Book Reviews

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SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT: CRITICAL APPROACHES, CREATIVE PRACTICES, INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES, CRAIG BATTY AND STAYCI TAYLOR (EDS) (2021)

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In *Script Development: Critical Approaches, Creative Practices, International Perspectives*, Craig Batty and Stayci Taylor bring together contributors to explore the topic of script development through complementary critical and creative perspectives. Script development defies standardized definition as the process is often an amalgamation of drafts, edits, rewrites and so on, with input from people with differing

commercial and creative objectives. As such, script development research has been academically problematic due to the perception that it is a collaborative practice that displaces notions of authorship and intent for scholarly investigations (see Baker 2013; Batty et al. 2016; Batty and Baker 2018; Macdonald 2010). Building on a special issue of the *Journal of Screenwriting* (Batty