In a prescriptive, formal tone which echoes the generic traits of a 'How-to' manual, the assessment guidelines specify that 'all courses must cover' the standardised script development process: 'Achieving a viable story idea: scale and scope of the format; synopsis and treatment; step outline; first draft; critique and rewrites; final draft; pitch and selling document' (Skillset, 2008-09, 25).

Finally, 'professional studies' which approved courses are required to teach include: 'demonstrating industry knowledge' such as economic trends, funding and distribution sources, personnel roles, agents, commissioning processes,and writers' contracts. The understanding of copyright laws is also recommended (Ibid., 26). Particular (and in concert with the prescriptions of the 'How-to' manual) entrepreneurial skills are required for any MA course, including presentation (such as pitching, handling meetings with agents, producers and script editors etc) and self-employment skills such as market information gathering, 'producing one's own work', the writers as 'small business' and networking (Skillset, 2008-2009, 28).

Clearly, this location offers a model of standardisation of craft-based screenwriting skills as a formal process in which the uncertainty of the reflexive teaching experience (one surely common across all forms of teaching and, perhaps, all forms of creative labour in one form or another) is tempered by this concretised and applied set of aims and objectives. Here, we see the perceived industry standards invoked, circulated and reworked as 'requirements' for a course which will be given Skillset's 'seal of approval'. Skillset represents a principal gate-keeping organisation in the service of the British government's 'creative industries' policies. Here, 'creative industries' discourse plays out in relation to screenwriting training and this location presents evidence for a particular process in which the basic notions underpinning creative industries policies - fiercely individualised notions of 'creativity' embodied within the concept of the individual creative

'voice'[33], the quantification of creative training and skills-based discourse, practice-based and industry-connected (read: employer-led) courses, entrepreneurial skills - are made material and compulsory.

5.4.1.Flashback: Skillset MA course assessment process

```
Fade In:
A researcher (me again) sits quietly in a room with three
Skillset course assessors and two MA teachers. I attempt
to surreptitiously take notes and draw as little
attention to myself as possible. The assessors take
little notice of my presence.

One of the assessors is asking the teacher questions,
some of which are clearly more rhetorical than others.

                     Erin B:
  How do you teach students to write in relation to 'what
  the industry wants' when, famously, the industry has no
                 idea what it wants?


Soon, the teacher leaves the room so that the assessment
team can talk to students about their experiences. I
quickly realise this is information I should not be privy
to so I sit, immobile – the scrawling of notes has
ceased. The assessor makes it clear to me as soon as the
student leaves that I should not have been present.
```

In the early stages of my fieldwork, I was invited to observe part of an on-site assessment process for an MA screenwriting course. My observation of the process was a somewhat bewildering experience. As I said, the opportunity came up very early on in my fieldwork and before I had gained a clear sense of Skillset in terms of its function and roles. An initial discussion between the three assessors and the course leader raised a number of disparate (from my perspective) pedagogical issues; whilst they seemed generally pleased with the course and its efficacy (this was in fact, a re-assessment so the course had already been approved) a number of concerns came up, from the lack of a satisfactory tracking system for graduates of the course to the need for more

---

[33] McGurl notes, in his discussion of the rise of creative-writing programs in the USA, that the underlying institutional experience of university teaching changed in this context. So, in the 1940s and 1950s, the overarching mantra was 'show don't tell' and by the 1960s and 1970s this had shifted to 'find your voice'. So the concept of the individual creative 'voice' in the context of writing training is for McGurl, a signal of a much broader set of cultural and societal shifts. See Menand (2009).

collaborative work between writing students and film production students. One assessor (Erin B.) also raised the issue of the realistic expectations around what could be taught within a year-long course. At one point she observed that it was certainly possible (and quantifiable) to teach the basics – format, structure, generic expectations and basic skills - but that none of even the "best" scripts she'd read during her time at Skillset could be termed "industry-ready". Therefore, a key discussion point in the process was the perceived disconnect in terms of expectations between the industry and UK-based courses and course-providers. Here, a familiar area of pedagogic tension reasserted itself, one that was later invoked by a number of subsequent informants: the specific fissures between academia and industry in the discussions around screenwriting teaching.

The assessors spoke to teachers on the specified course and other courses with affiliations to it (such as an MA Film Production) about the quantifiable and not-so-quantifiable outcomes of the teaching. Responses included the ability of students to get agents and work in development as well as produce their own films; a sense of discernment about script material was also identified and, in general, teachers were clear that after an MA course, their students could 'work in the biz'.

Overall, the conversation ranged across a number of areas: from the now (very) limited sources of funding and support for emerging writers to the recent proliferation of writer-directors within the British industry, a trend which was roundly denounced by one of the teachers because the industry 'doesn't want' writer-directors and most of them are 'crap' anyway. Also, it was stressed that students who were serious about a screenwriting career had to be able to write across a range of mediums in order to build up a diverse portfolio of work.

I followed up this observation with interviews with two of the assessors, Erin B. and Sandra K. Erin B. reiterated her perception of a real gap between course output (in terms of student skills) and industry expectations saying, "The courses need to be clearer about what they can realistically teach but in a world full of people who think that if they can pick a good film from a bad one they can probably write a good one, it is not going to be easy for them to do that." Sandra K. reiterated this, arguing that "there's a frustrating gap which is between the student coming out from their MA course, brandishing their spec script, and what the industry wants" and also stating, "I think there are too many courses producing people who think they can write a screenplay." Sandra K. expressed a concern that no one within the MA Screenwriting context in the UK was offering 'ruthless career guidance' and that students were in fact, being 'misled' by the process rather than

being told, 'one in twenty of you is going to stand a hope of getting anywhere'. Erin B. went on to specify in highly confident terms, where MA courses should be focusing their efforts and resources:

> Screenwriting teaching needs to focus on technical and craft skills and needs to align itself much more closely to the industry – more industry speakers, whole units of teaching in which writers learn how the industry works properly. They have enough producers talking to them, but not nearly enough distributors, sales agents, exhibitors or agents, I think.

So the re-iteration here is based on an informed call for *more* focus on 'craft skills' and industry knowledge and a hard-nosed attitude to student development and feedback. This then (perhaps inevitably) suggests a further separating-out and downgrading of any notion of the artistic imperatives of screenwriting labour or any academic or theoretical focus on screenwriting as a distinctive form of creative writing, and the need for a clear-eyed view of the fact that "incredibly few people can be screenwriters."[34]

5.4.2. Skillset as discursive lightning rod

Once I had talked with a number of other screenwriting teachers, it became clear that Skillset and its role in the industry in terms of pedagogy was also a vexed one – industrial anxiety loomed in all conversation in which Skillset was discussed. More than one teacher I talked to within formal and informal settings[35] expressed misgivings and concerns over its role and functions, its increased dominance (which was tied to its assessment process as a tool that promoted hierarchisation between courses) and its lack of sustained engagement with academia at the same level as it has worked to engage and represent industry. One informant was particularly open and vociferous in his concerns about Skillset;[36] they described the formation of the organisation as an institution designed to connect the academic and vocational orientations of MA courses and argued that it had begun positively but that something changed by the early 2000s. From this interviewee's point of view, over time, Skillset became less interested in 'collaborating' with academics and more about 'going it alone' to the point where they stated that "There's a huge division between Skillset and HE". This

---

[34] Sandra K.

[35] 'Informal settings' refers primarily to screenwriting research conferences I attended during my time as a student. I became part of a 'Screenwriting Research Network' and attended conferences during which I had informal conversations with a number of writers and teachers.

[36] I will leave them unidentified here (even via pseudonym) to ensure their anonymity.

informant went on to describe the assessment process as a form of 'infiltration', resulting in some 'chosen' courses being given privileged status through assessment whilst denying others. More than this, they were concerned that "the more insidious problem is that some placement providers are saying 'oh we only supply placements to [Skillset-approved] places'", a trend this figure saw as leading to a dangerous precedent, a process which lacked transparency and which promoted hierarchisation, competition and paranoia. Overall, this informant was clear that Skillset was an influential mouthpiece for an 'industrial perspective' on screenwriting pedagogy, one which inevitably led to mediocrity and a downgrading of the imaginative and creative aspects of screenwriting teaching. This industrial perspective is one "which I, personally don't think the industry are that wedded to but [Skillset], they exist to try and create work for themselves but also, they exist to try and create standards and pathways for education, for the industry." Other informants offered differing perspectives on Skillset. John S., who had previously been involved in assessment processes with Skillset, described the 'industry expectations' issue in more benign fashion: "when I left that process [course assessment], if a student was doing an MA course, the expectations should not be what that writer is able to do in the course of an engagement [during a course] is produced."

So, like an MA course, the Skillset course assessment process operates here as a location for the circulation and increasing enforcement of industrial standards and the formalisation of the internal and unofficial discourses flowing within and between teaching locations. Like the 'How-to' manuals, the process seeks to establish and maintain a *zone of intelligibility* for screenwriting teaching. In some ways, processes of formalisation reduce insecurity and increase confidence inside and outside Skillset, by again maintaining the polarity between craft and creativity and privileging quantifiable, vocational, craft-based notions of screenwriting education over theoretical or nominally artistic approaches. However new insecurities spring up to fill the void, insecurities bound up in the perceived influence of industry bodies such as Skillset and its colonisation of the discussions around what and how screenwriting should be taught. Notions of structure, concretisation and quantification dictate that the screenwriting labour that is moulded and produced through MA courses *and* the pedagogical labour that plays into this moulding and development process at MA course-level is refracted through an 'employer-led' lens and taught in terms of a rigid set of compulsory or 'recommended' aims and objectives. The craft versus creativity dichotomy is again evoked, but is done so through the preponderance of discursive constructions of craft skills

(as being realistically able to be taught at the location of the MA) whereas 'creative processes' are reduced to ephemeral, individual notions of 'voice'.

There is also evidence here for the self-promotion of Skillset as a discursive conduit between screenwriting teachers leading MA courses and "the industry". In this sense, "the industry" is routinely discussed as a coherent, 'employer-led' formation with a uniform set of values and demands of screenwriting training, demands which I was routinely told were not being met. The higher education (HE) side of this discussion was not characterised in nearly such universalised terms. Instead, each MA course was (from inside and outside) autonomous and distinctive, marketing themselves in various ways, and staffed largely by professional writers (along with some academics) who had their own sets of industry linkages to draw on, their own experiential backgrounds and with different relationships with Skillset itself. Overall, this multiplicity of pedagogical voices in relation to screenwriting teaching again coagulates around familiar discursive polarities: creativity versus craft, art versus commerce, theory versus vocation and it is craft, commerce and vocation that is privileged at this location. Again, this can be viewed as a way in which "the industry" as a coherent formation, seeks to distinguish screenwriting from other forms of writing. It is more overtly and confidently promoted as craft-focused, commercially and industrially-driven and thus, is aligned with 'skills' discourse precisely because these are its unique features as a form of written work, as opposed to prose writing, poetry writing or play writing.

I now turn to two more specialised and advanced locations for the circulation of pedagogical discourse for screenwriting, ones which budding screenwriters may interact with or visit once they have graduated from an approved (or not) MA course, have had work commissioned or optioned, have secured an agent: that is, once they have begun to build up industrial status and prestige.

5.5. The 'Creative Training' process

My third location is a site in which I was immersed in more than one sense over the course of my fieldwork and this offered a particularly rich area in terms of conversations, formal interviews and observations. This is a highly particularised model of screenwriting training – a one-off, year-long training process for ten British screenwriters and I will discuss this in terms of its structure, execution and, after completion, its external assessment. This model is one which has been

presented and replicated in a few different, small-scale forms in the British industry in recent years. John S. described the general form of 'training scheme' models to me:

> it's six months if you are coming off an MA course or screenwriting course or from Cinema Extreme[37] or Digital Shorts, the Film Council training schemes…so if you are recruited coming off one of those courses the programme is six months long. If you are a writer who has been delivering/writing scripts for a very long time but haven't quite got there, then you're considered more experienced and the programme is twelve months. And the programme is to familiarise you with the industrial context better, to bring in a whole variety of different experienced screenwriters from different forms who will come and do masterclasses with you and have sessions with the distributors, and sales agents and so on so forth so you actually understand the industry better. So that's what those courses are about.

The scheme was set up to offer a year's training for ten screenwriters. It was specified as not entry-level but aimed at writers "who have already demonstrated truly exceptional promise within some level of industry environment" ('Creative Training', 2008),[38] so this offers a very different training site than a standard Masters-level course. The writers were chosen on the basis of this set of criteria as well as on their application, which required the submission of an outline or treatment for a project to be developed on the scheme.[39] The training focused on the development of a particular project, a feature-length film script and importantly, offered 'competitive' rates of pay to its participants. So, in contrast to the other sites discussed here, the participants were paid for their involvement and time and were offered 'creative and professional development' training. Another unique feature of the process was the proviso that in the first six months, the participants had to retain their own rights in their projects – again, this site offers a very different model of training, one which was (at least initially) underpinned by notions of empowerment, collegiality and security for the chosen writers.

The structure of the course offered further points of differentiation – it was split into two six month blocks. The first was advertised as offering:

---

[37] Note that this scheme (like many of its kind) is no longer running. For more, see Appendix Two.

[38] Such experience was quantified in particular terms; so applicants had to have had a screenplay commissioned or produced or written and directed an 'award-winning' short film or have agency representation. They also had to have completed 'at least 1 work' whether a full-length feature screenplay or a half-hour television episode or a produced stage play ('Creative Training', 2008).

[39] I was able to view these treatments and the chosen writers' biographies – although I have not reproduced them here because of copyright and confidentiality issues.

> 1:1 support from both a script supervisor and a producer and professional support, bespoke training courses, masterclasses, readings, workshops and a series of placements designed to familiarise writers with working practice across the value chain of cinema from production to exploitation" ('Creative Training', 2008).

Interestingly, the initial group of ten writers was then culled to five who were offered a further six months of development support and this was one aspect of the process that many participants found unfortunate. Todd D. commented that this structure was "this slightly absurd reality TV you know, guillotine, from ten to five."

In the first six month period, the writers were required to produce a treatment, a first draft and a set of revisions as well as participate in a number of training exercises, for example, five-week long placements in development, production, post-production, sales and exhibition; a week-long residential PAL Labs workshop; rehearsed readings of their work with professional actors and the pitching of their projects to industry professionals. The second six months involved more 'intensive' script editing and consultancy in order to produce a second draft and revisions.

5.5.1.Flashback: 'Creative Training' Masterclass

Fade in:
```
A researcher (that's me again) sits in a small classroom
where writers and students are assembling. I recognise
the project manager of the scheme who has invited me to
this event, along with a few students. I sit nervously at
the back of the class, trying to identify the 'Creative
Training' writers, not wanting to introduce myself or
have to engage in networking of any kind. The leader of
the masterclass (Tina A.) is discussing the 'second
draft' stage of a script.
```

Tina A:
```
Using Syd Field's concept of 'character biographies' can
be really helpful for understanding the internal and
external lives of your characters.
```
```
The writers don't seem to be taking notes but a few
younger and eager students are busy scribbling.
```

Tina A:
```
Now we're going to do an exercise using 'Erin
Brockovich'. We're going to look at an excerpt from an
```

```
        early version of the script and compare it to the
        finished screen version.

        She begins to hand out copies of the script but I get the
        feeling the experienced writers have heard this all
        before.
```

Before I had met any of the writers on the scheme, I attended a masterclass titled 'Towards the second draft' with a 'development expert', Tina A.[40] As with the MA seminar led by Tess K., this experience enabled me to observe the 'Creative Training' process as location-at-work – most of the writers on the scheme were in attendance along with younger film production students from the school. Tina A. was an experienced executive, producer and teacher. As the above vignette dramatically suggests, it was one of my first 'observational' fieldwork experiences and I was nervous; I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, quietly taking notes in the corner. I was also at pains to not be pushy or 'networky' in my approach and, although I did speak to Tina A. afterwards, I found it too difficult to approach the assembled writers, largely because they stayed in a tight-knit group during and after the class, talking amongst themselves and, frankly, I was too intimidated to approach them.

The content of the masterclass itself was nothing new to me and I got the distinct impression it was nothing new to the attendees either.[41] 'Gurus' such as Syd Field were discussed, as were familiar terms such as structure, character, pace and dialogue, all aspects which Tina A. worked through in her second-draft analysis. She advocated 'free-writing' in order to unblock the creative flow which a second draft can staunch; she discussed common 'second draft problems' such as exceedingly expositional dialogue and static character development and she used other familiar examples for script/film analysis such as *Sideways* (2004). She also handed out a 'checklist for script assessment' which consisted of two pages of questions to 'ask yourself' as a writer when trying to progress from first to second draft.

---

[40] I was in touch with Tina A. after the session and sent her questions which she said she would respond to. However, the answers were not returned to me after repeated reminders.

[41] In an interview with one of the 'Creative Training' writers, Todd D. after the masterclass, this was confirmed to me when he commented on it: "I don't know if you picked up on it yesterday but we'd all watched those bits of *Erin Brockovich* (2000) and *Sideways* (2004) um, before, and studied them."

What this site particularly offered for me was a place to observe and 'learn the language' of this location and to observe the other participants. As with Tess K., professional anxiety was reproduced, in the constant references the teacher made to the difficulty of the second draft but also in the 'eye-rolling' I witnessed from the 'Creative Training' participants – they were clearly bored by the 'McKee-style' approach they had seen and heard so many times before. Confidence was also produced as a counter-weight – so, the teacher described personal anecdotes about prominent script development processes she had been involved in as a way to illustrate confidence in her pedagogical abilities and confidence was encouraged through the canonical examples she used (which were accompanied by the shooting scripts).

I interviewed one writer, Todd D., from the scheme after the masterclass and, whilst he confirmed my impressions of the class (as one which wasn't providing any new or necessarily helpful information for the experienced training scheme-based writers), he spoke in praiseworthy terms of the scheme as a whole:

> It's been terrific…and also, ten writers so that you know, when you put your two-page outline on the table, we were kind of having to pitch to each other from day one but it means you've got nine very canny people who are not just looking for problems but who are coming up with solutions and actually, I mean, I remember a number of points where…the things that have actually changed the shape, when it's really turned a corner for someone's difficult treatment or the clutchy third act, or whatever it is, has come from one of the other writers in the room.[42]

He went on to say that the most telling testament to the success of the programme was that the writers continued to meet, as a group of nine or ten, on a monthly basis (even after the six-month 'culling') which morphed into reading each others' 'new' work rather than simply the projects they were developing in the process itself:

> I've put a treatment on the table for a five-part serial, [writer] had a sitcom, [writers] running their new thing by us and you know, that's great and I think that's all about seeing and appreciating, the value of having you know, nine smart, canny, invested heads really scrutinising, find the best in it.

---

[42] Note that in the interim assessment of the scheme (November 2009), all ten writers responded that they would either 'recommend' or 'highly recommend' the course to anyone they know who writes professionally which was assessed as an 'impressive' result for the scheme.

Todd D. spoke eloquently about the nature of screenwriting training itself and, in his assessment of 'Creative Training', signalled the pedestrian ways in which screenwriting is often taught: "I never need to hear about the three-act structure ever again."

Another participant, Dale T., also spoke positively about the scheme and identified a 'fracture' between the British and Hollywood industries and the associated models used to teach and train writers:

> on this [institution name] course we had some really good people come in and, it was really interesting, there's a sort of fracture between the film industry, the British film industry and audiences…and they're now trying to remedy it, there's lots of stuff at the Script Factory about the American model of pitching, of how to…much more Robert McKee driven.

Todd D. was very clear on the benefits of it for him, which he discussed in terms of a sense of collegiality and peer support. He noted that the 'real test' of its success would be 'what everyone is doing in two or three years time' but noted that collegial relations and support were its 'enduring legacy':[43]

> I mean I regret the cut from ten to five, um, and although I understand that it was part of their proposal and probably was seen as, yes, this is how the industry is… but at the same time they probably didn't account for how valuable the peer aspect would become and that that might actually be its enduring legacy and that to actually pull a kind of…trick, like everyone who got through to the second half would have taken half the money for the ongoing participation of everyone else… but you know, the relationships have survived.

At the level of screenwriting pedagogy, this was one of the moments in which a sense of productive collectivity was both made material for me and discussed in connection with craft-based and industrial training and support rather than in opposition to it. Todd D. was quite clear that the creative frisson fostered by the relationships built up between the participants - 'canny, smart, invested heads' – then fed into classroom discussions about craft and informed his own craft and creative practices.

---

[43] This was again backed up by the assessment report ('Creative Training', 2009) which cited the ongoing 'support group meetings' as a positive outcome, one which encouraged a 'bond of trust' and informal, creative sites of discussion and support.

5.5.2. External assessment of 'Creative Training'

The assessment document produced at the conclusion of the 'Creative Training' process was made available to me and offered insights I would not otherwise have been privy to.[44] So for example, in assessing the efficacy of the 'bespoke' training sessions in the process, a consensus emerged among the writers that "the Syd Field, Robert McKee etc style of "structure" session was overplayed throughout the course"; a reading that echoed my own observations.[45] Other aspects of 'Creative Training' offered mixed responses. The industry placements were characterised as being 'pot luck', some viewed as less useful than others because they restricted particular writers to reading scripts only. A 'rehearsed reading' session with actors was also assessed as a 'non-productive' experience, at least partly because of the choice of actors and lack of preparation time.

The 'Producer Mentors' were also consulted in the assessment of 'Creative Training' and offered more varied responses to their experiences within it. For example, some felt more commercial involvement (such as first-look agreements or development options) were needed to incentivise them in relation to their roles and, in general, there was 'some confusion' about what those mentoring roles themselves entailed. Thus, for the assessor, the scheme needed to be more 'balanced' with producers offered more in terms of remuneration and direct involvement in the development of the chosen projects. Overall, the scheme's perceived 'success' is characterised as doubtful: "There is a general doubt as to whether the Scheme as conceived is truly successful for the Industry more generally." Note again, "the Industry" is discussed as a coherent formation, with a uniform set of expectations about this scheme which are voiced by the industrially-immersed 'Producer Mentors'. The assessor writes that the success of the scheme may only be perceptible once some of the writers' projects are produced or the individual writers go on to achieve production 'success.'

Perhaps most tellingly, the assessor offers a 'personal view' of the scheme and calls into question a number of its constitutive elements such as the necessarily truncated time period (six months) in which a project had to go from new treatment to revised first draft. Of this the assessor notes, it is "achievable only at the expense of the quality of the work produced" ('Creative Training,' 2009).

---

[44] Note at the time I was warned I needed to treat the information within it with sensitivity and discretion and I have maintained this, not identifying the author or institutions involved. I was told only that an 'external assessor' has been appointed from outside the institution (and from within the industry) to assess the scheme.

[45] 'Creative Training' (2009).

The writers needed more time early on to focus on filmic stories in general it is argued, and a stronger hand on the 'development tiller' was required. The assessor specifically questions why the 'card system'[46] wasn't introduced and raises concerns about the 'rushed' nature of the treatments offered, a result of the application deadline itself.

Interestingly, the assessor also offers their own perspective on teaching screenwriting and makes a distinction between learning to write and developing particular projects. So, they argue that writing itself can be more effectively taught by taking an already-established 'concept' (a current film or television show) and getting a group of writers to use the concept(s) to produce original scenarios for familiar characters and settings. This is distinguished from developing viable projects themselves and, for the assessor, an overall problem in the structure and unfolding of 'Creative Training' was the combination of training and development and the focus on one particular project. They suggest other possible teaching techniques, such as more rewriting practice (which, it is argued, the writers could practice on each others' work). The assessor downplays other techniques highlighted in this scheme, such as pitching.[47] Overall, the assessor finishes by characterising 'Creative Training' as 'well-meaning' but lacking a "clear, shared vision of the actual teaching process" ('Creative Training', 2009).

This location offers a much more focused vision for training a select few writers, for offering them secure and arguably empowering pedagogical spaces and tools as they develop their skills and work (such as remuneration, peer support and retention of their rights) and connecting them with 'mentors' such as producers and script editors within the industry. It represents a small-scale but mature attempt to reduce some of the industrial and professional anxieties that I have already identified and discussed in relation to the provision and perceived efficacy of screenwriting teaching. A location (albeit a temporary one) such as 'Creative Training' allowed space for teaching in the mould of the MA course, for vocational and industrial interactions at a number of levels (placements, pitching sessions, mentorships) and for informal, peer-support style development and creative support which was initiated and driven by the participants themselves.

---

[46] This is characterised by the assessor as "one the simplest and most effective tools of screenwriting". Such a technique is one often discussed in the 'How-to' manuals and strikes me as a highly instrumental and Hollywood-oriented technique – exactly the kind of technique the writers identified as having too much weight in the 'Creative Training' seminars overall.

[47] The assessor distinguishes the commercial development culture of the UK from that of the USA here, noting that there are only '20-40 people powerful enough to ensure films are made' in the UK, thus arguing that pitching is not central to the UK's restricted development and commissioning culture.

The assessors' remarks more baldly re-calibrate this location to a set of polarised instrumental tropes: the invocation of a unified notion of 'the Industry', the distinction between writing training and development training and the need for a more commercial orientation for the projects, mentors and the writers participating in the scheme. This recalibration then judges the scheme as ultimately lacking, precisely because the most positive and progressive of its developments (collegial bonds formed between writers, retention of intellectual property rights and competitive remuneration) do not jibe with 'the Industry's' standards.

I have highlighted the fissures visible in the informal discourse from the scheme's participants about the dominance of unhelpful 'McKee-style' training techniques. I would argue that professional anxiety is also visible from the comments of the 'Producer Mentors' that a strongly commercial focus was lacking within the scheme. This is also evident in the external assessment of the scheme - for example, in the comments that the collegiality produced within the group of writers could be counter-productive because it lacks the 'hard edge' of the industry's development culture. Plainly, professional insecurity is re-doubled with the knowledge that this scheme was a 'one-off' – there is no evidence that another training process like this is imminent in the British setting and the judgement from the assessment is that another will not materialise until quantifiable 'success' can be pinpointed.[48]

Nevertheless, this small-scale and temporary site offers evidence for a model of a practical screenwriting pedagogy that (intentionally or not) mitigated against the flow and churn of the industry in certain identifiable ways and built confidence for the participants through collegiality and security. Quantifiable standards are maintained but were perceived by the participants as a hindrance as much as a useful set of tools. Spontaneous and less-concrete eruptions of professional confidence appeared 'after-hours', in the ongoing connections between the writers. However, this site was temporary – lacking sustainability as a pedagogical location and undercut by its lukewarm assessment which relies on a set of discourses that echo 'Media Practice Organisation's' industry-led approach. Tension is necessarily brought back into the frame so that standards are maintained (standards which 'the industry' and some higher education institutions are heavily invested in, as I have already illustrated) and a set of formal discourses that privilege individualised- and vocationally-oriented pedagogies are re-established in the final instance.

---

[48] Such as one or more of the scheme's projects being produced or one or more of the writers gaining widespread status and prestige in their own right.

I turn now to the private script development company as the last location for this analysis of the circulation of pedagogical frameworks for screenwriting. Here, the 'development' model of training highlighted in the last section is discussed in detail and offers perhaps the most industrially-immersed location. It is a site at which discourses of insecurity are purged from the discussion as much as possible in order to focus on identifying talent and viable projects. Arguably, professional anxiety does not have a productive place within this location nor is it required from a commercial perspective. However, insecurity may well be located with writers who engage with this location, a location which unapologetically privileges projects over individuals.

5.6. The Script Development Company

There are a number of private script development companies based mainly in London that represent practical and more industrially immersed sites for the circulation of pedagogical norms and values around the development of screenwriting talent and skill. These also offer variant locations from the more standardised and institutionally-oriented models offered by the MA course and associated 'Media Practice Organisation' assessment process. There are fairly prominent development organisations such as Euroscript and The Script Factory[49] and many smaller organisations I came across in the course of my fieldwork. For example, Linda L. (who had begun her own training career in the UCLA Producers training scheme) had established a consultancy who offer script-reading and assessment services and who promote the various courses they are involved in teaching.[50] At the time of our interview, she said of the company:

> I think the reason we started the company, was that we really felt there was a
> niche…so this is, you know, obviously I'm not promoting the company but it
> really was actually identifying that there was a niche in the development
> infrastructure of the UK, that there wasn't enough training and support for writers.

---

[49] Established in the mid-1990s, The Script Factory began within the BFI as a forum for staging prepared script readings. This company expanded to offer training for script readers as well as screenplay masterclasses. They also now run film and television training schemes for writers, producers, readers and so on, the classes are paid for by participants. See http://www.scriptfactory.co.uk/go/Default.html. For an indicative list illustrating the variety of these kinds of organisations in the UK. See Appendix Two.

[50] The name of the consultancy is not included here in order to maintain confidentiality. The classes offered by this organisation include: Skillset approved MA Screenwriting, Myth and the Movies, The Psychological Basis of Story Structure, Concept Development, Screenplay Analysis and so on. They offer services from treatment analysis to 'industry script coverage' and development planning.

So whilst a company like this is a commercially-oriented one (offering script consultancy services as small-scale training tools for which writers or producers will pay) it is certainly viewed as a form of training organisation and one that fills a perceived 'gap' or acts as a development bridge for writers between an MA course and more sustained professional screenwriting work.

5.6.1.Flashback: In the shadow of a Hollywood studio

```
Fade in:
I sit in a plush meeting room in an imposing building
overlooking a London park. Fresh fruit and mineral water
are laid out artfully on the glass table – soon, tea
arrives. On the bookshelves beyond the table are piled
familiar titles: 'Story', 'Screenplay', 'Raindance
Writers Lab' etc etc. The office outside is hushed and I
am frankly, extremely nervous.

The interviewee soon arrives, a figure who has been
described to me as a 'guru' of the self-defined mould. He
fixes me with an impassive stare – I know I am being
professionally eyed-up and found wanting. We sit and I
begin to explain the rationale of the project, attempting
to cover the quaver in my voice. He soon interrupts me:

                        John S:
           Do you want me to start answering?
```

The case I will focus on here was unlike anything else I came across in the course of the fieldwork – a private 'workshop' that acts as part-training location and part-development company and is funded by a Hollywood studio but is based in London. I focus on this as a final case study in my analysis of screenwriting pedagogy precisely because it offers a 'high-concept'[51] training model and location for the circulation of discourses about the education and shaping of writers' labour, and because there are telling parallels and ruptures between this location and the others illustrated here. This location describes itself as: "a collaborative development environment offering peer support and peer review to British and European writers who want to craft high quality screenplays with commercial appeal."[52] A crude analysis would perhaps argue that this location offers the most vociferously industry-focused platform for writer training which foregrounds the project and its potential commercial value over any individual writerly vision. I will address this but it is not where

---

[51] See Justin Wyatt (1994) who coined the term 'high concept'.

[52] Quote comes from the location's promotional materials but I have not provided the full reference here to maintain anonymity for the informant.

the analysis will begin and end and I will illustrate the intricacies of this particular location as it works with writers and their labour.

This location was one which explicitly stated its territory and intentions – it seeks to develop writers and particular projects which will sit in the US$30million plus budget range - note the use of American currency here, something the informant used throughout the interview, reflecting the funding interests of the organisation. Unlike a production company working in this budget band (such as Working Title for example), this location was called a 'screenwriters workshop'; it selects writers and projects with development potential, trains writers in 'workshop' style fashion and aims to develop projects that can then potentially be fed into the production avenues of the studio partner. The 'selection process' of the workshop was described to me in detail and it's worth quoting significant parts of our conversation here precisely because of the rich detail this interview offered. Note that John S. is comparing his earlier work as an MA teacher with his leadership role at this location:

> First and foremost the criteria we have for selecting people to do this programme are not that dissimilar to what I have to taking people on the MA course. It's to do with the level of creativity he or she demonstrates as part of their application, their CV. I would expect if someone calls him or herself a writer, they're not writing because someone has given them a contract, they're writing because they have to. That's the first and most important thing to do. So I actually want to see in their CV that they've done the whole writing thing, whether they've been given a job or not. They have to write short stories, up on a blog, whatever it is. I want to see that. Secondly, there's a need to…I want to know their point of view of the world…Are you interested in helping us to understand human nature, ourselves as people in the world and cultures better.

Very early on, John S. described what he looks for in terms of a 'level of creativity' which is linked to that common theme of a 'compulsion' to write across mediums as well as the 'unique' point of view or voice. This discussion of a selection process also immediately signalled that this location acts as gate-keeper, offering big-budget funding for a project so there was an underlying sense of industrial clout as well. The informant went on to describe in more specific detail, his organisation's role as gatekeeper:

> Then I want to know something about your process of development, and people have different ways, and I'm not saying there has to be one, but we ask people to submit to us in the beginning is, first of all, we really don't take unsolicited, that's the first thing. Secondly, we therefore expect you to come with a recommendation,

ideally from an agent, so that would suggest you are serious, or a reputable producer, and if you pass those two we'll then start looking at something.

From here, John S. described in highly procedural terms, the next phase in the 'selection' process which is based on the receipt and assessment of a sample script. He talked about the workshop having a number of readers who give him 'coverage'[53] on the script (much like the services offered by other script consultancy services) and from the coverage, a decision is made on whether to meet the writer. John S. then described what the next stage might look like:

> Maybe an individual meeting with myself and [business partner], and in that meeting we just sort of …this is who I am this is who you are, the kind of things we're really passionate for and then we ask the writer to go away and send us a one or two page outline based on ideas on something that they have touched on. They aren't allowed to pitch very much in that first meeting because we don't really want that to happen yet. A second option could be that they are asked to send in a one page outline of something they've got in mind, recognising the kind of movies we're interested in doing which are the bigger budget things.

The process continues from here with a 'concept development day' which involves a group of up to fifteen or sixteen writers who have been given 'various things to think about' such as 'foundation principles' and this day then involves the writers pitching ideas to the group and responding to feedback. At this point, I was struck by the routinised order represented by this location; John S. continued to talk about the next steps of the process – the writers have two weeks after the concept development day to rewrite their ideas into two-page outlines and this leads on to a 'concept development week' which was described like so:

> In the course of that week we are developing that idea on several criteria. We're actually asking a great deal of questions about the concept itself. Secondly about the central character and why the audience will actually want to go on that journey with that central character…References to other films come all the time during that because 'Oh it's like whatever it is'.

Interestingly, John S. noted that this workshop location offers more than one training and development model; not only are writers recommended through agents and then brought in through the stages of coverage and concept development session but the workshop also offers a different, organisationally-directed process. So he described this alternative process:

---

[53] A term used commonly in Hollywood to refer to professional script readers and the work they do in assessing unsolicited/spec scripts.

> We also have something called a story development workshop in which we prepare some information about a whole variety of different ideas up to 14, 15, 16…ask them to read them in advance and then think through which ones grab them and how they would actually like to do a story based on that….We then have a brainstorming session.

So, here we see material flowing from the workshop towards particular pre-chosen writers and the training programme then progresses in a different fashion:

> if there's 14 people in the room we'll end up with 14 projects and over the following three weeks we have something called a 'Main Turning Points document' and we discuss how the stories may go, who the central characters are etc etc. Work out a framework and what the story's really about and the passions, wants and needs and so on of the characters, what the antagonism is. We start to framework the story and in the fifth week they go off and do the first draft treatment. And in the sixth week everyone's back here again, and we've read all the treatments and we start discussing them further so everyone's here and then they go away and do a second draft treatment and they're back here again. Then a third draft treatment.

This sounded like the development narratives that flow from the self-disclosures (found in interviews, manuals, blogs) and popular discourses of Hollywood-based screenwriting lore. This extended to the sense from the informant that the material took precedence in the workshop and that writers could be picked up, replaced or shifted around in order to serve the material. So, once particular projects have been isolated as worthy of further development, writers are commissioned:

> probably the same writers but it could be totally independent people who've not been part of the story concept development or the story design phase. We think this is perfect for Robert Harris or Tom Stoppard or whatever, and we shoot it off to him and the scripting is easy because most of the harder work has been done.

Tellingly, 'big name' writers are suddenly invoked, names that offer a sense of security and legitimacy that indicate the over-confidence this location exemplified. One take on this is that the writers within this project are not trained at all but are used for story/concept generation and development but without any guarantees that their ideas and skills will be utilised through the full development process. I asked John S. about this and his response was pragmatic: "It's not much of a problem for us, we make it very clear up front that we are a Hollywood financed or orientated

company and in this business the real world says that something that you may start may not be something that you finish."

In many ways this site offers a very different pedagogical model from those I have already discussed" writers 'chosen' for the workshop are more experienced than budding screenwriters on an MA course; 'training' is highly practical and oriented to the codes and stages of Hollywood-style development; arguably, project development is the focus as opposed to education and training in and of itself. I have already spoken of how 'collaboration' is a term often used (in 'How-to' manuals for example) as an alibi for practices which are not wholly collective in spirit or orientation. The term 'workshop' works in a similar fashion here – it signals notions of craft-based, collaborative learning but the informant's discussions indicate a hard-nosed approach in which commercial concerns such as intellectual property rights are paramount.

However, my engagement with this location also offered numerous resonances with more 'traditional' pedagogical sites; as we talked I observed piles of 'How-to' manuals on shelves behind us which John S. referred to and explicitly linked to his former career as a pedagogue and his enduring 'academic' perspective. Here, academic credentials were used to signal professional confidence through diversity of experience rather than being hidden or subsumed by industrial credentials (production credits for example). This workshop site also offered an industrially-focused model of learning that some informants (such as Erin B.) argued was largely missing from MA courses, courses that lacked on-the-ground or 'real world' connections to the industrial realities that writers must learn to face. Ed R.[54] cited this workshop-based company as an important location in the current British industrial schema: "at least you're seeing people...saying we are people who make X amount of money, every few years, we're going to put that into nurturing young talent." He went on to note that he had seen some of the projects that had percolated out of this location and assessed them like this:

> they're not great but at least they're pursuing what writers are genuinely
> fascinated by and you're giving them the space to come up with stuff and you're
> like, wow that's really wack and weird and maybe that could be a web show.

---

[54] Ed R. was a script editor and writer with extensive experience in both the USA and UK. He had also served as a script mentor for the 'Creative Training' process.

This pedagogical location offers the antithesis of the MA course – it is a site unconcerned with the vexed questions that spring up in informal and formal discussions around theory versus industry or craft versus creativity. It is driven by unashamed commercial interests and it offers a rigorous and professionally advanced route for the 'promising' writer. Arguably, it may also illustrate the site at which writers start to look like deskilled cogs in a development machine, positions more routinely akin to the big-budget Hollywood filmmaking system in which writers are hired and fired with ease.[55] And at this site, the perspective of the head of the private script development company was the only one I canvassed, unlike 'Creative Training', in which I had access to the participating writers and their varied perspectives on the scheme from the inside.

Nevertheless this site offers an endpoint for industrial and professional insecurity which is purged from this location and replaced with clear commercial guidelines and goals and a 'steady hand on the development tiller' (to hark back to the comments of the 'Creative Training' assessor). Politically-inflected discourses about higher education, pedagogical standards and vocationalism do not enter this realm to stir up trouble and force invested players to take sides and cling to polarities; here, confidence and over-confidence comes from those well-worn industrial standards trotted out at 'development concept' days but also comes from Hollywood-studio backing (a rarity in the UK industry) and the disciplinary experience of those who control the boundaries of the location.[56]

5.7. Conclusion: Creativity and Insecurity within Pedagogical Frameworks

The themes of professional insecurity coupled with lack of/over- confidence as a pedagogical janus face, and the durable discursive polarities between creativity and craft and individualism and collectivity have percolated through this chapter and have appeared in a number of concrete yet equally complex forms – in the self-disclosures of writers and screenwriting teachers, in course curricula, in 'development' meetings, in accreditation documents, in moments of observation. In this chapter, I have mapped some of the complex dynamics, the flow and churn of these locations in the UK and have used these themes as devices of coherence across these diverse, delimited sites.

---

[55] See chapter two for a discussion of the historical origins of this trend.

[56] As I have noted, John S. used his experience as a former pedagogue (he described himself as an academic) to bolster his confidence at certain points in the conversation. Dealing with those politically-invested debates in the course of his career had obviously played a role in determining his current position in an 'anxiety-free' location.

In doing so, I have followed the movement of the screenwriter and the discourses that follow them as they move from site to site. From budding, unproven writer on an MA course to more experienced writer gaining professional capital and markers of status (an agent, commissions, credits and contacts) and engaging with development-oriented locations. I have also traced in this process of movement, the eddying currents of confidence and insecurity that both motivate and haunt pedagogues and pedagogies at each of these sites. I have shown that, at the location of the MA course, the potential breeding grounds for new screenwriters in the UK in the era of the 'new cultural economy', professional insecurity is a constant feature and manifests itself in particular discursive ways: in the undying argument around what can and can't be taught; in the concerns over rigid orthodoxies and pedagogical standards; in the worry over quantifiable measurements for success and so on. These concerns are also tempered by particular strategies found both in and outside the classroom; thoughtful and invested calculation of the individual career paths of screenwriters and pedagogues; the supreme confidence many pedagogues have in their ability to offer exciting classroom experiences or their ability to attract prominent industry speakers; and open hostility to institutions, such as 'Media Practice Organisation', perceived to be further splintering the political debates over higher education provision and vocationalism.

For Skillset, professional confidence is produced through its standardised aims and objectives. Confidence is also bolstered by the discourse which weds Skillset to "the industry" as a coherent employer-based orientation. The coherence of this location is also bound up with a dedicated belief in vocationalism, on skills-based creative industries education and on craft skills pedagogies. However, as I argued, new tensions are produced in the spaces created by Skillset's processes and practices – tensions which explicitly flow from its role as a discursive conduit between academia and industry. So, pedagogues are made more anxious (and thus, with more reasons to appear confident) by Skillset's perceived dominance, by its lack of transparency as a political and industrial actors and by the 'orthodoxies' and standards that writer-teachers must wrestle with.

By the time writers reach a location such as 'Creative Training' process, a fresh vision of a more savvy, experienced and justifiably confident writer is illuminated. Here, a combination of teaching writing as skill-set and teaching through development offers new forms of creative control, genuine collegiality appears and is sustained and orthodoxies and standards are given surreptitious, confident 'eye-rolls'. However, the potentially progressive pedagogy of this location is undercut at a number of moments. The build-up of confidence is punctured by the re-establishment of a

coherent notion of 'industry', the confidence-boosting elements of the site (such as collegiality, remuneration and creative control) are dubbed 'unrealistic' and naïve; the dubious claims of 'success' are highlighted and limit the reach of such a site – it remains small-scale, a one-off, yet-to-be-proven.

Once the discursive currents of this chapter lead us (and more experienced writers) to the private development company, all insecurity has vanished in the teaching-as-development process which dominates. Confidence comes from industry and finance, from standards and orthodoxies once more. However, this is not, in my estimation, a simple tale of crude deskilling of screenwriter-as-student as they move from location to location. At each of these sites I have illustrated where ruptures and contradictions can be identified – where pedagogues/writers use their experience to both recognise and work productively with the limitations of the 'orthodoxy' or where pedagogues/writers actively use the discourse (of craft versus creativity) to encourage collegial connections. Pedagogue-screenwriters also retain or regain control over their career trajectories through calculation of this as a professional position – they teach in order to write without the relentless industrial dictates, the flow and churn, that they might otherwise face.

But where can creativity and craft themselves be located in these pedagogical locations? I have argued here that the perceived dichotomies between creativity and craft or between individual and collective forms of screenwriting work, are routinely re-established and, in fact, deepened at many points – within curricula and standards, discourse and debate. This dichotomy is a necessary structuring device within a neo-liberal educational environment calibrated to quantifiable notions of vocational skills and assessment, employability and 'industry' as a whole, coherent and demanding formation. This environment and its gate-keepers are wholly invested in distinguishing screenwriting from other forms of *more* creative writing by tying it down as a craft-based profession which can be taught, and can be taught in particular ways. Notions of creativity and craft are constantly separated out and the perceived distinctions between them are clarified: craft links to industry and commerce whereas creativity links to unhelpful, muddying conceptions of artistic production; crafts links to concrete, quantifiable skills and practices whereas creativity links to the lofty realms of academia and irrelevant forms of theory-making. Paradoxically, screenwriting as a vocation is also a key facet of the 'creative industries' policy environment within the UK and here, the use of the term 'creative' is fiercely individualised, commercially driven and placed in opposition to retrograde notions of deskilled, unfulfilling craft work.

In the next and final chapter, I use interviews with a group of British, 'professional creative' screenwriters and supplementary data from and about the lives of working screenwriters to focus on the diverse ways in which craft and creativity, individual and collective working practices, are experienced and navigated in the UK industry today. The experiences of screenwriters offer evidence for particular forms of work that are crafty and creative, individual and collaborative – not only polarised or conflated but potentially synergistic and enabling, theatrical and savvy.

Chapter Six - Calculation and Navigation: Screenwriting careers and livelihoods in London

> There needs to be a certain level of pure confidence in order
> to actually operate effectively and then as a screenwriter
> writing for hire, it's very hard to maintain that sometimes
> because when you're doing well, in terms of getting paid,
> getting commissions and so on, you can feel like a bottom
> feeder.

(Sam P. in conversation, 2009)

6. Introduction

The connection made in the above quote between "pure confidence" and the degraded status of the screenwriter as a "bottom-feeder" is a potent opening to this final chapter, in which the individual working practices of a number of London-based screenwriters and filmmakers are the focus. As I have already argued, in the new cultural economy in which supreme confidence is a compulsory survival mechanism in the face of precarious working conditions, screenwriting is a form of pedagogy and practice which has agitated traditional notions of creativity, craft and authorship politically and practically, and continues to do so. More specifically, I argue that the connected dualities - creativity and craft and individual and collaborative - are simultaneously conflated and prised apart in creative labour theory and in screenwriting theory and practice. This multiplicity of movement is at the heart of the way screenwriting is understood and practiced as work today; screenwriters shrewdly calculate and navigate about and through their own careers, but these practices also breed professional insecurity and the need for intelligibility and currency at the multiple locations of both pedagogy and everyday experience.

I have analysed how screenwriting is constructed, taught and practiced as labour in 'How-to' screenwriting manuals and pedagogical practices for screenwriting in the previous two chapters. At these locations I have focused on how craft and creativity are defined and experienced, how individual and collaborative forms of screenwriting work are privileged at different moments and locations, and the ways in which these 'locations' for screenwriting pedagogy and practice can be understood as zones of intelligibility, making screenwriting thinkable and knowable as labour. In this final chapter I follow the voices of screenwriters and those who teach and instruct about screenwriting and analyse the ways in which they calculate, navigate and make sense of the labour

market in which they are immersed. Here I use interviews with a group of British, 'professional creative' screenwriters and supplementary data from and about the lives of working screenwriters to focus on the diverse ways in which both craft and creativity, individual and collective working practices are experienced and navigated in the UK industry today.

I begin by tracing the career trajectories of the writers I spoke to, using them to foreground the flow and churn which characterises their work-worlds and the sense of vocation which routinely permeates the screenwriters' biography. I then discuss the fiercely individualised orientations of this group of writers - their self disclosures as craft-oriented workers, their individual navigations through the London-based labour market, their sense of creative drive in their development of ideas, drafts and revisions and the cultivated strategies required to build beneficial industrial relationships, compete for and secure commissions and build income streams. Thirdly, I focus on the collectively-oriented calculations which these writers perform and enact - the wholly collaborative forms of work that screenwriters participate in, calculations which I will characterise as savvy and theatrical as well as frequently atomising. Finally, I end the chapter with some final reflections on the collective and shifting persona of the screenwriter-as-myth I have seen in my fieldwork, a multitudinous and fractured figure which is nonetheless required and specifically enacted to counter-act the consistent tendency towards insecurity and atomisation within the new cultural economy. This is a reflexive strategy on my part to again illuminate the compulsory egotism and over-confidence which is bred to combat the vagaries of the industry. This also resonates with the figure of the embattled, mythic screenwriter invoked in chapter two. For example, I discuss the ways in which contemporary screenwriters 'speak back' to the collective history of their work and in this sense, acknowledge and take pride in this history as one of marginalisation and contested creativity. Screenwriters also display, use and voice supreme confidence and savviness in order to navigate their work-worlds. I will show that their horror stories serve as currency as much as credits do and that the collective history of their work also fuels this confidence and brashness. Screenwriters also 'speak forward' to their audiences (producers, financiers, audience members, teachers, students and so on) and thus they constantly juggle many forms of industrial talk and many audiences in pursuit of secure and rewarding work. I will re-enact this juggling process in what follows.

6.1.Screenwriting career trajectories - multiplicity and vocation

I begin by tracing some of the career trajectories of the writers I spoke to. In many ways, a screenwriting career trajectory cannot and, perhaps, has no need to be generalised - all are highly particular, with varying experiences of education, with varying forms of nominally 'creative' work represented both in and outside the designation 'writing' (film, television, theatre and prose writing, acting, producing, advertising) and are characterised using a cacophony of often conflicting, personalised narratives. However, I begin by highlighting this multiplicity in order to illustrate in one sense, the porousness of the screenwriting milieu - the various ways in which screenwriting is 'got to' as a creative profession and a vocation. This could be read, like a screenwriting manual, as a reiteration of the Syd Field mantra that 'everyone is a writer', that seductive notion that anyone can potentially write a screenplay by following the ten steps to 'success' or by mimic-ing the navigations of 'successful' writers. This tendency is tempered, though, by the reality that these biographies are also precarious, are permeated by chronic job insecurity, by needing 'dosh' and often not having it, of aspirations and 'bulimic' industrial realities.

All the writers I spoke to expressed, in some form, a sense of vocation in relation to the terms 'writing' or 'filmmaking'.[1] Many interviewees 'always wanted to write' and without exception, their trajectories reflected a gravitational pull in one form or another, from a childhood love of films and stories to lucky breaks which enabled them to transition from one 'creative' role to another: actor to screenwriter; editor to screenwriter; documentary-maker to screenwriter for example. Many times, an interview began by outlining a career biography that referenced a number of 'creative' occupations as well as some type of higher education course often followed by the key career milestone of securing an agent. Jane M., a writer and teacher, began by making short films, eventually took a short course on writing feature films and then got a "few scripts in development". Todd D. initially aimed for novel writing, then worked for a production company making animations and "creative formats" and worked as head of campaign media for an non-governmental organisation. He then actively cultivated his transition to full-time writing by writing in the mornings before work and eventually secured a few "gigs" as well as finished his first spec script which got him an agent. Eventually, he 'weaned' himself on to writing full-time from home and had

---

[1] I usually began the interviews by asking the writers to explain how they got into the industry, or what drew them to screenwriting particularly. I always had some sense of their biographies from previous research and so would ask questions such as 'I know you were originally a film editor. So how did you make the transition from editing to screenwriting?'

maintained that for two years. Another screenwriter-pedagogue, Sam P., began as an actor and started writing plays which was "great fun but no money". On the back of a play he had written, a producer commissioned him to write a feature version of the script. He became more interested in making films and continued writing, making a living for a number of years through commissions from the BBC and Hollywood-based production companies. Dale T., whom I spoke to after his first feature had been produced, had begun at a regional film production programme after university, had made short films and 'making-of' films for DVDs as well as 'fly-on-the-wall' documentaries before getting a break writing children's television.

Another informant, Karen H., who spoke demonstratively about her creative drive as a screenwriter took a four-day introductory course at a film school and then spent ten years working for a foreign aid organisation before selling her house to finance an MA in Screenwriting. Her first feature script got her an agent but financial instability meant she had to go back to her "day job" before she decided to do a PhD in Screenwriting which coincided with a "nice big film job" for an Italian television company that enabled her to focus on (and survive - "just") on writing work. A film editor, Sandra K., started writing in response to her editing work, in which she had to read and analyse scripts:

> So I started writing, partly in response to that, I was writing sort of connective moments, or single lines of dialogue which we were putting in, to get us round awkward corners and things that hadn't worked out.

One project she worked on needed a "big fix" and in the course of working with the producer, he said he had some slots available for children's television projects and was able to give her an opportunity to write for them so she immediately wrote four: "So that was the start, which was extraordinary because it meant that the first thing I wrote wasn't the first script I'd written, I'd written scripts before, but the first thing I wrote for anybody went into production straight away, so that was an extraordinarily lucky break."

Informants who claimed primary job descriptions besides screenwriter (script editor, development assistant, producer) also gestured towards vocationalism and made reference to a sense of "creative drive" in terms of career trajectory. Producer, Phil R., had begun working in a corporate company but felt 'creatively stifled' so was spurred to pursue film production, beginning with short filmmaking. Another producer, Linda L., trained at UCLA before moving to the UK to produce,

teach and consult and the script editor (Ed R.) also began working in the USA as a "joke writer" and agent before freelancing in film and television, building up a resume by "making scripts funnier" and more "emotionally true". Jane M., had trained at UCLA, "writing five scripts over two years" and also worked as a part-time script reader before returning to the UK to teach.

As I discussed in chapter five, a number of my informants had used teaching as a way to build job security into their livelihoods, a role which still offered connections to the industry and fuelled their love of writing. In fact, a number of my informants not only taught but were writing 'How-to' manuals when we spoke, were running seminars on aspects of screenwriting work and craft or were undertaking other supplementary industrial roles (as course assessors for example) and these were strategic roles designed not only to secure income but to 'break into Hollywood' or to secure legitimacy as scholars. Overall, these select trajectories signalled drive, motivation and confidence. Simultaneously, these modalities of livelihood were used to mitigate against insecurity, precariousness and professional anxiety. As Ed R. put it, "I tend to find the best writers seem to know what they want to write for pretty early on..." but that also "...writers will take whatever the hell you ask them to do."

6.2. Individual navigations

```
It's sad to say this but try to do things that you think
might get made.[2]
```

The career biographies of the writers I spoke to offer a number of paths into the practices and livelihoods of this group as they navigate their work-worlds. At one level (and as I approached the analysis of the 'How-to' manuals) these workers are required to operate as fiercely individualised selves in the new cultural economy. Craft and creativity are deployed to navigate through the London-based labour market in which finance is scarce and very few 'developed' projects will be produced; ideas are nurtured in portfolios, often for little or no pay; drafts and revisions are laboured over in competition with other writers; and disinvestment and pragmatism are cultivated to build beneficial industrial relationships, secure commissions, avoid 'preciousness' and over-attachment to their work and to build income streams. In this section, I follow the terms and phrases

---

[2] Jane M.

my informants used as they described their daily working lives and practices to me.[3] This takes the form of a series of 'scenes', much as screenplays traditionally do. I also follow the narrative lines the writers used as they described how screenwriting looks and feels at the level of the individual, from the appeal of the form through to getting and juggling work and disinvesting in that work in order for it to soon be 'developed' by others.

6.2.1. Act One, Scene One: The appeals and comforts of screenwriting for the individual

Themes: architecture, structure, purity, rules and constrictions, genre, strengths and weaknesses

> What you're doing when you're a storyteller, you're flying by the seat of your pants, you're having to use instinct, you've got a million variables, you have to make instinctive choices on the basis of rhythm.[4]

According to a number of my interviewees, screenwriting is appealing as a profession and form of writing because discipline and structure, which are individually controlled, are integral to its execution. Whilst, as Sam P. put it, the first couple of drafts "has to be a blurdge...a more instinctual process", which he defined as artistic and creative in orientation, the necessary craft of structure is comforting. So, screenwriting was described to me as "architectural", as "the hardest form of writing", visually stimulating, and as "bound by rules and constructions" but as simultaneously fun, comforting and "pure" of form. Structure was described as the defining feature of the profession and as dictating many of the day-to-day decisions that individual screenwriters routinely make:

> The crucial element of screenwriting as opposed to other writing is structure, you know you can be as good a writer as you like, but if you don't have a sense of how to structure a story, then it's not going to make you into a screenplay writer, and that's the overwhelming importance... understanding how to weigh things so that the story is being told in the right order, how to hold back information.[5]

---

[3] And as I did in chapter five, I employ the language of screenwriting and the standard format of screenwriting as a playful rhetorical strategy of my own. I envisage this chapter as illustrating the 'drafting' process I heard about during my fieldwork, and which I learnt so much about with the help of my informants. So, this chapter is designed to mirror the 'drafting process' - using the terms 'acts', 'scenes' and 'themes' to graphically illustrate the process of writing and to let the informants speak for themselves wherever possible.

[4] Sam P.

[5] Sandra K.

The standard three-act structure I outlined and analysed in its 'How-to' iteration in chapter four was frequently referred to here, as both the gold standard and as potentially transcendent:

> it has an atomic weight that way outguns its simple length, adds up to way more than the sum of its parts...that's what most experienced writers get excited by, can I pull it off?[6]

When discussing the particular appeals of the form, those that separated screenwriting out from other possible forms of creative production, genre was also cited as uniquely appealing. Genre and structure are regularly connected in 'How-to' manuals and in discussions with writers, generic standards also offered insights into projects and career trajectories themselves. Ben J. said his initial career ambition was to be "the British John Hughes" and he described his enduring love of horror films. He said that after trying to write a British gangster film that "wasn't very good", "I set out to write a really straight slasher film...so British-set, teen horror movie...and the inspiration came from a story I'd read in the newspaper." Here, genres offered a 'way in', a comforting set of tropes and a canon to reference (he jovially admitted this project was a *Halloween* (1978) rip-off). Another informant, Dale T., spoke to me after his first feature film had been produced, a film which was a "conventional rom-com" but had a strong and original "image" at the centre of it, which served as a useful calling-card when it attracted development interest. Ed R., the script editor I spoke to, had secured ongoing editing work with a small production company who were increasingly "genre-focused" and he freely admitted that his influence there was a "commercial" one, which was attractive in the small, Hollywood-influenced British market.

In a number of the discussions I had with writers and other filmmakers, the recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses as a practitioner were foregrounded. This also bred professional confidence. If individuals recognised what they did and did not do well from an early point, they could build up their skills and, further down the line, could work with others who had complementary skill-sets. So Jane M. was very clear that she was "good" on structure and character; Ben J. admitted he wrote good scenes and had a natural ear for dialogue but also understood that this was a potential flaw because his scenes and dialogue often gave the impression that a project was going well when it actually was not. He went on to admit that "I can't help putting in silly stuff" which appealed to his writerly sensibility but also represented an ongoing

---

[6] Sam P.

issue when it came to development because other creative inputs didn't often share his vision for the thematics and tenor of a project.

Sandra K., a writer who had previously worked as an editor, admitted that she often found she had to put more into her scripts rather than less, that "extra padding" was necessary and useful (to make a script readable for actors for example) even if it would often be removed in the final cut. This writer felt fortunate that she had had a career before writing which she emphasised had been essential to the establishment of her skill-set. Karen H. echoed this, acknowledging that she felt "wiser" as a writer because she had 'lived more' and had had more relationships which fed her "creative well". Ed R. taxonomised his various industry roles, recognising that he was regularly hired at both the beginning of projects, as an "ideas guy" and at the end of projects, as a "polishing and fixing guy" and that he was able to effectively straddle both positions.[7]

All these moments, in which strengths and weaknesses, skills and attributes were reflexively recognised, bred professional confidence for these workers, able to reflect on their own practice, their positions and careers-to-date. They were also able to articulate the myriad ways in which the work appealed to them - through concrete tropes such as structure, genre and conventions which were deployed to clue other professionals[8] in to their individual orientations, their interests, their labouring positions. Such concrete pronouncements also signalled comfort in the face of acute industrial anxiety. Whilst the vagaries of the industry (which many of them routinely faced) signalled that much was out of their direct control within their work-worlds, their strengths and their motivations to pursue the work could and did anchor them as they pursued what Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) refer to as 'good work'.

6.2.2. Act One, Scene Two: Getting work and keeping work

Themes: balance, pursuing vs generating work opportunities, free labour, discipline and drive, juggling

> It's really important for writers to take responsibility for their stories and own them.[9]

_____

[7] This pragmatism was reflected in the large number of projects he was working on when we spoke.

[8] And of course, could clue me in as the researcher.

[9] Erin B.

Simply getting work was a consistent and underlying theme in the conversations I had with my informants and this was discussed in terms of finding and maintaining "balance" between projects that come to writers from others and those that originate with them. For example, Sandra K. described her balance:

> Sometimes people come specifically saying we'd like to get [informant] to do this, and sometimes it's a more general search, and so that's where having the right agent is hugely important. Sometimes there are projects that I already have and I love and therefore I'm going around trying to find somebody interested in it and getting engaged with it, and quite often what happens is that at the end of a meeting with a producer you'll then have a general discussion about you know, what other things are you interested in, and I'll say well we've talked about this and this.

This was reiterated by Todd D. who expressed a similar need for balance, but who, because he was not as established as Sandra K., had a more profound experience of competitive writing which permeated his interpretation of the concept:

> it's difficult getting the balance sometimes between chasing opportunities, as they come up, and concentrating on your own work and then promoting it...so at the moment, at least like, half the things I've worked on have come about because I've been made aware of an opportunity or have been invited to do something, a company have said, we want to do a project around this, got any ideas? Recently, I did a treatment for a sitcom for [production company] and it got down to like the last three people they were considering and um, it's not that I get a little cup for being in the last three...in the end they went for the other guy's thing...that was something I'd written in response to their call...we want this and this, ok I will craft something, but actually...you do that and you're almost always in a race with hundreds of people whereas probably, eventually you have to go, these are my ideas, these are my scripts.

This second writer was acutely aware that his tales of 'getting work' were inflected by his lack of track record upon which to stake his reputation. At the time we spoke, he was competing to adapt a novel for a well-known British director:

> for that project, I've probably written five thousand words of analysis of the book, in terms of emails and several hours of conversations and meetings you know, trying to get more meetings with the director set up...and essentially, it's necessary because I can't simply say, look at my last screen outings.

These kinds of explorations and negotiations as one builds up a career were also articulated as building up one's stamina and professional chops, "working the writing muscle" that could then deftly cope with the unpredictabilities the industry might dish out:

> it's a trade-off between wanting your own original work out there, wanting to be seen to have a sustainable career...I think you need to be seen as a safe pair of hands, as someone who can deliver on time, who can write treatments and synopses.[10]

It was also clear in a number of accounts that free labour was an inevitable consequence of pursuing and getting screenwriting work. So Todd D. had seven projects in "speculative development" when we spoke, and admitted to "doing a lot of work for free" on them, in the hopes that this early investment would pay off further down the development line. Karen H. described routinely writing seven drafts for any project (which did not include "sub-drafts") and described this as "monumental" groundwork. Karen H. had had nine projects optioned and a radio play produced and had 'just' been able to stay afloat although none of the optioned projects had yet been made.

The need for personal discipline, drive and responsibility were also frequently described as essential to getting work and then, getting work *done* at the level of the individual writer and the drive to write was characterised as something, perhaps one of the few things, a professional writer has control over.[11] "Writers need to be exceptionally driven. They need to write all the time and to love it." was the professional advice of Erin B. More focused strategies to spur the writing of a screenplay were also tied to notions of personal responsibility. Sam P., a screenwriter-pedagogue, forcefully argued that every serious screenwriter should be constantly asking one question in the process of writing: "what is the audience feeling now?" And for this informant, it was "the responsibility of the screenwriter to think about that question". Personal drive and responsibility could also be helpfully coupled with a strategic approach to modalities of screenwriting; specialising in a particular form of screenwriting was one example of this.[12] The writer as strategic professional was also obvious in the many references to the relative benefits of film versus

---

[10] Dale T.

[11] This personal drive was referred to in numerous ways and it was often noted that other industry gate-keepers looked for this quality when assessing the performance and demeanor of writers. Todd D. said, for example, "agents want a sense of hunger from their writers."

[12] Sandra K. had pursued adaptative screenwriting and had been successful within this modality, a strategy she described as "very practical".

television writing.[13] For example, as an early-career writer, Todd D. stressed the need to "channel both worlds" and was clear that in the UK industry in which finance was always scarce, "most people are aware that they'll probably make their careers in television drama with forays into film."

At the initial first draft stage, Todd D. told me, "if you've prepared really hard, slaved over your treatment, done everything right, maybe you've done 60 percent of the work." Of course, that first draft will then evolve beyond all recognition and will be pulled apart by the writer and anyone else who subsequently becomes involved in the project so preparation and structural groundwork was the oft-cited strategy to minimise that necessary creative destruction. However, other writers hinted at the contrary logics that keep individual writers searching for stability and comfort in the face of unpredictabilities and precariousness. Dale T. who had just navigated a very difficult project gestation process noted that it was not always the case that "the harder you work, the better the script will be...it's sometimes about stepping back." In this case, "stepping back" meant ceding a significant part of his individual control of the project to other collaborators. Ed R. echoed this paradox, stating at one point that the industry was often depressing because "so much of it is timing" and skills can be arbitrary. "It's not necessarily a skills based industry" was his aphoristic take.

The juggling of projects at a day-to-day level was also a key theme of a number of the conversations and, again, the contrary logics that dictate the getting and keeping of work were illuminated. Having "lots of stuff on the go" was desirable for individual writers who could then keep a number of potentially lucrative irons in the fire at any one time. However, the management of such a work portfolio was a further challenge:

> in my ideal world I would have a project that I'm right at the beginning of, a project that I'm in the middle of, and a project that I'm doing the final touch-ups on, but it never works like that, so ... at any given time I will have probably half a dozen different projects underway at some stage of development.[14]

---

[13] A theme which clearly distinguishes the UK labour market from the North American market, in which writers generally specialise in television or film but often don't do both and certainly don't do both simultaneously. Most of the writers I spoke to had primarily worked in film and aspired to this as their primary medium as opposed to television writing, sometimes actively opting for more intense career precariousness because they didn't want to be pigeon-holed too early as a TV writer. However they also acknowledged that television writing was often the best pathway to (relative) job security.

[14] Sandra K.

This writer went on to very eloquently describe the particular problems that such 'bulimic' work patterns (from Gill, 2002) have in this industrial context:

> One of the problems that happens quite often is that writers start off, and you write things over several years without very much input and then finally something takes off, and then you get incredibly busy, and so it was taking you six months to get your script into a reasonable state, and now you have six weeks, oh this isn't half as good as the one you wrote last year, well it's because I didn't have the time and I've got ten times more people on my back...and I think managing that kind of career shift can be extremely challenging. So sometimes you get a break and then you can't capitalise on it, because you're overwhelmed by the demands that are being put on you.

This sense of unpredictability permeated the discussions we had about the getting and juggling of work and this was often tied to the need to disinvest in the work as a survival technique, to recognise what could be controlled at the level of the individual but to be clear-eyed about when that control had to be ceded and 'preciousness' needed to be purged from one's professional being.

6.2.3. Act One, Scene Three: Disinvestment and pride in the work

Themes: survival, rejection, satisfaction, competition.

> You can't be precious about your work, you have to accept that it's going to change, and enjoy that change to some extent.[15]

Individual screenwriters who get and juggle work, who organise that work and their daily writing lives and who build up and maintain livelihoods must, as I have already argued, juggle the contrary logics of the screen production industry and the wider cultural economy, logics which call on these workers to take pride in their individual inputs but also be ready and willing to 'let go', to disinvest in their individually-oriented projects as they become collectively managed and developed. Ed R. put it bluntly, describing the writer's life in this respect: "you're being beaten down on a daily basis with people saying no, no sorry, we don't really want your work."

Many of the writers I spoke to took a highly pragmatic view of these everyday realities, realities dictated by the form of the writing itself and of the financial dynamics of the work. For example,

---

[15] Jane M.

Sandra K. summarised the logics of an industry in which the screenwriter becomes invisible and unnecessary at a certain point in the development of a script:

> it's certainly a survival mechanism, you have to let things go, certainly unless you're a writer/director then things are going to be taken out of your hands and they will make something else of it. If you're lucky you'll get consulted along the way but often you won't...people just don't think of coming back to ask you, what do you think?

Todd D. was very quick to point out that "you just have to get over that", that is, get over a sense of individual authorship and control over a script, and went on: "with screenwriting, you have producers and commissioners chasing audiences and investing a huge amount in them and I think it's naive in the end to start going around and getting all depressed."

Again, a strategic approach was invoked as an antidote to this blunt-edged reality. Todd D. suggested that a very personally invested script could always be used as a sample script when new professional relationships are sought (with agents or producers for example) and that finding people who "love the voice" will reap rewards further down the career line. But this writer also noted, again pragmatically, "it's on the screenwriter to find those relationships and if the screenwriter is forced because of the stage in their career [to enter destructive relationships] that's just cutting your teeth." At a number of points in these conversations, writers offered their view on the slim odds of success, delivering pithy slices of reality that struck me as highly theatrical and as mirroring the 'shoot from the hip' address of the gurus and 'How-to' manuals. For example, Sam P., a screenwriter-pedagogue who also ran pitching workshops and seminars in London, said:

> The problem invariably is that most scripts are crap, even by good writers they're still crap, so you should definitely spend probably 90% of your time getting better and writing and working on that particular piece of work but probably at least 10% of any one working week should be getting on the phone, showing up at the right bar.

An antidote to the inevitability of individual projects being personally invested, but strictly to a point [ie. the point as which money is exchanged for that project or idea], was located, in many of my discussions, in the various ways in which pride could be taken in the work done, in fulfilling one's responsibilities as far as they went. This extended, beyond the remit of the writers, to those other professionals I spoke to who worked closely with writers in a number of capacities. Here,

pride and job satisfaction was found at those points in which the trace of the individual could be found within subsequent versions of a re-drafted script. Lindsay A., a development assistant, said she really enjoyed the process of a script development meeting, in which ideas "fly around" and subsequently, when the writers then go away and write a new draft and she then sees some of her input in the next draft of a script. Her input was traceable in the new version of the script. Ed R. described his individual input thus:

> My role is to come up with ideas and to help a writer who's stuck so the last two things I've done for example, I just came up with the plot...I don't do the actual writing, I do the structure... That's about one in three where you basically end up doing the heavy lifting.

Again, there was a mixture of collaborative pragmatism and personal pride in evidence within this role, the mediating role between writer and director. Linda L., a producer and script consultant evoked an "American can-do attitude" as another antidote to "hurt feelings" at the level of the individual. Writers need to be aware of their audience to be empowered, she argued, individuals should be focused on how to "get yourself out there and give it a shot", "build an awareness of themselves". Linda L. also reiterated that over-confidence, even a "difficult" working style, was paramount for a writer because it signalled that passion and a refusal to always succumb to development pressure "I would rather work with a writer or a director who are slightly tipped towards the difficult side in the sense that they have a really strong vision and are very passionate...more than somebody who's going to capitulate at every turn."

In one sense, the simple fact that all these interviews, in which I asked them about their career development, their working practices, their individual perspectives on writing and the industry in which they write, were conducted one-to-one, indicates that it's no surprise that a huge amount of data was offered to me about the individual orientations of this group of writers. It was as individuals that they described their research, the gestation of particular projects, their strategic pursuit of new work, their own balance between writing and meetings. However, it was also clear that the collective navigations and calculations these individuals experienced were utterly central to their conceptions of their own craft and creativity as it differed from other forms of creative production; that collaboration offered intense appeal and opened up individual writers to the exploitation of their original screenwriting work. There was a recurring sense of forward motion here in that the writer begins a discrete screenwriting process as the originator, author and dictator

in terms of subject matter, theme and progress. Todd D. described that pleasurable early stage in this way:

> My favourite bit is making something at the beginning, when you're carving something out of nothing and then ideas begin to come together and you, you find yourself sitting on the bus pulling out your notebook and constantly making another note on that project...and then there are holes in it and those puzzles are solved...and that's exciting and fun and kind of odd...at that point, it's the most pristine it will ever be, it's playful, it's adventurous.

At some point however, one that may be different for every project, the collective force of development takes over, other inputs stake a claim on the ideas and their form and a new phase of 'screenwriting' as communal creative process begins. For some of my informants, the combative nature of this stage was inevitable and natural, echoing the mythic tales of studio era Hollywood writers as preyed upon by power-hungry producers:

> this is I think where producers can subsequently take out their revenge because at the beginning of the process they are completely in the thrall of the writer and when they'll deliver and the vagaries of the writer's existence...so once it's done then they can decide, right, now I'm going to screw with you and that's when they dick them over as much as they can...so I think it's very much a power-play game.[16]

I now move into the collective zone(s) of screenwriting work-worlds as they were shared with me and whilst combat and competition are features of these narratives, I also found in the discussions of collaborative screenwriting, a wealth of expansive examples of collective creativity, of development as theatrical, as productive, as nurturing.

6.3.Collective Calculations

In this section I focus on the collectively-oriented calculations which these writers perform and enact, the wholly collaborative forms of work that screenwriters participate in, calculations which I will characterise as savvy and theatrical as well as frequently exploitative. I argued in chapter four that 'How-to' screenwriting manuals frame and enact the working techniques of rewriting and collaboration as both individual and collective; these more contingent aspects of screenwriting work are characterised as self-driven in some cases but also as 'notes'-driven, as dictated by the feedback

---

[16] Ed R.

and input of others. In the analysis of pedagogical locations for screenwriting in chapter five, I illustrated that the perceived dichotomies between creativity and craft or individual and collective forms of work, are routinely re-established and, in fact, deepened within curricula and standards, discourse and debate.

In many ways, the self-disclosures of the writers I spoke to reflected these orientations and I will explicate those here - my informants described collaboration and development as requiring amenability, mental and emotional flexibility, diplomatic combat and, sometimes, 'slave labour'. A number of development tales were told that reflected the screenwriters' position as atomised, as supplicant, as partial, as invisible. However, our discussions of screenplay development also evoked creative subjectivities which I characterise as savvy, theatrical and nurturing. The roles of writer, producer, script editor and development assistant all evoked the potential of collaborative work-worlds to open up a discussion of 'creativity' and 'craft' as collective as well as fiercely individual and isolating.

6.3.1.Act Two, Scene One: Yes, yes yes

Themes: Saying 'yes', control, flexibility, combat

> When a producer asks a writer to do something, the writer should say 'yes, ok, let's do it'...whether you do it or not is an entirely different thing.[17]

Collaboration as a necessary phase in the screenwriting labour process is one that was consistently characterised in interviews as requiring amenability, an ability to say 'yes' in every meeting, to say 'yes' to every note from every new input who comes on board. As Ed R. put it, "always be amenable in a face-to-face meeting with a producer, choose your fights carefully." This epithet, 'always say yes', was repeated in a number of forms and can be read in two divergent ways. Firstly, writers are always in a position of inferiority in the development process, are always working at the behest of others and are required to simply smile and 'take it'. Conversely, the underlying sense was that the writers were the superior force in these encounters, would say 'yes' in order to placate the multitude of voices weighing in on a project, but would continue to serve the script as they saw fit, maintaining control by seeming to give up that control. So, emphasising the former screenwriter-as-

---

[17] Ed R.

supplicant figure, Sam P. told me: "The key probably to being a happy collaborator...is to be comfortable with the notion that as a screenwriter, you're the second most important person in the business...you need to pass the authorial baton to the director." Ed R. placed the writer and producer in opposition: "writers do have all the power...and I think this is a very clever bit of work by producers to make them feel disenfranchised." But an analysis cannot begin and end with the one-dimensional portrait of the hopelessly exploited worker. Sam P., who spoke of the writer as needing to accept their secondary status, went on to use the example of a well-known writer friend who maintained control of his development work: "the first thing he does is re-read his own draft and make quite a detailed set of notes, when he goes into a meeting, he's the person who takes control of the meeting." This was presented as a highly practical strategy, it ensured that the writer simply had a job for the next draft, calibrated the project as a whole and instilled confidence in his production team that this was "the man for the job".

Confidence - for writers and development partners - was often linked to notions of mutual respect in the giving and taking of 'notes' on script drafts and many of my informants were clear that notes had to be given respect and attention, whatever their substance and motivation. Todd D., an early-career writer, told me he always tried to remain "open" rather than "closed" in the development process, that a specific note usually raised a problem of some kind in the screenplay and thus, they "are always worth listening to". For example, he suggested, a lack of warmth in a character may be about the situation the writer has created for them and notes can be indicative of the invisible but dysfunctional elements of a screenplay. The ability to "confidently reappraise" your own work in light of a set of notes was viewed by Todd D. as a paramount skill, one which then bred further confidence in one's own navigational abilities in the unpredictable and hydra-like worlds of 'development hell'. Dale T. argued that ignoring notes or considering yourself "above" them was simply arrogance on a writer's part.

In terms of an ideal development attitude for a young writer, Todd D. said he constantly calculated and asked himself "what does the person across from me want?", noting that opportunities can be spotted and played to if a writer is nimble enough. Sandra K. described this as "mental and emotional flexibility":

> you have to be simultaneously passionate and able to defend your point of view
> and to offer creative solutions all the time...and at the same time go ok, I don't
> think your way works, but I'm going to really try and make it work, and not just

kind of go through the motions, but if this is the way we're going to do it, then it's got to be the best possible version of this way, so it does take.. a special kind of mental and emotional flexibility you need.

She went on to use combative terminology in summarising the strategy she takes when dealing with a large meeting involving numbers of development executives who are all wanting to "make their mark" on a particular screenplay: "Fight without seeming to fight too much." Diplomatic fighting skills are needed and she noted that this again will foster confidence in a meeting room if the writer is viewed as strong and willing to defend their work. In fact, Sandra K. noted that there is generally "admiration for the creative temperament" which calls up those familiar assumptions of creative artists as 'difficult' though brilliant, tortured by their own talent. This kind of discourse also perpetuates those durable and comforting polarities – for example, between art and commerce, or between creative workers and uncreative development executives.

Interestingly, tales of these encounters were often recounted to me in playful terms, as offering theatrical possibilities for writers who may anticipate that development meetings will be the beginnings of the erasure of their individual creative control.

6.3.2. Flashback: Theatrical collaboration

```
Um, so, so….I'll tell you one story on the kind of ludicrous
side of development.[18]
```

In one of the most in-depth and wide-ranging discussions I had with a writer, a development process was described to me which encapsulated the 'theatrical' possibilities of screenplay development work. I am reproducing a substantial portion of our dialogue here to illustrate this:

Todd D:
```
    Um, one project I was working on, I was working with
    another writer, and whenever we took a meeting about
    things we'd written, there were always four or five
    people in the room, either the producer, the director,
    then the company's head honchos, finance person…and
    again, because it's an insecure industry and nobody
    really, wants to be perceived as the person who's not
    having value or insight, but at the same time it's
    sometimes bewildering to know what to do…in every scene,
```

---

[18] Todd D.

we would build in a couple of lines, a couple of beats
that were mis-steps, that were badly conceived, slightly
clunky, slightly mis-written, purposefully….and we would
build them so that in cutting them, in changing them, it
would be a better scene….and we'd put them on the table
and in the meeting.

Interviewer:
That's interesting

Todd D:
Inevitably, someone would, everyone needs to have their
say and someone would go like, this for me isn't working,
and we'd go oh, no do you think? And they'd go, yeah…and
we'd go, well maybe we can cut it, maybe we don't need it
and they'd go, that's what you need to do and then
everyone can go: Yup, that's what you need to do to get
this scene working and it just means that instead of,
like, having a scene that is otherwise working fucked
with because nobody wants to leave a meeting going

Interviewer:
Someone wants to put in their two cents

Todd D:
We are useless individuals because all we're doing is
saying 'well done', it gives everyone something to do,
everyone can feel good, and we come away with a scene

Interviewer:
And you guys come away

Todd D:
That we feel happy with

Interviewer:
That's really interesting

Todd D:
I know it's profoundly cynical

Here, the development process is a competitive game - the writer (and, in this case, writers[19]) have

anticipated a development negotiation and during the writing process, have padded out scenes and

acts with "mis-steps", "clunky", mis-written beats. They have done so precisely to protect the

integrity of their script and its core ideas. Todd D., reflexively describing the whole process as

---

[19] Which may go some way towards explaining the idiosyncracies of the situation and perhaps, the confidence the writers had in pursuing this course of action.

"cynical", has fuelled his own professional confidence in his ability to defend his ideas in the face of those who are more concerned with their own individual reputations and voices; the strategy offers the producers, executives and financiers ways to be 'involved' and also directly challenges them, asking them to prove their knowledge of screenplay construction and storytelling by spotting the mis-steps. This example struck me as profound - theatrical, playful, challenging, exceedingly self-aware. However, the underlying tenor to this scene is that writers are still on their own; that as creative workers positioned at the inception phase of a project, they may wield superior intelligence and skill and are in a fundamentally conflictual relationship with their 'collaborators', those who are, by dint of their proximity to industrial realities, less skilful, less creative and self-serving as opposed to script-serving. These kinds of strategies recur in various forms and serve as defence mechanisms for writers who are simultaneously seeing their work degrading or diluting, seeing their scenes being "fucked with" by over-zealous 'collaborators' wanting a hand in the development pot.

Of course, such theatrical negotiations can stem from other creative inputs and were often articulated to me as cynical but necessary in the juggling of development perspectives. Ed R., the script editor I spoke to, described editing a number of scripts in which 'some essential element' was missing. He went on to describe how he navigates between a producer and a writer in such a case:

> it's awful to say this but it's either narrowing down the genre to make sure the genre fits the target, that's usually what the producer wants, *the way you sell that to the writer is well, actually we're focusing on this character.* [my emphasis]

Here, the editor negotiates with the writer in terms of a writer's 'creative' drive and the producer is engaged in terms of commercial realities and the editor serves as the savvy conduit between these two languages - again, confident but also perpetuating that durable and dramatic distance between the creative temperament of the writer and the industrial temperament of the producer.

6.3.3.Act Two, Scene Two: Development 'off the rails'

Themes: Misunderstandings, fear, credit disputes, creative control, naivete, slave labour

> Oftentimes the writer gets blamed when they aren't
> necessarily the ones at fault.[20]

In keeping with the mythic persona of the screenwriter as misunderstood and marginalised and as needing to defend themselves in development work with whatever strategies possible, theatrical or otherwise, tales of 'development hell' further fuel this mythic well. In my discussions with writers and other filmmakers, collaboration and development were often illustrated with 'off the rails' anecdotes, with tales of credit disputes tinged with fear and misapprehension.[21] These tales were usually told with diplomacy, with the benefit of hindsight, with temperance. Producers spoke about the 'breakdown' of a development process often stemming from slight misunderstandings. Linda L., a producer, described the nuanced ways in which development can veer off-course simply by force of numbers:

> a lot of cases, you often have a couple of producers and at some point in the journey it's easy for there to be several voices weighing in on the project and I think that one of the things that I find really easy, if you're not careful, is that everybody in that team is making a slightly different movie in their head.

She went on to acknowledge the difficult position in which writers are often placed; that is, the position of blame:

> It's easier to blame the writers, so I think that writers have a hard job...because I think they have to answer to several masters and the masters don't always agree...so it's a schizophrenia that the writer really has to try to stay on top of.

This image of the writer as schizophrenic resonates with the myth of the writer-as-martyr. The requirement to 'play the game' during screenplay development means that these writers juggle multiple voices and positions, wants and needs in defending and preserving work and then are still offered only a secondary position. So the heroic writer toils to keep everyone happy whilst letting

---

[20] Linda L.

[21] I often asked what coded a collaboration as 'good' or 'bad' and it was at these points that writers became suspicious or worried - wanted to talk to me 'off the record' or were concerned that no names were used if they went on to describe a 'bad' encounter.

others take the credit although they may preserve some self-perception as the puppet-masters of the work to preserve their own ego. The schizophrenic nature of development from the writer's perspective was highlighted for me during another conversation with Dale T., a writer whose first feature film had been produced and had had a long and difficult gestation. In the course of re-telling the narrative, the writer told me he had juggled the notes of twelve producers; had been through a number of development programs and production companies; had won a online competition which had offered a doubling of the film budget but meant he had to consider 'input' about scenes from the website's users; had had a falling out with the director who claimed a co-writing credit which the producers agreed with; and had seen the film premiere at a prestigious British film festival but had also seen the film bumped from a planned theatrical release straight to DVD without his knowledge.[22] By the end of this story, my mind was frankly boggled, and yet, the writer took a "realistic" approach to it, acknowledging that the film had been made (an achievement in itself) and that he had had to simply "get over it".

Another producer and script consultant, Erin B., used the term "fear" to describe the nature of development breakdown:

> The thing that most often leads to the breakdown of the development process is fear, followed by not listening. The not listening is just as likely to be the producer, the director, the writer or the financier not listening, or even more than one or all of them. The fear is everybody's, because it is a scary industry (stories are important, art meets commerce, films are expensive, nobody knows anything: it's terrifying). Fear makes people behave badly, or even just a bit wildly. In particular it makes them stop listening, and it makes them fight.

The issue of credit for screenwriting work was another recurring theme in a number of the descriptions of development I was privy to. I have already noted in chapter two that credit disputes have been a key locus for discussions within Hollywood about the power, or lack thereof that writers wield. It is clear in the re-telling of these stories that notions of individual creative authorship are still influential here. Early career writers often described collaborative situations as ones in which they had limited bargaining power and other creative inputs sought co-writing credits which they were unable to dispute. But again, these were carefully described in pragmatic terms; writers did not want to be viewed as complaining, as resentful about the 'realities' of the industry:

---

[22] I have not provided the specific details of the online competition here to preserve the anonymity of the writer and project.

> As a first time writer you're incredibly grateful...for a large part of the process…
> and it's not to say that you have to become ungrateful but you have to sort of get
> over yourself…and say, OK, they employ me, it's a job, it's work, it's presumably
> good, otherwise I wouldn't have got to this point.[23]

Dale T. went on to (cautiously) describe his need to accept the situation and 'move on':

> So I sort of went with it and you have to say, well to an audience, who honestly
> cares... I mean at the time it was difficult but you know, no one's putting a gun to
> my head.

This issue of creative control is a perpetual one and as I described in chapter two, is central to the ongoing myth-making about screenwriting work and to contemporary debates about the monopolisation of intellectual property rights by corporate cultural production firms. Sandra K. described the situation writers often face in terms of credits as a moral one and a historical one:

> I think there's a significant problem in that if you come with an original piece, you
> can often be put in the position of having to sell everything, sell all your rights to
> it in order to get it off the ground, and then you can be taken off your own project,
> and I think that's morally reprehensible, you know it's legally reasonable but it's
> really inappropriate, you don't buy a piece of art and then go I think I'll have this
> repainted by Damien Hirst, if you want to commit to somebody's own personal
> project then you have to commit to it in a serious way, so there's a big problem
> and I think it's a historic problem, that writers started off as being studio hired
> hands.

This writer returned to the debate about screenwriting as a less creative form of writing than playwriting or fiction for example, in which the writer's claim to single authorship would never be disputed in such ways. She also connected this to the mis-held but widespread perception of film as a director's medium. However, directors were certainly not always the 'villains' in narratives of development hell. Karen H. described her worst experience of script development as "slave labour by numbers" led by a "militant script editor":

> I felt really abused on one project... I went far beyond the contracted schedule to
> keep her happy…and my agent was saying, shall I say something to the producer?
> Because I was working with the script editor between deliveries…so the producer
> was a bit ignorant, and I wasn't happy, I knew I was working too much but I also
> knew, I was so miserable I needed to try and get a project…I felt I was writing by
> numbers, it was slave labour by numbers…my creative passion did go….and I

---

[23] Dale T.

think lack of confidence and feeling, oh my god I can collaborate, I've got to
prove myself, I think I totally sold myself out.

Again, this writer was able to confidently appraise this experience in hindsight. She noted that this process had produced her most polished screenplay to-date and that it helped her build up a reputation as collaborative, amenable and, therefore, a 'good writer'. This was another recurring feature of the horror stories I was told, the reflexive ability of the writers to reflect on their own perceptions of the process and their own role(s) within them. Ben J., whose horror story was perhaps the most protracted and painful, noted simply, "For all of the complaints, I think a lot of it comes down to naivete on my part."

I have already noted in chapter two that horror stories serve a productive purpose for writers; they are a potent form of currency within the screenwriting community and the filmmaking community more generally. This was highlighted within my encounters with writers in which such stories were also recounted theatrically - with wide eyes, pauses for effect, the finest points of detail in the development process listed. This reflected a need to make sense of these encounters and more elaborately, to prove one's own endurance and longevity as a writer. Horror stories indicated that one had 'done time', had faced the slings and arrows of the business and was still standing, with credits to one's name. And at certain points, these stories were also connected to that mythic persona - the studio era writer-for-hire or the lone, tortured but brilliant writer-in-the-garret. Thus, the genealogy of screenwriting as a special, and specially tormented creative profession was powerfully and repeatedly evoked which tempered the palpable sense of atomisation and isolation these stories also suggested.

6.3.4.Act Two, Scene Three: Creative collaboration

Themes: good experiences, trust, creative energy, negotiation, vitality, spark, new media possibilities

Somebody else can spark you up.[24]

Although stories of 'development hell' (and this widely-used term itself) nicely perpetuate the age-old mythic tropes and conflicts of the filmmaking world and its schisms between creative and

---

[24] Jane M.

uncreative people, collaboration was also described to me as just that - as positive, as nurturing, as a process of continued creation and crafting as opposed to dismantlement and destruction. Jane M. said she had only ever had good working relationships and said on this point that a sense of isolation and resignation was alleviated by another creative input:

> It's so easy to lose the tension somewhere and things can just fall flat...you don't realise you've done it until someone reads through and you have to have a lot of trust with the person you're working with, your producer or editor or whoever, because it's very easy to lose track of what you're writing...and somebody else can spark you up as well, if you feel a bit flat.

Often, the connection between the terms 'screenwriting' or 'filmmaking' and 'collaboration' were described as simply logical, obvious. The producer Linda L. stated forcefully that filmmaking is about "that creative energy which is created by several people working together." and Ed R. argued that screen production was "the most collaborative of creative processes."

A number of concrete initiatives were referred to in which writers had actively pursued an alternative to the standard screenwriter-as-supplicant narratives, seeking positive relationships and development trajectories. Karen H. had met two producers who were interested in her script but had little money to develop it and she describes her approach here:

> So I said to them look, don't pay me…because they don't have any money, so I said, I'll invest the rights but I'll be a producer as well, so we'll split the deal and I thought, well, I know my script is commercial…I've given them the rights for a period, that's my investment as a producer, that's what I think a way to go as a writer is here.

This was reiterated by Sandra K. who referred to the WGGB's 'Guidelines for Writing Films' (2009), discussed in chapter two. In the guidelines, a 'joint venture agreement' was suggested as a practical way in which screenwriters and producers could facilitate closer and more fully collaborative script development. The writer spoke about the reasoning behind the guidelines in the UK setting:

> So, both sides should have some guidance, writers should say ok, this seems reasonable to me and this doesn't, and when you're beginning you do need some help. But also I think some producers don't necessarily do things wickedly, they do things ignorantly, and they go to a media lawyer maybe, and say I want a really watertight deal, and he says ok we can stitch this person up because they know

> nothing, you get all the rights, they get nothing. And actually to help producers to see that writers should be treated with respect, is really important.

However, in an industry with no history of collective organisation for screenwriters,[25] the limits of such a 'voluntary' initiative are clear, and the straitened production dynamics of the industry continue to place writers in the supplicative role, as the ones required to be amenable, savvy and theatrical as they navigate and negotiate their work-worlds. This also means that the perceived dissonance between individual and collective modes of screenwriting work persists; even at the advanced development level, collaboration is still largely viewed and experienced in individualised terms; as competitive, confrontational, exploitative, isolating and generally, disadvantageous for screenwriters.

However, another potential shift in these easily replicated narratives is the influence of new media in the new cultural economy and the screen production industries particularly. New and relatively cheap technologies are touted as now enabling writers and directors to bypass traditional development channels altogether and produce their work on their own time and on their own terms. This topic came up a number of times during the writers' discussions of their present and future work and perhaps suggests another way beyond the traditional polarities that continue to animate the practices and livelihoods of screenwriting work.[26] This was hinted at in a number of tangential ways and directly in a few cases in which writers had worked on projects with a significant new media or 'transmedia' element.[27] Sam P. was clear that writers could 'help themselves' if they felt hard done by in the current labour market by simply, making films:

> fortunately the nature of the industry has changed a little in that it's much easier to make very low budget films now than it used to be…and so there's now no excuse…if you're feeling frustrated as a writer and you want to make a movie, go make a movie.

---

[25] I was unable to interview anyone from the WGGB, which I was told informally, was suffering from severe personnel shortages and lack of funds when I was carrying out fieldwork. Sandra K said of the WGGB: "the Guild has historically not been very powerful, its core constituency is television writers, and it's much more obvious why you need a union there because they're negotiating with big companies, and it's much easier for them and for the writers to deal in collective bargaining, so that's always been the core business of the Writers Guild here."

[26] This of course also feeds into broader debates around the potential of new media technologies in many realms of creative production. I've already mentioned the debate sparked by the use of ICTs during the 2007-08 USA writers' strikes (see Banks, 2010) and in chapter three I noted that blogs and other fora are interesting tools for resource-sharing and storytelling within the screenwriting community which may arguably help to foster a sense of collectivism and community in an era in which guild membership is decreasing or already marginalised.

[27] A term made popular by Jenkins (2006) and one which was prominently discussed by the showrunners of a number of popular American television programs at a conference panel event I attended in Los Angeles in March, 2010.

Alan F. had done just that; he and a co-writer and producer had conceived a feature film idea, had undertaken conceptual artwork and had made a "teaser trailer" for a film they had not yet written or made. They then built a website for the project, posting the trailer which eventually "went viral", generating more "buzz" and then interest from producers in the UK and USA.[28] For this writer-director, this was a very direct strategy to 'build a world' for the project and thus attract finance so the film could then be written and produced.

Dale T. had juggled not only twelve producers during the production of his debut feature film but his script had won a online competition in which the budget for the film was doubled[29] but the conditions of the competition meant that scenes from the script were posted online for users to comment on and suggest revisions for. In fact, Dale T. downplayed the interactive element of this particular situation, noting that he already had notes from twelve inputs by that point, and "didn't need any more" but the precedent was a fascinating one. From his point of view, this represented not a form of emancipation from the shackles of traditional development but simply another input to juggle. Todd D. had been commissioned to develop a project for a British television production company which was originally a one-hour television show but "with an online universe so audience members could be in it." This developed over time once other production voices came on-board and it was described to me as a "very experimental format", combining documentary, educational programming, scientific content and gaming. Todd had to try and coordinate the content for the show and its online presence; that is, acknowledging it was fiction but "hiding online" and thus encouraging viewers to search for content and clues. Overall, he felt it had developed into something unwieldy: "In a way, I think the project kind of ended up sprouting a couple too many heads...lost some of its simplicity...I've mixed feelings about its performance in the end."

All these examples vary wildly in terms of format, scope and detail but all suggest new possibilities in terms of defining and practicing screenwriting itself, as well as new possibilities for collaborative script development. In each of these cases, the practice of screenwriting loses its focus on the standard 'blueprint' screenplay, on its format, its traditional stages of development, its standard trajectory from individual written document to multiple-drafted and redrafted document as it heads

---

[28] When I spoke to Alan F., he was about to go to Los Angeles for two weeks of meetings and "networking" with producers who had contacted him and his writing and producing partners after seeing the trailer. The writer was hoping this would lead to further contact-making and financial support for the next phase of the film's production, the writing of a feature-length script.

[29] From a quarter to half a million pounds.

towards its discrete screen version or versions.[30] The possible decentralisation or diminishment of the screenplay-as-written-blueprint which the advent of new ICTs at least signals, leads me to finally return to the particular contemporary circumstances in which screenwriters as creative workers are calculating and navigating. Here I continue to ask, how do screenwriters as creative workers understand their own labouring positions?

6.4. Screenwriting personae in anxious times

I end the chapter with some final reflections on the collective persona of the screenwriter I have seen in my fieldwork, a persona which is required and specifically enacted in anxious times and in an anxious industry. This is a reflexive strategy on my part to again illuminate the subjectivities which are bred to combat the vagaries of the industry. This also resonates with the figure of the embattled, mythic screenwriter which I invoked in chapter two.

6.4.1. Act Three, Scene One: Dire industrial straits

Themes: The 'state' of the British film industry

    Where have all the British screenwriters gone?[31]

The dire state of the British film industry and the subsequent lack of funding and opportunities for 'good' screenwriting work cast a pall across many of the discussions I had with writers during the fieldwork. Of course, cyclical debates about the gloomy state of national film industries attempting to sustain themselves and their workers are not new[32] but there was a pervasive sense (along with the general discourse of the 'recession economy') that things were particularly grim. A number of the schemes which the writers I interviewed had used for the development of particular projects were no longer running when I conducted interviews (for example, Arista and North by Northwest - see Appendix Two) and a number of times I heard strident criticisms of the BBC, Film Four and the UK Film Council (the three largest industrial gatekeepers in terms of film finance) for breeding

---

[30] There is not room here to continue speculating about how the practices and livelihoods of British screenwriting may be affected by new media production, distribution and exhibition technologies but other scholars have begun to ask questions in this realm (see Millard, 2010 for example).

[31] This was the title of an article Phil Parker published in *Screen Daily* in September 2009 in which he lamented the increasingly conservative and dysfunctional development culture within the British film industry and therefore, the dire state of the British screenwriting labour market. I was in touch with Parker at the time this was published and he asked me to respond to his article via the online Screen Daily 'comments' board, which I did. See Parker (2009).

[32] I examined these cyclical debates in relation to national cinemas and 'runaway production' in my previous research project on New Zealand filmmaking, see Conor, 2004.

chronic conservatism and elitism in relation to the commissioning and development of screenwriting work. A number of reasons were offered to explain these dire straits. Ed R. argued: "I think the reason that we have a paucity of good film at the moment is because we've had a paucity of good British television for about the last twenty years...and I think the two go hand-in-hand." Erin B. argued that the pervasive sense that "anyone can do it" had fostered a downgrading of writing and producing talent in this context:

> This is a film-literate world and a film-literate culture; plus screenwriters have been very downgraded in the British industry, as have development skills. This adds up to a generalised belief that more or less anyone can write a screenplay and more or less anyone can develop one, so everyone thinks they may as well give it a go.

Karen H. called the industry "unreconstructed" and went on to implicate the Writers Guild of Great Britain as another institution worthy of critique:

> I mean, our Guild is so symptomatic of the British film industry…its powerlessness, its lack of respect for the script… I think they are institutionally rotten to the core, they have no raison d'etre, they have no power, what do they do all the time?

Dale T. highlighted the commonly articulated sense that the UK industry suffers from an ongoing identity crisis, "caught in the middle" between a wholly commercial, Hollywood-oriented screen production model and a cottage-based and art-house model. He noted that the public funding for the British industry means there are public obligations to be upheld and catered to which continues to fracture the industry in which screenwriters are navigating, perpetuating a schizophrenia within the industry as a whole. Industries other than the UK's were referred to in admiring terms a number of times: the French model was described as an ideal one for example, favouring protectionism over the aping of Hollywood genre frameworks and styles. National cinema models which encouraged longitudinal collaborations and alternative forms of screenwriting/filmmaking were also suggested.[33]

---

[33] For example, the Danish industry encourages collaborations between screenwriters and directors at film schools and these are then fostered and nurtured from pedagogical spaces into industry. For an exemplary study of these developments and its effects on the Danish film industry see Redvall (2010).

In terms of practically navigating these particularly precarious times, many informants offered resigned personae, arguing that times were tough but that this is nothing new. Phil R., a producer, was very blunt and clear about what was required from writers in the current climate:

> I know this is going to sound really harsh, but in order to get someone to really think about am I interested in this project, there has to be a script, and as we said before there are bucketloads of small independent companies but they've got no money. So I think writers in the current climate are going to have to write a draft for next to nothing.

He also argued that screenwriters should avoid "personal" stories or should write them for another medium because, within this industry, writers should be writing "for an audience" rather than for themselves. Paradoxically, he noted that writers should be careful about writing "million-pound odysseys" arguing that such projects could open Hollywood doors but that "they won't be writers for long" if this is their long-term strategy. Some informants were more positive, arguing that tough economic times could lead to more discernment on the part of commissioners and producers which would "hopefully" encourage more quality control[34] rather than a rash of half-cooked, Hollywoodised projects.[35] Other writers were more playful in their pronouncements, still resigned to precariousness and defiant in their drive to write at any cost:

> My next one will be a novel, because I'd like to have done, I'm quite prolific as a writer, I would like to have ah…I would have liked to have written two novels and two plays instead of four specs and just seen if I've got a novel published before I've got a film made.[36]

I also found that talking in these contextual terms offered clarifying moments in which writers and other practitioners offered subjective and reflexive insights into the collective personae they took up and embraced; personae which reflected the mythic tropes of the screenwriter-as-supplicant as well as the screenwriter-as-egotist and the screenwriter-as-geek.

---

[34] Lindsay A.

[35] A few films were consistently mentioned as being 'symptomatic' of this trend, *Sex Lives of the Potato Men* (2004) for example.

[36] Karen H.

6.4.2. Act Three, Scene Two: Screenwriting Personae

Themes: Egotism, Fraudulence, Geekery

> It's only a matter of time before I find my rightful position.[37]

These British screenwriters as creative workers are navigating and calculating within work-worlds in which job security and satisfaction are fleeting and elusive, in which their work continues to be downgraded and degraded but in which accepting all this and retaining a reputation as productive, responsible, amenable, collaborative and driven is essential. At particular moments in our conversations, writers distilled and described their own conflicted and resilient labouring subjectivities to me. Todd D. expressed the conflict of his work and the comfort of his craft-based skill-set:

> it's so easy to feel fraudulent when you're writing a story, when you're writing for hire, when someone has paid you, for allegedly your expertise, your ability, it's very easy to feel like a total fraud and that's the point at which, recourse to tool-sets as I think of them, becomes quite a useful psychological crutch.

Egotism was often presented to me as inevitable and necessary, as allowing one to deftly navigate from one project to the next. Dale T., who had seen his film premiere at a major film festival, admitted this was a channel for some much-needed "ego-puffery" which then filtered outwards in practical ways, providing him a platform on which he was able to set up new project meetings (with 'big' production companies such as Working Title) and speak at conferences on writing and filmmaking as a successful, produced screenwriter.

Karen H. cheerily admitted she had a "massive ego" and was a "hard grafter". Ben J., who was recovering from a project which had had many development problems that had affected him directly described himself as "horribly arrogant". He went on to suggest that the persona who was attracted to the life of the screenwriter was also necessarily attracted to the "masochism" of the profession. This resonated in the numerous moments in which horror stories were related to me with some relish, in which 'big names' were whispered to me 'off the record', 'possible' projects with name producers or stars were hinted at and dangled before me. Here again a sense of playfulness and

---

[37] Karen H.

theatricality pervaded the tenor of the conversations. The screenwriter-as-egotist and the mythic figure of the downtrodden screenwriter fuelled confidence and a sense of collective, industrial identity.

The spectre of the screenwriter-as-geek also appeared in my encounters with these writers and within their self-perceptions.[38] In particular, one writer, Todd D., spoke eloquently about the "nerdy" persona of the screenwriter who haggles over story paradigms, pores over manuals and compares notes on scripts, drafts and films, in an endlessly reflexive process that burrows further into the screenwriter's own psyche as some form of defensive strategy: "most screenwriters are geeky about the craft aspects...to the point of fetishising them because it's something that you can hang onto in this confusing fricking world." As well as this, Todd D. noted that the screenwriter-as-geek also fuels industrial confidence for a writer once they begin communicating their ideas to others, that professionalism stems directly from obsession:

> there is perhaps an element of sparring for the love of it but there's also, it becomes apparent that people kind of think deeply about this stuff...On the one hand, as I say it's about trying to arm yourself with the sensation at least that you understand and can act the mechanics of this world...The second thing is that as soon as an idea moves from being entirely your own, conceived on your desk, into conversations with people, you need a shared language and actually talking with development execs, it's probably important to familiarise yourself with those kind of terms...it professionalises that relationship.

Here the screenwriter-as-geek illustrates a dynamic oscillation between speaking back - to a perceived collective and mythic history of screenwriting as profession, as pedagogy and practice - and speaking forward - to collaborators, to audiences, to financiers, to other screenwriters. These varied and delimited subjective fragments reveal the highly practical and playful strategies these screenwriters use to navigate and calculate over their working lives as reflexive creative workers and crafty professionals.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn together a number of thematic strands under the banner of the broad terms *navigation* and *calculation* in order to illustrate the pursuit of lives and livelihoods by a

---

[38] This is the spectre which is frequently evoked in portrayals of the screenwriter in film and, as I did earlier, I again express my awareness of and my concerns about its masculinist overtones. A figure such as Charlie Kaufman, who appeared in the introduction, embodies this iteration of the screenwriting persona and his film *Adaptation (2002)* offers a particular representation of this. Other filmic portrayals such as *Barton Fink* (1991) also tap into and re-present this myth in filmic form.

number of screenwriters and filmmakers within the British screen production labour market. I have foregrounded a number of modalities of screenwriting work which were illuminated during fieldwork encounters, from individualised modes of writing to collaborative development. I have also highlighted the various ways in which screenwriting is made knowable and do-able to these creative workers. I have shown that screenwriting as work is both highly individual and often atomising. This is because of the need to find and juggle work, job security and satisfaction, the need to compete with others within a straitened and struggling industry, the need to disinvest in the work and accept one's secondary status. However, here the work is also experienced as liberation, as challenging and exciting, as unconcerned with lofty and outdated notions of individual creative authorship, as a particular form of creative production in which creativity itself is contested and craft is comforting.

Screenwriting is also wholly collective, a form of work in constant dialogue with a number of other inputs which are variously and meaningfully designated as 'creative' or 'less-' or 'un-creative'. Here, savvy and theatrical forms of navigation and calculation are routinely deployed to protect core themes and ideas, to secure another draft or another job, to promote individual working selves as amenable and collaborative. Screenplay development also opens up into the realm of the horror story, the narratives of 'development hell' which can be difficult but are also used as currency, as teaching tools and as indicative examples of, again, the particular and contested nature of screenwriting as creative production. In order to effectively survive and prosper in such work-worlds, I have argued that a number of connected screenwriting subjects are called into being as writers and filmmakers talk about the work they do; subjects which enable navigation and calculation day-to-day, which foster forms of collectivity within labour markets, which allow writers to embrace the schizophrenic nature of the industry and their own fractured experiences. The screenwriter-as-supplicant, the screenwriter-as-egotist and the screenwriter-as-geek are three iterations of this subjecthood which all have links to the mythic history of screenwriting work. They are also actively used by writers to fuel their own professional confidence, their sense of vocation, their understanding of their own 'good' craft and creative work.

Conclusion - Screenwriting as Creative Labour: Pedagogies, Practices and Livelihoods in the New Cultural Economy

This study of screenwriting as creative labour is an inter-sectional and theoretically informed investigation which illustrates how a particular form of creative work, screenwriting, is constructed in discourse and practice, is shaped by *both* historical and contemporary production dynamics and is thus, experienced and lived as work in the 'new cultural economy'. Screenwriting, I have argued, is a form of both exemplary and idiosyncratic creative labour precisely because it is unapologetically market-oriented, potentially privileged, historically marginalised. It agitates traditional polarities - between craft and creativity, art and commerce, individual and collective work. Consequently, I have shown that this form of creative labour more effortlessly conflates these same contradictions and polarities that produce anxiety in many forms of work. This has made for a rich case study which has embraced the contradictions, the flow and churn, the slipperiness of screenwriting work and its constitutive modalities and experiences. I have illustrated the multitudinous ways in which screenwriting politically, discursively and materially disturbs and renews the concepts of 'craft', 'creativity' and 'creative labour'.

This investigation began with a dialogue involving a number of important creative labour theorists and screen production scholars; Ursell (2000), Blair (2001, 2003) and Caldwell (2008) were particularly influential in the process of theorising screenwriting as creative labour because of their deft combination of screen production studies along with an attention to subjectivity and reflexivity at work. Ursell's work on the subjectivities of British television production workers offered an important model for incorporating a Foucauldian understanding of technologies of the self into an analysis of semiotic production. Blair (2003) also exemplified this productive form of analysis, focusing on below-the-line film production workers in the UK and their subjectivities within semi-permanent work groups. Caldwell's (2008) large-scale study of screen production workers in Los Angeles and industrial reflexivity then enabled me to more fully engage with Hollywood-centric production dynamics and "forms of local cultural negotiation and expression" (2008, 2). These three studies led me in constructing the backbone of my own theorisation whilst I have asserted its originality; focusing, not on below-the-line workers across a range of occupations (as all three of these scholars did) but on one above-the-line occupation, screenwriting. This study complements and builds on the theoretical agenda these works laid out, leading to an innovative form of production studies that is attentive to both macro- and micro-politics in creative labour. Thus, I took Caldwell's lead in establishing a solid theoretical and historical trajectory for screenwriting as

creative labour in chapters one and two and was then able to hone in to particular locations in chapters four, five and six, locations in which individual and collective subjectivities for screenwriters as workers are constructed, enacted and deployed.

Clearly MacDonald (2004) and Maras (2009) were also particularly influential in establishing an agenda for the analysis of screenwriting as creative labour, a form of work given little attention within film studies, production studies and creative labour theory to-date. MacDonald's work is itself a doctoral thesis but represented one of the few attempts to consider processes of screenwriting in the UK. MacDonald's conceptualisation of screenwriting as a collective endeavour, represented by the 'screen idea', again complements my own work and its different focus on the figure of the screenwriter as worker. MacDonald also offered a model for the consideration of screenwriting in terms of discourse as it is deployed in 'How-to' manuals and pedagogical frameworks in order to produce and reproduce standards and conventions. This was where Maras (2009) was particularly useful. His text consolidated much of my thinking around the historical standardisation of screenwriting as a form of work, its 'screenplay as blueprint' position, and the various investments made in distinguishing screenwriting from other forms of writing and filmmaking. These two writers legitimised my focus on screenwriting, highlighting the need to understand both the continuities and changes that are evident in the development of screenwriting as craft and creative work. They also pushed me to consider screenwriting as simultaneously both individual and collective. MacDonald places his concept of the 'screen idea' within a notion of collective creativity for example, and this framework alerted me to the need to consider both the atomised, highly individualised contexts of screenwriting work (contexts not considered in the project-team based analyses of Blair and Ursell) as well as the wholly collaborative nature of the work, a polarity which I juggled throughout the course of the project. Working with these studies enabled me to formulate my primary research questions, which I stated in chapter one:

How is screenwriting constructed as a form of creative production and as both individualised and collaborative work in discourse, pedagogy and practice? and

How do screenwriters navigate, operate and calculate within the industrial realms of cultural/screen production in which they pursue and secure their livelihoods?

In addressing the first question, I have laid out a reinvigorated theoretical vocabulary for screenwriting as creative work and I have extended both theories of creative labour and theories of

screenwriting. This vocabulary consists of a number of terms and discursivities that I then traced through histories, manuals, pedagogies and practices – old and new, craft and creative, individualised and collaborative, atomised, partial and standardised. As I have stressed throughout this study, I have been preoccupied with seeing these polarities together, polarities which often structure contemporary discussions of creative work and can themselves create invisible hierarchies, privileging creativity over craft for example, or pleasure in work over pain and insecurity. Thinking polarities together was a particularly important intellectual operation because screenwriting itself embodies and bridges these polarities. It incorporates the discourses and practices of both creativity and craft, old and new, individual and collective. This insight then informed the pursuit of my second research question as I payed particular attention to subjective experiences, to reflexivity in screenwriting work-worlds, to the navigations and calculations required and enacted to bridge these polarities in everyday practice. In my discussions and observations of screenwriting as creative labour across those sites, I recorded the savvy and theatrical forms of navigation and calculation which were routinely deployed to protect core themes and ideas, to secure another draft or another job, to promote individual working selves as amenable and collaborative. In order to effectively survive and prosper in their work-worlds, I illustrated that the screenwriter-as-myth - supplicant, egotist, geek - represent particular subject-hoods which all have links to the mythic history of screenwriting work. They are actively used by writers to fuel their own professional confidence, their sense of vocation, their understanding of their own 'good' work.

Overall, this project offers a number of key contributions to the fields of both creative labour theory and screen production studies. As well as my concern with seeing polarities together, and seeing them in the context of the 'new cultural economy', the work is innovative because of the unique design of the project. I believe that the continued engagement with labour itself, and labour as simultaneously both craft and creativity-oriented, as both individual and collective, enables us to see how 'good work' happens across and within those polarities of experience. The consideration of screenwriting is again, a strength and a unique contribution to the field. This is because, as I said, screenwriting uniquely embodies those polarities. But more than this, the technologies of the self, the particular subjectivities I have identified as integral to screenwriting as work, *also* embody the same polarities. So, I examined practices and experiences of selfhood gained through individualising tendencies as well as engines of collective subjecthood and this made for a rich analysis of particular practices and pedagogies. The consideration of screenwriting work through

pedagogy is another key contribution of the project. This was a natural methodological development as the study progressed and distinguishes the case study from other exemplary creative labour analyses. It enabled me to build in another plane of analysis that again bridged both macro- and micro-politics. It was here that I was able to observe the construction of screenwriting as standardised work, the circulation of standardised discourses of that work and the influence of particular practical models and 'ideal' technologies of the self. It was at the level(s) of pedagogy that I was also able to observe writers at work as pedagogues, as completing the circuits of re-production which maintain standards and conventions. And it was also here that I was able to compare and contrast these various sites, paying attention to the ways in which pedagogical subjectivities clash with official discourses, where confidence and insecurity appear, where livelihoods are built up and maintained. These contributions mark the project out as instructive and timely; the theatrical, mythic and practical navigations of screenwriters in pedagogy and practice that are the centre of this thesis offer an antidote to impoverished, economistic readings of creativity, craft and creative labour in contemporary worlds of work.

It is crucial for me to finally pause here and reflect on the methodological issues that the project has raised as well as the future directions the project opens up. As I said in chapter three, the methodological strategy for the study developed over time and was affected by issues of limited access, resources and time. It evolved into a multiple data-collection method, incorporating in-depth interviews and some observation, textual analysis, industrial and historical analysis. Upon reflection, this design produced a large amount of complex data, not only about screenwriting subjectivities and personal experiences, but also about continuities and changes in pedagogical techniques, labour market functions and the particularities of industrial screen production in both the USA and UK. I have effectively navigated through this material (much as my interviewees navigate their work-worlds), following the discourses and voices of screenwriters, gurus, teachers and manuals and I have synthesised the material to address my particular research questions.

The ongoing negotiations I had to make as researcher and interviewer were particularly illuminated in my navigations with the issue of confidentiality during the project. I had committed to a process of anonymisation for all of my interviewees from very early on because of the sensitive nature of some of the conversations I had with writers and teachers. This was the most efficacious strategy on my part to both put my interviewees at ease as well as to remain relatively free and open in the subsequent analysis of interview and observational data. Of course, I had to acknowledge as I

continued the research that the anonymisation process raised further issues because of the nature of the British screenwriting community. It is small, with relatively few projects commissioned and produced in any one year and thus even anonymised writers or teachers could potentially be identified from the nature of their discussions about their own practices and livelihoods. I had to be extremely careful in deciding how to quote and what to quote from the lengthy transcripts, the choice of suitable pseudonyms, and the elision of identifying information such as the details of particular people, projects or institutions. A principal concern here (and one that preoccupied me up until the final days of writing) was the role that Skillset plays in my work and analysis. I did not speak to anyone at Skillset[1] however, I did speak to professionals working in the Skillset assessment process. Thus I had to consider the particular ethics raised through these encounters - anonymising Skillset itself (which I experimented with) was nearly impossible to achieve. No other organisation plays the role it currently plays in the British industry and I believe it is fair to identify it as an organisation, analyse the various roles it plays in engaging with screenwriting work and workers in the UK, and raising issues around those roles, issues raised by many of my other interviews and encounters. But I did need to continue to preserve the identities of those I spoke to and observed at work and I believe this has been achieved to the best of my ability. Institutions and figures connected with Skillset remain anonymous, identifying information removed as much as was reasonable and necessary, and all interviewees have been informed of this process. The research will also be fed back to those involved in the project as much as is feasible. I believe this feedback circuit will ensure an ongoing process of accountability and will also enable the research to contribute to an ongoing dialogue about British screen production and screenwriting practices.

This study has also raised some further questions and issues which indicate the future directions the project should take. One of the most compelling issues I believe the analysis highlights is the need for much more attention to gender in screenwriting work, and thus, gender in creative work more generally. This is an issue that I felt cleaved very closely to a number of the analytical strands of the project. For example, I acknowledged (although only in passing) that the mythic figure of the screenwriter is a highly masculinised one. To be more specific, the compulsory traits of the ideal screenwriter evoked in manuals and pedagogies such as the always-say-yes mantra, combat and disinvestment are highly masculine in orientation although rarely acknowledged in gendered terms. Also, the subjectivities I identified that were variously described as geeky, masochistic,

---

[1] Any attempts to speak to Skillset representatives were not responded to and I eventually decided to focus on interviewing writers and those working directly with writers.

schizophrenic and egotistical were also highly masculinised. As the project evolved, the gendered nature of much of these practices and pedagogies became more and more starkly obvious to me, and thus more pressing a concern. Yet, the design of the project meant I was simply unable to engage with the issue in a significant way (and in a way that would have done this topic justice), for fear of losing focus on my primary research questions and spinning out into a number of new directions. Thus, perhaps the most important outcome of the project at a personal level, is my commitment to pursuing this issue in future research. At this stage, I could certainly be charged with complicity in the continued neglect of gender in creative labour research, but I believe the nature of my own project has set up an agenda (by identifying these as pressing issues) for the consideration of screenwriting as creative work and therefore, the consideration of screenwriting as *gendered* creative work.

This relates to a broader set of issues which I am also committed to now pursuing in future work. That is, a deeper and more nuanced consideration of historical and contemporary conceptions of creativity itself. I argued a number of times in the course of this work that creativity is 'hollowed-out', is now tied to impoverished, individualistic discourses of skills, innovation and freedom at work, and is often *not* considered alongside and within craft practices or as a crucial element of collective subjectivities at work. More than this though, I see these impoverished discourses of creativity as again highly masculinised, as historically bound up in notions of individual, male, creative genius and as thus constantly repudiating other possible forms of 'good work' that don't fit with this genius figure; creative work as social, as wholly collaborative and as opening up into new realms of potential fulfilment and security. I strongly believe that this project and case study again offers an innovative research agenda as well as new avenues for the consideration of these deep and unquestioned 'truths' around creativity. It also offers fresh evidence for the possibility of 'good work' through the subjective experiences of screenwriters, work that bridges these engrained and unquestioned polarities, even within highly industrial, marginal and delimited work-worlds.

In closing, I return to that figure with which I began, Charlie Kaufman, the ultimate (and now I must specify, *masculine*) screenwriter as tormented but brilliant and successful creative worker. In his film *Adaptation* (2002), Kaufman (the 'character' called Charlie Kaufman) has a conversation with the 'guru' Robert McKee (playing himself) about screenwriting technique after Kaufman has just sat through one of McKee's 'Story' seminars. McKee offers Kaufman some advice about endings:

```
     McKee:
I'll tell you a secret. The last act makes a film. Wow
them in the end, and you got a hit. You can have flaws,
problems, but wow them in the end, and you've got a hit.
Find an ending, but don't cheat, and don't you dare bring
in a deus ex machina. Your characters must change, and
the change must come from them. Do that, and you'll be
fine.
```

I do not claim to have 'wowed' my audience in these final paragraphs but I can certainly admit to a profound process of change in the course of carrying out this research. I have staked a claim to my own 'situated knowledge' throughout this dissertation and this last act is no different. This is original knowledge produced in the course of my discussions and collaborations with professional creative workers and with my own 'split and contradictory self' (Haraway, 1996, 256) as researcher of screenwriting as creative labour. This knowing but partial self has 'seen together' with the equally split and contradictory figure(s) of the screenwriter - and although it was tempting, I have not resorted to a deus ex machina.

```
                    The End
```

Bibliography

Adaptation. 2002. Written by C. Kaufman and D. Kaufman. Directed by S. Jonze. [Film].

Adkins, L. 2005. "The new economy, property and personhood". *Theory, Culture and Society,* no. 22, 111-130.

Adkins, L and Lury, C. 2009. "Introduction: What is the empirical?" *European Journal of Social Theory,* vol. 12., no. 1, 5-20.

Aglietta, M. 1974. *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience.* London: NLB.

Aksoy, A., & Robins, K. 1992. "Hollywood for the 21st Century: Global competition for critical mass in image markets." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* no. 16, 1-22.

Alien. 1979. Written by D. O'Bannon. Directed by R. Scott. [Film].

Amman, J. 1996. "The transformation of industrial relations in the motion picture and television industries: Craft and production". In. L. Gray and R. Seeber, eds. *Under the Stars: Essays on Labour Relations in Arts and Entertainment.* Ithaca and London*:* ILR Press. 113-155.

Aronson, L. 2001. *Screenwriting updated: New (and Conventional) Ways of Writing for the Screen.* Los Angeles: Silman-James Press.

As Good As It Gets. 1997. Written by M. Andrus and J. L. Brooks. Directed by J. L. Brooks. [Film].

Atkins, D. 2008. "The WGA strike, the internet and media decentralisation" [Online]. *Flow TV,* Issue 7.15. Available from: http://flowtv.org?p=1390 [Accessed February 3, 2010]

Atkinson, P. and Coffey, A. 2002. "Revisiting the relationship between participant observation and interviewing". In J. Gubrium and J. Holstein, eds. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method.* Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage. 801-814.

Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D.1997. " 'Kundera's 'Immortality': The interview society and the invention of the self." *Qualitative Inquiry* vol. 3., no. 3. 304-326.

Azlant, E. 1997. "Screenwriting for the early silent film: Forgotten pioneers 1897-1911." *Film History* vol. 9., no. 3. 228-256.

The Bachelor's Club. 1921. Written by E. Stannard and I. Zangwill. Directed by A.V. Bramble. [Film]

Ball, E. H. 1917. *Cinema Plays: How to Write Them, How to Sell Them.* London: Stanley Paul and Co.

Banks, M. 2007. *The Politics of Cultural Work.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Banks, M. 2010. "The picket line online: Creative labour, digital activism and the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America strike." *Popular Communication* vol 8., no. 1, 20-33.

Banks, M. and Deuze, M. 2009. "Special issue: Co-creative labour". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 12., no. 5.

Banks, M. and Hesmondhalgh, D. 2009. "Looking for work in creative industries policy". *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 15., no. 4. (November), 415-430.

Barthes, R. 1977. *Image, Music, Text.* London: Fontana.

Barthes, R. 1982. "Authors and writers". In S. Sontag ed. *A Barthes Reader,* New York: Noonday Press, 185-193.

Barton Fink. 1991. Written by J. Coen and E. Coen. Directed by J. Coen. [Film]

Bauman, Z. 2001. *The Individualised Society.* Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* Sage: London.

Beck. U. 2000. *The brave new world of work.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Becker, H. 2008. *Art Worlds,* Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition. Berkley: University of California Press.

Becker, H. and Geer, B. 1969. "Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison". In G. McCall and J. Simmons, eds. *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and Reader.* Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley, 322-331.

Being John Malkovich. 1999. Written by C. Kaufman. Directed by S. Jonze. [Film]

Bell, D. 1973. *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society.* New York: Basic Books.

Berman R. 1988. *Fade In: The Screenwriting Process.* Boston, M.A.: Focal Press.

Bielby, W. and Bielby, D. 1996. "Women and men in film: Gender inequality among writers in a culture industry". *Gender and Society* vol. 10., no. 3, 248-270.

Bielby, W. and Bielby, D. 1999. "Organisational mediation of project-based labour markets: Talent agencies and the careers of screenwriters". *American Sociological Review* vol. 64., no. 1, 64-85.

Birch, M. and Miller, T. 2000. "Inviting intimacy: The interview as therapeutic opportunity". *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* vol. 3., no. 3, 189-202.

Blair, H. 2001. " 'You're only as good as your last job': The labour process and labour market in the

British film industry". *Work, Employment and Society,* vol. 15., no. 1, 149-169.

Blair, H. 2003. "Winning and losing in flexible labour markets: The formation and operation of networks of interdependence in the UK film industry". *Sociology* no. 37, 677-694.

Blair, H. and Rainnie, A. 1999. "Flexible films?" *Media, Culture and Society* vol. 22., no. 2, 187-204.

Blair, H., Grey, S., and Randle, K. 2001. "Working in film: Employment in a project-based industry". *Personnel Review v*ol. 30., no. 2, 170-185.

Bonnet, J. 2006. *Stealing Fire from the Gods: The Complete Guide to Story for Writers and Filmmakers.* Studio City, C.A: Michael Wiese Productions.

Bonnie and Clyde. 1967. Written by D. Newman and R. Benton. Directed by A. Penn. [Film]

Booker, C. 2004. *The Seven Basic Plots.* London: Continuum.

Bordwell, D. 1989. *Narration in the Fiction Film.* London: Methuen.

Bordwell, D. 2006. *As Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bordwell, D., Staiger, J. and Thompson, K. 1985. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960.* London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production.* Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press.

Braverman, H. 1974. *Labour and Monopoly Capital.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Brophy, E. 2008. The organisations of immaterial labour: Knowledge worker resistance in post-Fordism. PhD thesis, Queens University.

Bryman, A. 2001. *Social Research Methods,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buscombe, E. 1973. "Ideas of authorship". *Screen* vol. 14., no. 3 (Autumn), 75-85

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. 1997-2003. Created by J. Whedon. [Television series]

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. 1969. Written by W. Goldman. Directed by G. R. Hill. [Film]

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari. 1920. Written by H. Janowitz and C. Mayer. Directed by R. Wiene. [Film]

Caldwell, J. T. 2008. *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Caldwell, J. T. 2009. "Screen studies and industrial 'theorising'". *Screen,* vol. 50., no. 1, 167-179.

Campbell, J. 1949. *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Caprica. 2009- Created by R. Aubuchon and R. Moore. [Television series]

Castells, M. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden: Blackwell.

Castells, M. 1997. *The Power of Identity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Castells, M. 1998. *End of Millenium*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Cherry, S. 2008. "The ontology of a self-help book: A paradox of its own existence". *Social Semiotics* vol. 18., no. 3, 337-348.

Chinatown. 1974. Written by R. Towne. Directed by R. Polanski. [Film].

Chouliaraki, L. and Fairclough, N. 1999. *Discourse in Late Modernity*: *Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Christopherson, S. 1996. "Flexibility and adaptation in industrial relations: The exceptional case of the U.S. media entertainment industries". In L. Gray and R. Seeber, eds. *Under the Stars: Essays on Labour Relations in Arts and Entertainment*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 86-112.

Christopherson, S. 2006. "Behind the scenes: How transnational firms are constructing a new international division of media labour". *Geoforum,* vol. 37., no. 5. (November), 739-751.

Christopherson, S. 2008. "Beyond the self-expressive creative worker: An industry perspective on entertainment media". *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 25., no. 7-8, 73-95.

Christopherson, S. and Storper, M. 1986. "The city as studio; The world as back lot: The impact of vertical integration on the location of the motion picture industry". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* vol. 4., no. 3, 305-320.

Christopherson, S. and Storper, M. 1989. "The effects of flexible specialisation on industrial politics and the labour market: The motion picture industry". *Industrial and Labour Relations Review* vol. 42., no. 3, 331-347.

The Cider House Rules. 1999. Written by J. Irving. Directed by L. Hallstrom. [Film]

Coffey, A. 1999. *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*. London: Sage.

Collins, C. 2007. "Show-runners run the show". *The Los Angeles Times*. [Online]. 23rd November. Available from: http://www.latimes.com/business/la-et-channel23nov23,1,5491248.story [Accessed 28 January 2010]

Conor, B. 2004. "'Hollywood, Wellywood or the backwoods?': The political economy of the New

Zealand film industry". MA thesis. AUT University.

Conor, B. 2010. "'Everybody's a writer': Screenwriting as creative labour". *Journal of Screenwriting* vol. 1., no. 1, 27-43.

Corliss, R. 1974a. "The Hollywood Screenwriter". In G. Mast and M. Cohen, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings.* Fourth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 541-550.

Corliss, R. 1974b. *Talking Pictures: Screenwriters in the American Cinema 1927-1973.* Woodstock, N. Y.: The Overlook Press.

Cornea, C. 2008. "Introduction: Interviews in film and television research". *Cinema Journal,* vol. 47., no. 2, 117-123.

Coughlan, S. and Diamantopoulos, A. 2002. "Market forces lead to a rise in courses for horses". *Times Higher Education*. [Online]. Available from: http:// www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=169014&sectioncode=26 [Accessed 8 December 2009]

Coward, R. 2000. "Dennis Potter and the question of the television author". In R. Stam and T. Miller, eds. *Film and Theory: An Anthology.* Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 7-15.

Cowgill, L. 1999. *Secrets of Screenplay Structure: How to Recognize and Emulate the Structural Frameworks of Great Films.* Los Angeles: Lone Eagle Publishing.

'Creative Training'. 2008. Information sheet". Personal correspondence via email, 29 January 2008. [Anonymised]

'Creative Training'. 2009. Interim Report. Personal correspondence via email, November 2009. [Anonymised]

Crimson Tide. 1995. Written by M. Schiffer. Directed by T. Scott. [Film]

Currid, E. 2009. "The Black List: What it can and cannot do for Hollywood filmmaking." *The Los Angeles Times*. [Online]. December 11. Available from: http://articles.latimes.com/ 2009/dec/11/opinion/la-oe-currid11-2009dec11) [Accessed 28 January, 2010]

Dams, T. 2005. "UK industry comes together to launch film academies". *Screen Daily.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.screendaily.com/uk-industry- comes-together-to-launch-film-academies/4023670.article [Accessed 9 December, 2009]

Dancyger, K. and Rush, J. 2002. *Alternative Scriptwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules.* Third Edition. Boston, M.A: Focal Press.

De Peuter, G. and Dyer-Witheford, N. 2005. "A playful multitude: Mobilising and countermobilising immaterial game labour". *Fibreculture*. [Online]. no. 5. Available at: http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5.html [Accessed 4th October 2007]

Deahl, R. 2006. "Guiding screenwriters". *Publishers Weekly.* [Online]. 27th February. Available at: http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6310959.html [Accessed 12 January 2009]

Department for Media Culture and Sport. 2001. "Culture and creativity: The next ten years". [Online]. Available at: http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4634.aspx [Accessed 29th April 2010].

Denzin, N. 1970. *The Research Act in Sociology.* Chicago: Aldine.

Doctor Who. 2005-2009. Created by Russell T. Davies. [Television series]

Drucker, P. F. 1993. *Post-Capitalist Society.* Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

Du Gay, P. 1996. *Consumption and Identity at Work,* Cambridge: Polity.

Du Gay, P. and Pryke, M. (eds). (2002). *Cultural Aconomy: Cultural analysis and Commercial Life.* London: Sage.

Dyer-Witheford, N. 2004. "Autonomist Marxism and the information society". *Multitudes.* [Online]. no. 5. (June). Available at: http://multitudes.samizdat.net/spip.php?article1502 [Accessed 3rd April, 2008]

Easy Rider. 1969. Written by P. Fonda, D. Hopper and T. Southern. Directed by D. Hopper. [Film]

Egri, L. 1960. *The Art of Dramatic Writing.* New York: Simon and Schuster

Erin Brockovich. 2000. Written by S. Grant. Directed by S. Soderbergh. [Film]

Engel, J. 2000. *Screenwriters on Screenwriting: The Best in the Business Discuss their Craft.* London: MJF Books.

Engel, J. 2002. *Oscar-winning Screenwriters on Screenwriting: The Award-winning Best in the Business Discuss their Craft*. New York: Hyperion.

Epstein, A. 2002. *Crafty Screenwriting: Writing Movies that Get Made*. New York: Henry Holt.

Esenwein, J. B. and Leeds, A. 1913. *Writing the Photoplay.* Springfield, M.A.: The Home Correspondence School.

Featherstone, M. 1991. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism.* London: Sage.

Field, S. 1989. *Selling a Screenplay: The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood.* New York: Delacorte Press.

Field, S. 1994. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting.* New York: Dell Publishing Co.

Fitzgerald, F. S. 1941. *The Last Tycoon,* London: Penguin.

Fontana, A and Frey, J. 2000. "The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text". In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Second Edition. Thousnd Oaks, C.A.: Sage, 645-672.

Florida, R. 2004. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How its Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life.* New York: Basic Books.

Foucault, M. 1984. "What is an author?" In P. Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 101-120.

Foucault, M. 1988. 'Technologies of the self". In L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton, eds. *Technologies of the Self.* London: Tavistock, 16-49.

Friedmann, J. 2000. *How to Make Money Screenwriting.* London: Intellect Books.

Froug, W. 1991. *The Screenwriter Looks at the Screenwriter.* Los Angeles, C.A.: Silman-James Press.

Frow, J. and Morris, M. 2000. "Cultural studies". In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, C.A.: Sage,315-346.

Garnham, N. 2005. "From cultural to creative industries: An analysis of the "creative industries" approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 11., no. 1, 15-29.

Gassner, J. and Nichols, D. 1943. *Twenty Best Film Plays.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Gaut, B. 1997. "Film authorship and collaboration". In R. Allen and M. Smith, eds. *Film Theory and Philosophy.* Oxford: Clarendon Press. 149-172.

Geertz, C. 1993. "Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture". In C. Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* London: Fontana, 3-30.

Geraghty, C. 2003. "Aesthetics and quality in popular television drama". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 6., no. 1, 25-45.

Geraghty, C. 2008. *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Gill, R. 2002. "Cool, creative and egalitarian? Exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe". *Information, Communication and Society* vol. 5., no. 1, 70-89.

Gill, R. 2007. "Technobohemians or the new cybertariat? New media work in Amsterdam a decade after the web". Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures. [Online]. Available at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/genderInstitute/Amsterdam   %20report2.pdf [Accessed 14 April, 2008].

Gill, R. and Pratt, A. 2008. "In the social factory?: Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work theory". *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 25., no. 5, 1-30.

Goldman, W. 1983. *Adventures in the Screen Trade: A Personal View of Hollywood and Screenwriting.* London: Abacus.

The Great Waldo Pepper. 1975. Written by W. Goldman. Directed by J. R. Hill. [Film]

Gregg, M. 2006. *Cultural Studies' Affective Voices.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Grieveson, L. 2009. "On governmentality and screens". *Screen,* vol. 50., no. 1, 180-187.

Gritten, D. 2008. "'The technique of the talkie': Screenwriting manuals and the coming of sound in British cinema". *Journal of British Film and Television v*ol. 5. (November), 262-279.

Grove, E. 2001. *Raindance Writers Lab: Write and Sell the HOT Screenplay,* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Gulino, P. J. 2005. *Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach.* New York and London: Continuum.

Hague, M. 1989. *Writing Screenplays that Sell*. London: Elm Tree Books.

Halloween. 1978. Written by J. Carpenter and D. Hill. Directed by J. Carpenter. [Film]

Hamilton, I. 1990. *Writers in Hollywood 1915-1951.* London: Heinemann.

Hammersley, M. 2003. "Recent radical criticism of interview studies: Any implications for the sociology of education?" *British Journal of Sociology of Education* vol. 24., no. 1, 119-126.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice.* Third Edition. London: Routledge.

Haraway, D. 1996. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective". In E.F. Keller and H. Longino, eds. *Feminism and Science.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 249-263.

Harbord, J. 2007. *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies.* Cambridge: Polity.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2000. *Empire.* Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2004 *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire.* London: Penguin.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. 2009. Written by S. Kloves. Directed by D. Yates. [Film]

Heath, S. 1973. "Comment on 'The Idea of Authorship'". *Screen* vol. 14., no. 3. (Autumn), 86-91

Hesmondhalgh, D. 2007. "Creative labour as a basis of a critique of creative industries policy". In G. Lovink and N. Rossiter, eds. *My Creativity Reader: A Critique of Culture Industries.* Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 59-69.

Hesmondhalgh, D. and Baker, S. (2008). 'Creative Work and Emotional Labour in the Television Industry', *Theory, Culture and Society* 25(5), 97-118.

Hesmondhalgh, F. and Pratt, A. (2005). 'Cultural industries and cultural policy'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 11., no. 1, 1-13.

Hicks, N. 1999. *Screenwriting 101: The Essential Craft of Feature Film Writing.* Los Angeles, C.A.: Michael Wiese Productions.

Higson, A. 1989. "The concept of national cinema". *Screen,* vol. 30., no. 4, 36-46.

Hill, J. 2004. "UK film policy, cultural capital and social exclusion". *Cultural Trends* vol. 13., no. 2, 29-39.

Hillier, J. 1985. *Cahiers du Cinema: 1950s Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave,* Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. 2003. *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling.* Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hollenback, S. 1980. "Analysis of processes involved in screenwriting as demonstrated in screenplays by Ernest Lehman". PhD thesis. University of Texas at Austin.

Holloway, W. and Jefferson, T. 1997. "Eliciting narrative through the in-depth interview". *Qualitative Inquiry* vol. 3., no. 1, 53-71.

Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. 2004. "The active interview". In D. Silverman, ed. *Qualitative research: Theory, Method and Practice,* Second Edition,. London: Sage, 140-161.

Horton, A. 2004. *Screenwriting for a Global Market: Selling your Scripts from Hollywood to Hong Kong.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hunter, L. 1994. *Screenwriting.* London: Hale.

Iglesias, K. 2001. *The 101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters: Insider Secrets from Hollywood's Top Writers*. Avon, M.A.: Adams Media.

Jaws. 1975. Written by R. Benchley and C. Gottlieb, C. Directed by S. Spielberg. [Film].

Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* New York: New York University Press.

Jones, S. 1985. *Applied Qualitative Research.* Adershot: Gower.

Judge, S. 1997. "Giving credit where credit is due?: The unusual use of arbitration in determining screenwriting credits". *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution.* vol. 13, 221-262.

Katz, S. B. 2000. *Conversations with Screenwriters.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Kaufman, C. 2000. *Being John Malkovich*. London: Faber and Faber.

Kincheloe, J. and McLaren, P. 1998. "Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research". In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, eds. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues.* Thousand Oaks: C.A.: Sage, 260-299.

Kohn, N. 2000. "The screenplay as postmodern literary exemplar: Authorial distraction, disappearance, dissolution". *Qualitative Inquiry* vol. 6., no. 4, 489-510.

Kong, L. 2005. 'The sociality of cultural industries: Hong Kong's cultural policy and film industry'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 11., no. 1, 61-76.

Landry, C. 2000. *The Creative City.* London: Earthscan Comedia.

Laporte, N. 2004. "Inside move: Best Koepp 'secret'". *Variety.* [Online]. 14th March. Available at: http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117901643.html?categoryId=1228&cs=1&query=david+koepp+%2B+panic+room [Accessed 21 March, 2009]

Lash, S. and Urry, J. 1987. *The End of Organised Capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity.

Lash, S. and Urry, J. 1994. *Economies of Signs and Spaces.* London: Sage.

Law, J. 2004. *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research.* London and New York: Routledge.

Law, J. and Urry, J. 2004. "Enacting the social". *Economy and Society* vol. 33., no. 3, 390-410.

Lawson, J. H. 1949. *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting.* New York: Putnams.

Lazzarato, M. 1996. "Immaterial labour". In M. Hardt and P. Virno, eds. *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 133-147.

Leadbeater, C. 1999. *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy.* London: Viking.

Lipietz, A. 1987. *Miracles and Mirages: The Crisis of Global Fordism.* London: Verso.

Livingston, P. 1997. "Cinematic authorship". In R. Allen and M. Smith, eds. *Film Theory and Philosophy.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 132-148.

Los Angeles Times. 2008. "The strike zone". [Online]. *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-writersguild-sg,0,5731707.storygallery?coll=la-home-center [Accessed 3 February 2010]

Los Angeles Times. 2009. "The black list: What it can and cannot do for Hollywood filmmaking". [Online]. *Los Angeles Times*, 11th December 2009. Available from: http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/11/opinion/la-oe-currid11-2009dec11 [Accessed 28 January, 2010]

MA in Screenwriting (Fiction) Programme Specification. 2005. Obtained via informant (2009).

MA in Screenwriting (Fiction) Critical Appraisal. 2005. Obtained via informant (2009).

MA in Screenwriting (Fiction) Critical Appraisal Appendices. 2005. Obtained via informant (2009).

MacDonald, I. W. 2004a. The presentation of the screen idea in narrative film-making. PhD thesis. Leeds Metropolitan University.

Macdonald, I. 2004b. "Manuals are not enough: Relating screenwriting practice to theories". *Journal of British Cinema and Television* vol. 1., no. 2, 260-274.

MacDonald, I. 2007. "The struggle for the silents: The British screenwriter from 1910 to 1930". *Journal of Media Practice* vol. 8., no. 2, 115-128.

Mad Men. 2007. Created by Matthew Weiner. [Television series]

Maras, S. 2009. *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice.* London: Wallflower Press.

Martin, A. 1999. 'Making a bad script worse: The curse of the screenwriting manual". [Online]. *Australian Book Review,* April 1999. Available at: http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/April99/mar.html [Accessed 26 March 2009]

Mato, D. 2009. "All industries are cultural: A critique of the idea of 'cultural industries' and new possibilities for research". *Cultural Studies* vol. 23., no. 1, 70-87.

Mayer, V. 2008. "Studying up and f**cking up: Ethnographic interviewing in production studies". *Cinema Journal* vol. 47, no. 2, 141-148.

McGee, M. 2005. *Self-Help Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life.* New York: Oxford University Press.

McGilligan, P. 1986. *Backstory: Interviews with Sreenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

McGilligan, P. 1991. *Backstory 2: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1940s and 1950s.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

McGilligan, P. 1997. *Backstory 3: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1960s.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

McGilligan, P. 2006. *Backstory 4: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1970s and 1980s.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

McGilligan, P. 2010. *Backstory 5: Interviews with Screenwriters of the* 1990s. Berkeley: University of California Press.

McGuigan, J. 2009. "Doing a Florida thing: The creative class thesis and cultural policy". *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 15., no. 3, 291-300.

McGurk, S. 2008. "Spoiler sport". *The Guardian: The Guide,* 19th January 2008, 12-14.

McKee, R. 1998. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting.* London: Methuen.

McKee, R. 2009. "Biography" [Internet]. Available at: http://www.mckeestory.com/bio.html [Accessed 29 March 2009]

McNab, G. 2009. "Can writers change the script?" [Online]. *Screen Daily*. 22nd October 2009. Available at: http://www.screendaily.com/territories/europe/can-the-writers-change-the-script/5007243.article [Accessed 28 January 2009]

McRobbie, A. 1998. *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* London: Routledge.

McRobbie, A. 2002a. "From Holloway to Hollywood: Happiness at work in the new cultural economy?" In P. Du Gay, P. and M. Pryke, eds. *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life.* London: Sage, 97-114.

McRobbie, A. 2002b. "Clubs to companies: Notes on the decline of political culture in speeded up creative worlds". *Cultural Studies* vol. 16., no. 4, (July), 516-531.

McRobbie, A. 2004. "Making a living in London's small scale creative sector". In D. Power and A. Scott, eds. *Culture Industries and the Production of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 130-146.

McRobbie, A. 2005. *The Uses of Cultural Studies.* London: Sage.

McRobbie, A. and Forkert, K. 2009. 'Artists and art schools: For or against innovation? A reply to NESTA'. *Variant*. [Online]. No. 34. Spring. 22-24 Available from: http://www.variant.org.uk/issue34.html [Accessed 27 May, 2010]

Memento. 2000. Written by C. Nolan and J. Nolan. Directed by C. Nolan. [Film]

Menand, L. 2009. "Show or tell: Should creative writing be taught?" [Online]. *The New Yorker.* 8th June, 2009. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/ 2009/06/08/090608crat_atlarge_menand [Accessed 29 April 2010]

Michael Wiese Productions. 'Information request: Screenwriting manuals and books'. [Personal communication via email with Ken Lee]. January 13, 2009.

Millard, K. 2006. "Writing for the screen: Beyond the gospel of story". [Online] *Scan: Journal of Media Arts Culture* vol. 3., no, 2. Available at: http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php? journal_id=77 Accessed 26 March 2009.

Millard, K (2010). "After the typewriter: The screenplay in a digital era". *Journal of Screenwriting* vol. 1., no. 1, 11-25.

Miller, J. and Glassner, B. 2004. "The 'inside' and the 'outside': Finding realities in interviews". In D. Silverman, ed. *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice.* Second Edition, London: Sage, 125-139.

Miller, T., Govil, N., McMurria, J., Maxwell, R. and Wang, T. 2005. *Global Hollywood 2.* London: BFI Publishing.

Miller, T. 2009. "From creative to cultural industries: Not all industries are cultural, and no industries are creative". *Cultural Studies* vol. 23., no. 1, 88-99.

Million + 2008. "Creative futures: Building the creative economy through universities". [Online]. Centre for Creative and Cultural Industries Research, Napier University. Available at: www.millionplus.ac.uk/file.../Creative_Futures_Final_Report_June_08.pdf [Accessed February 25, 2010]

Mol, A. and Law, J. 2002. "Complexities: An introduction". In A. Mol and J. Law, eds. *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1-22.

Morley, D. 1997. "Theoretical orthodoxies: Textualism, constructivism and the 'new ethnography' in cultural studies". In M. Ferguson and P. Golding, eds. *Cultural Studies in Question.* London: Sage, 121-137.

Murphy, J.J. 2010. "No room for the fun stuff: The question of the screenplay in American indie cinema". *Journal of Screenwriting* vol 1., no. 1, 175-196.

Nanook of the North. 1922. Written by R. Flaherty. Directed by R. Flaherty. [Film]

Negus, K. and Pickering, M. 2004. *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value.* London: Sage.

Nelmes, J. 2007. "Some thoughts on analysing the screenplay, the process of screenplay writing and the balance between craft and creativity". *Journal of Media Practice* vol. 8., no. 2, 107-113.

Nelmes, J. 2009. *"*Developing the screenplay *Wingwalking*: A case study". *Journal of British Cinema and Television* vol. 5, 335-35.

Nelson, J.A. 1913. *The Photo-Play: How to Write, How to Sell.* London: Photoplay.

New York Times. 2008. "The 100 day writers strike - A timeline". [Online]. *New York Times,*12 February 2008. Available from: http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/02/12/the-100-day-writers-strike-a-timeline/ [Accessed 3 February 2010]

National Film and Television School. 2010. "A short history of the NFTS". [Online]. Available from: http://www.nfts.co.uk/index.php?module=Content&template=history [Accessed 21 April, 2010]

Nixon, S. and Crewe, B. 2004. "Pleasure at work? Gender, consumption and work-based identities in the creative industries". *Consumption, Markets and Culture* vol. 7, no. 2, 129-147.

Norman, M. 2007. *What Happens Next: A History of American Screenwriting,* New York: Harmony Books.

Oakley, A. 1981. "Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms". In H. Roberts, ed. *Doing Feminist Research.* London: Routledge, 30-61.

Oakley, K. 2009. "The disappearing arts: Creativity and innovation after the creative industries". *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 15., no. 4, (November), 403-413.

One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest. 1975. Written by L. Hauben and B. Goldman. Directed by M. Forman.

Pang, L. 2009. "The labour factor in the creative economy: A Marxist reading". *Social Text* vol. 27., no. 2, 55-76.

Parker, P. 1998. *The Art and Science of Screenwriting.* First Edition. Bristol: Intellect.

Parker, P. 2005. *The Art and Science of Screenwriting.* Second Edition. Bristol: Intellect.

Parker, P. 2009. "Where have all the British screenwriters gone?" [Online]. *Screen Daily,* 24th September 2009. Available from: http://www.screendaily.com/news/opinion/where-have-all-the-screenwriters-gone/5006085.article [Accessed 28th September]

Patterson, F. 1921. *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights.* New York: Harcourt.

Patterson, F. 1928. *Scenario and Screen.* New York: Harcourt.

Paul, A. and Kleingartner, A. 1996. "The transformation of industrial relations in the motion picture and television industries: Talent sector". In L. Gray and R. Seeber, eds. *Under the Stars:*

Essays on Labour Relations in Arts and Entertainment. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 156-180.

Piore, M. and Sabel, C. 1980. *The Second Industrial Divide.* New York: Basic Books.

Polan, D. 2007. *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film,* Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Pollert, A. 1988. "Dismantling flexibility". *Capital and Class* vol. 34, 42-75.

Pope, T. 1998. *Good Scripts, Bad Scripts: Learning the Craft of Screenwriting Through 25 of the Best and Worst Films in History.* New York: Three Rivers Press.

The Power and the Glory. 1933. Written by Preston Sturges. Directed by W. K. Howard.[Film]

Probyn, E. 1993. *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge.

Psycho, 1960. Written by J. Stefano. Directed by A. Hitchcock. [Film].

Pulp Fiction. 1994. Written by R. Avary and Q. Tarantino, Q. Directed by Q. Tarantino. [Film].

Raiders of the Lost Ark. 1981. Written by L. Kasdan. Directed by S. Spielberg. [Film].

Rain Man. 1988. Written by R. Bass and B. Morrow. Directed by B. Levinson. [Film].

Raynauld, I. 1997. "Written scenarios of early French cinema: Screenwriting practices in the first twenty years". *Film History* vol. 9., no. 3, 257-268.

Redvall, E. 2010. "Teaching screenwriting in a time of storytelling blindness: The meeting of the auteur and the screenwriting tradition in Danish film-making". *Journal of Screenwriting* vol. 1., no. 1, 59-81.

Reich, R. 1991. *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism.* New York: Vintage Books.

Rimke, H. 2000. "Governing citizens through self-help literature". *Cultural Studies* vol., 14., no. 1, 61-78.

Rose, N. 1989. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self.* First Edition. Routledge: London.

Rose, N. 1992. "Governing the enterprising self". In P. Heelas and P. Morris, eds. *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate.* London: Routledge, 141-164.

Rose, N. 1998. *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, M. 1941. *Stars and Strikes: Unionisation of Hollywood,* New York: Columbia University Press.

Ross, A. 2004. *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs.* New York: Basic Books.

Ross, A. 2008. "The new geography of work: Power to the precarious?" *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 25., no. 7-8, 31-49.

Ryan, B. 1991. *Making Capital from Culture: The Corporate Form of Capitalist Cultural Production.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Sargent, E.W. 1912. *The Technique of the Photoplay.* New York: Motion Picture World.

Schatz, T. 1988. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era.* London: Faber and Faber.

Schlesinger, P. and Magor, M. 2009. "'For this relief, much thanks': Taxation, film policy and the UK government". *Screen* vol. 50., no. 3, 1-19.

Schultheiss, J. 1971. "The 'Eastern' writer in Hollywood". *Cinema Journal* vol. 11., no. 1, 13-47.

Scott, A.J. 2005. *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Seale, C. 1998. "Qualitative interviewing". In C. Seale, ed. *Researching Society and Culture.* Sage: London, 202-216.

Seger, L. 1994. *Making a Good Script Great,* Los Angeles: Samuel French Trade.

Sennett, R. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism.* London: W.W. Norton.

Sennett, R. 2009. *The Craftsman.* New York: Penguin.

Sex Lives of the Potato Men. 2004. Written by A. Humphries. Directed by A. Humphries.

Shakespeare in Love. 1998. Written by M. Norman and T. Stoppard. Directed by J. Madden. [Film]

The Shawshank Redemption. 1994. Written by F. Darabont. Directed by F. Darabont. [Film]

Sherlock Holmes. 2009. Written by M. R. Johnson, A. Peckham, S. Kinberg and L. Wigram. Directed by G. Ritchie.

Sideways. 2004. Written by A. Payne and J. Taylor. Directed by A. Payne. [Film]

Skillset. 2003. "Developing UK film talent: A comprehensive skills survey for the UK film industry. [Online]. Final Report of the Film Skills Group Research Project, Skillset. Available from: http://www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset_347.pdf?1 [Accessed 12th November 2009].

Skillset. 2007. "Skillset/UK Film Council feature film production workforce survey 2008". [Online]. Available from: http://publications.skillset.org/index.php?id=9&page=10 [Accessed 12th November 2009].

Skillset. 2009a. "Skillset employment census 2009." [Online]. 1 July. Available from: http:// www.skillset.org/research/activity/census/article_7569_1.asp [Accessed 12th November, 2009].

Skillset. 2009b. "Sector skills councils". [Online] Available from: http://www.skillset.org/skillset/role/sector_skills_councils/ [Retrieved 8 December 2009].

Skillset. 2008-09. "Application guidelines: Assessment of screenwriting courses". [Online]. Available from: http://courses.skillset.org/pick_the_tick/accredited_screenwriting_courses/apply_for_course_accreditation [Accessed 1 October, 2009]

Snyder, B. 2005. *Save the Cat! The Only Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need, the Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need.* Los Angeles: Michael Wiese Productions.

The Sopranos. 1999-2007. Created by D.Chase. [Television series]

The Sound of Young America. 2010. "Jane Espenson". [Online]. Available from: http://www.maximumfun.org/sound-young-america/jane-espenson-caprica-executive-producer-interview-sound-young-america [Accessed 12th January 2010]

Staiger, J. 1982. "Dividing labour for production control: Thomas Ince and the rise of the studio system". In G. Kindem, ed. *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures.* Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 94-103.

Staiger, J. 1983. "Individualism versus collectivism". *Screen* vol. 24., no. 4-5, 68-79.

Stam, R. 2000. *Film Theory: An Introduction,* Malden, M.A.: Blackwell.

Stempel, T. 1988. *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film*. New York: Continuum.

Storper, M. 1989. "The transition to flexible specialisation in the us film industry: External economies, the division of labour and the crossing of industrial divides". *Cambridge Journal of Economics* vol. 13., no. 2, 273-305.

Storper, M. 1993. "Flexible specialisation in Hollywood: A response to Aksoy and Robins". *Cambridge Journal of Economics,* vol. 17., no. 4, 479-484.

Stranger Than Fiction. 2006. Written by Z. Helm. Directed by M. Forster. [Film].

Sunset Boulevard. 1950. Written by C. Brackett, B. Wilder and D. M. Marshman Jnr. Directed by B. Wilder. [Film]

Synecdoche, New York. 2009. Written by C. Kaufman. Directed by C. Kaufman. [Film]

Thompson, K. 1999. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique.* Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Tierno, M. 2002. *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters.* New York: Hyperion.

Toffler, A. 1980. *The Third Wave.* London: Pan.

Tomaney, J. 1995. "A new paradigm of work organisation and technology?" In A. Amin, ed. *Post-Fordism: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 157-194.

Trottier, D. 1998. *The Screenwriters Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting and Selling Your Script.* Third eEdition. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press.

Trow, M. 1957. "Comment on participant observation and interviewing: A comparison". *Human Organisation* vol. 16, no. 3, 33-35.

Turner, B. 2007. *The Screenwriter's Handbook,* London: Macmillan.

UK Film Council. 2006. "Scoping study into the lack of women screenwriters in the UK". [Online]. Report prepared by Institute for Employment Studies, University of Sussex. Available from: http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/4/r/0415womenscreen_-_FINAL_09.06.06.pdf [Accessed 31 March 2008]

UK Film Council. 2007. "Writing British films: Who writes British films and how they are recruited". [Online]. Prepared by S. Rogers, Royal Holloway, University of London Available from: http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/5/r/RHUL_June_27_2007_-_Final_for_Cheltenham.pdf [Accessed 12th August, 2008]

UK Film Council. 2009. "Statistical yearbook 2009". [Online]. Available from: http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/yearbook Accessed 12th January 2010]

UK Film Council. 2010. "UK films international market share". [Online]. UK Film Council Research and Statistics Unit. (March). Available from: http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/0/8 UK_films_international_market_share_2009_-_Final_report.pdf [Accessed 19 April 2010]

Unbreakable. 2000. Written by M. N Shyamalan. Directed by M. N. Shyamalan. [Film].

Ursell, G. 2000. "Television production: Issues of exploitation, commodification and subjectivity in UK television labour markets." *Media, Culture and Society* vol. 22., no. 6, 805-825.

Van Osten, M. 2004. "The spaces of a cultural question: An email interview with Brian Holmes". [Online]. Available from: http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/holmes-osten01_en.pdf [Accessed 1st February 2010]

Variety. 2009. "M. Night. Shyamalan: Variety profile". [Online]. *Variety*. Available from: http://www.variety.com/profiles/people/main/35525/M+Night+Shyamalan.html?dataSet=1&query=m.+night+shyamalan [Accessed 21st March, 2009].

Virno, P. 2003. *A Grammar of the Multitude.* London: Semiotext(e).

Vogler, C. 1998. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters.* London: Pan.

Vongova, B. 2007. "Bridging the gap: WGA strike negotiations." [Online]. *Harvard Law Record*, 7th December, 2007. Available from: http://media.www.hlrecord.org/media/   storage/paper609/news/2007/12/06/News Bridging.The.Gap.Wga.Strike.Negotiations-3139281.shtml [Accessed 31st March 2008]

Walker, M. C. 2002. *Power Screenwriting: The Twelve Stages of Story Development.* Los Angeles: Lone Eagle Publishing.

Wayne, M. 2003. "Post-Fordism, monopoly capitalism and Hollywood's media-industrial complex". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol. 6., no. 1, 82-103.

Webber, M. 2000. *Gardner's Guide to Screenwriting: The Writer's Road Map.* Fairfax, V.A.: GGC Inc. Publishing.

Webster, F. 2002. *Theories of the Information Society.* New York: Routledge.

West, N. 1939. *The Day of the Locust.* London: Penguin.

Williams, R (1961). *The Long Revolution.* London: Chatto & Windus.

Windolf, L. 2006. "Leaving schmuckville". [Online]. *Vanity Fair (*March, 2006). Available from: http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2006/03/windolf200603 [Accessed 5 April, 2009]

Winston, D. 1973. *The Screenplay as Literature.* London: Tantivy Press.

The Wire. 2002-2008. Created by David Simon. [Television series]

Wolff, J. and Cox, K. 1988. *Successful Screenwriting.* Cincinnati, Ohio: Writers Digest Books.

Wollen, P. 1972. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.

Woolcock, N. 2008. "Vocational courses double in popularity". *The Times* (23rd July, 2008). Available from: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/education/article4383503.ece [Accessed 8 December 2009]

Writers Guild of America West. 2007. "The 2007 Hollywood writers report: Whose stories are we telling?*"* [Online]. Available from: http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/HWR07_exec.pdf [Accessed 31 March 2008]

Writers Guild of America West. 2008. "Schedule of minimums: Theatrical and basic agreement. [Online]. 13th February, 2008. Available from: http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/writers_resources/contracts/min2008.pdf [Accessed 21 March, 2009]

Writers Guild of America West. 2009. "2009 Hollywood writers report: Re-writing an all-too-familiar story?" [Online]. Available from: http://www.wga.org/content/subpage_whoweare.aspx?id=922 [Accessed 15 December 2009]

Writers Guild of Great Britain. 2009. "Writing film: A good practice guide". [Online]. Available from: http://www.writersguild.org.uk/public/userimages/File/Guidelines/WG_film_Oct09_LR.pdf Accessed 15 December 2009]

Wyatt, J. 1994. *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Zathura: A Space Adventure. 2005. Written by D. Koepp and J. Kamps. Directed by J.   Favreau. [Film]

Additional Online Sources Cited:

BBC Writers Room: http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/

Creative Screenwriting Magazine podcasts: http://creativescreenwritingmagazine.blogspot.com/

Jane Espenson: http://www.janeespenson.com/

Jane Espenson on 'The Sound of Young America' podcast: http://www.maximumfun.org/sound-young-america/jane-espenson-caprica-executive-producer-interview-sound-young-america

The Artful Writer: http://www.artfulwriter.com

The Script Connection: http://www.thescriptconnection.net/about.htm

The Script Factory: http://www.scriptfactory.co.uk/go/Default.html

Simply Scripts script hosting: www.simplyscripts.com

Script-o-rama script hosting: www.Script-o-rama.com

Agent Provocateur, Twelve Point: http://blog.twelvepoint.com/

Writers Guild of America West: http://www.wga.org/

Writers Guild of America East: http://www.wgaeast.org/

Writers Guild of Great Britain: http://www.writersguild.org.uk/public/index.html

Appendix One: Fieldwork Summary

Interviews conducted:

Joshua P. Screenwriting teacher - 2 March 2009

Bruce T. Screenwriting teacher - 11 March 2009

Sam P. Screenwriter and screenwriting teacher - 18 March 2009

John S. Screenwriting teacher and development consultant - 25 March 2009

Dale T. Screenwriter – 31 March 2009

Ed R. Screenwriter and Script Editor – 31 March 2009

Todd D. Screenwriter – 10 April 2009

Linda L. Screenwriting teacher and script consultant - 12 May 2009

Jane M. Screenwriter and screenwriting teacher - 21 May 2009

Sandra K. Screenwriter/Skillset assessor – 2 June 2009

Erin B. Script editor/Skillset assessor (via email) - 6 July 2009

Karen H. Screenwriter/teacher/consultant - 22 October 2009

Louise R. Screenwriter and screenwriting teacher - 19 November 2009

Phil R. Producer - 13 December 2009

Lindsay A. Script development assistant (via phone) - 11 December 2009

Ben J. - Screenwriter - 13 October 2009

Alan F. - Screenwriter and Director - 6th February 2010

Observations of:
- Skillset course assessment process at an anonymous higher education institution.
- 'Second draft Masterclass' at 'Creative Training' host institution with 'development expert' Tina A.
- 'Genre' lecture conducted by Louise R. to her MA Screenwriting class at an anonymous higher education institution
- MA screenwriting seminar at an anonymous higher education institution led by Tess K.
- Screenwriting skills seminar at an anonymous public institution led by Karen H.

More casual 'mid-level' discussions:
- UK Film Council Head of Research
- 'Creative Training' administrators and organisers
- Head of Women in Film and TV (WFTV)
- Writers Guild of Great Britain - Brief discussion on phone but no response to questions and numerous requests for interview

Question and Answer sessions/screenings attended with:
- David Simon (speaking about *The Wire,* 2002-2008)
- Andrew Davies (speaking about *Little Dorrit,* 2008)
- Charlie Kaufman (speaking about *Synecdoche New York,* 2009)
- Nick Hornby (speaking about *An Education,* 2009)
- Jane Campion (speaking about *Bright Star*, 2009)

Other elements of my own 'education' in the topic:
- Creative Screenwriting podcasts.
- Podcasts and videos from Cheltenham Screenwriters Festival.
- My participation in the Screenwriting Research Network (based at the University of Leeds) and involvement in their two conferences (Leeds and Helsinki) to-date and publication in the new *Journal of Screenwriting* (Intellect).
- My own viewing/consuming/engaging with texts and commentary from screenwriters and producers eg. *The Wire, Mad Men, Dr Who* etc.
- Reading screenwriters' blogs (see above for website Details): Jane Espenson, The Artful Writer, Agent Provocateur.
- Participating in industry debates: For example, Phil Parker's 2009 *Screen Daily* article and my online comment at his request.

Appendix Two: Indicative Pedagogical Map

Skillset approved courses:

MA PG/Dip Screenwriting at Bournemouth University
MA Creative Writing (Plays and Screenplays) at City University London
MA Screenwriting at Edinburgh Napier University
MA Scriptwriting at Goldsmiths, University of London
MA Screenwriting at Liverpool John Moores University
MA Screenwriting at London College of Communication
MA Screenwriting at London Film School
MA Screenwriting at the National Film and Television School
MA Feature Film Screenwriting at Royal Holloway, University of London
MA Creative Writing: Scriptwriting at the University of East Anglia

Many other undergraduate and postgraduate courses, for example:

The University of Bolton - BA (Hons) in Media Writing and Production
Bristol University - MA in Film and Television Production
The Central College of London - One-year diploma in film-making including screenwriting courses
Leeds Metropolitan Film School - Film Production courses
London Film Academy - One-year Screenwriting Diploma and six month Writer-Director Diploma
London School of Film, Media and Performance - BA (Hons) and MA in Screenwriting
New York Film Academy, London - One-year diplomas in filmmaking including Screenwriting
Screen Academy Wales - BA (Hons) in Film and Video and MA Film with specialisms in Screenwriting
Sheffield Hallam University - BA (Hons) in Scriptwriting with Screen Studies and MA Film Studies with Screenwriting
Southampton Solent University - BA (Hons) Screenwriting and MA Media Writing and Media Practice
Met Film School - BA Practical Filmmaking (one and two-year programs) and short and part-time courses in screenwriting and filmmaking
University of Central Lancashire - BA Screenwriting and Moving Image
University of Greenwich - BSc (Hons) Film and Television Production

Further selected locations/short courses/workshops for screenwriting training, networking and development:

BBC Writers Room
http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/
Accepts unsolicited television scripts and runs workshops for writers, for example the Drama Writers Academy

The BBC has also recently launched the BBC Film Network, an online portal which features and archives new short films and filmmakers as well as 'case studies' and interviews with and about British filmmaking
http://www.bbc.co.uk/filmnetwork/

Berlinale Talent Campus
http://www.berlinale-talentcampus.de/

Six-day creative summit for 'up and coming' filmmakers as part of the Berlin Film Festival

Equinoxe Screenwriters Workshop
http://www.equinoxetbc.fr/

Euroscript Screenwriters Workshop
http://www.lsw.org.uk/
European screenwriters training

Industrial Scripts
http://industrialscripts.co.uk/
Script Analysis and Scriptwriter Training

Inktip
http://www.inktip.com/index.php
Networking site for film professionals and script-hosting site

Lighthouse
http://www.lighthouse.org.uk/index.htm
Courses include:
Introduction to Screenwriting
Further steps to Screenwriting
Screenwriting for Television
Script Development

The London Script Consultancy
http://www.scriptconsultancy.com/
Online network, short courses and script consultancy

PAL Labs
http://www.pallabs.org/
Fact/Fiction film development program

Raindance
http://www.raindance.co.uk/site/
Evening and weekend writing courses and script reading and registration services

Rocliffe
http://www.rocliffe.com/homepage.php
Production company and networking organisation.

The Script Factory
www.scriptfactory.co.uk
Script development organisation also offers training events, short courses, seminars

Shooting People
https://shootingpeople.org/account/auth.php
Online networking organisation for filmmakers

Programs now closed:

Arista Workshop

First Film Foundation

North by Northwest

Moonstone International

Appendix Three: European Screenwriters Manifesto

Stories are at the heart of humanity and are the repository of our diverse cultural heritage. They are told, retold and reinterpreted for new times by storytellers. Screenwriters are the storytellers of our time.

European writing talent should be trusted, encouraged and supported. The European film industries need to find ways to attract and keep its screenwriters in the cinema and in their craft.

We assert that:

• The screenwriter is an author of the film, a primary creator of the audiovisual work.

• The indiscriminate use of the possessory credit is unacceptable.

• The moral rights of the screenwriter, especially the right to maintain the integrity of a work and to protect it from any distortion or misuse should be inalienable and should be fully honored in practice.

• The screenwriter should receive fair payment for every form of exploitation of his work.

• As author the screenwriter should be entitled to an involvement in the production process as well as in the promotion of the film and to be compensated for such work. As author he or she should be named in any publication accordingly, including festival catalogues, TV listing magazines and reviews.

We call on:

• National governments and funding agencies to support screenwriters by focusing more energy and resources, whether in form of subsidy, tax breaks or investment schemes, on the development stage of film and television production and by funding writers directly.

• Scholars and film critics to acknowledge the role of screenwriters , and universities, academies and training programmes to educate the next generations in accordance to the collaborative art of the medium and with respect towards the art and craft of screenwriting.

• Festivals, film museums and other institutions to name the screenwriters in their programs and plan and screen film tributes to screenwriters just as they do to directors, actors and countries.

• National and European law should acknowledge that the writer is an author of the film.

• National and European law should ensure that screenwriters can organise, negotiate and contract collectively, in order to encourage and maintain the distinct cultural identities of each country and to seek means to facilitate the free movement of writers in and between all nations.

We will:

• Distribute this manifesto to industry members and the press in our respective countries.

• Campaign for the implementation of the agenda defined by this manifesto.

• Seek the transition into national and European law of the legal changes demanded by this manifesto.

Available at: http://www.scenaristes.org/manifesto.htm
[Accessed 5th May, 2010]

Appendix Four: World Conference of Screenwriters Declaration

In the new digitised and globalised world, we screenwriters have today come together, in Athens Greece, to discuss our central role in the creation of the stories that are carried with such impact to the world's myriad screens and to people's minds and hearts.

Stories influence our behaviour and shape our culture. They help us understand. Stories can conquer fear. Stories have power. As screenwriters, the storytellers of our time, we are conscious of our role and our responsibility and we have met to make sure that we can continue our work in the new environment.

The creative and financial challenges which we face, can only be met if we join forces and work together. We insist on the individual capacity of every one of the twenty five thousnd screenwriters, whose representatives are gathered here, to see and understand the world in their own way and to reflect that unique perspective in their stories. We exult in the knowledge that individual creativity is what brings us together to defend and assert our common rights and goals.

We endorse the ambitions and intentions of the Charter of the FSE, the Charter of the IAWG and the Manifesto of the European Screenwriters.
We demand the right of screenwriters everywhere to be acknowledged as an author of the audiovisual work which they have written and to be fairly compensated for each and every use made of their work.

In pursuit of these objectives we will engage in active collaboration on campaigns that seek to achieve our common goals.

We pledge to work together to defend and extend the rights of writers for the screen.

Agreed and Signed on Saturday 7th November 2009 in Athens at the conclusion of the first World Conference of Screenwriters :

Christina Kallas

President

Federation des Scenaristes en Europe/Federation of Screenwriters in Europe

Michael Winship

Chair

International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds

November 7th, 2009

Available at: http://wcos.wordpress.com/2009/11/07/world-screenwriters-declaration/

[Accessed 5th May, 2010]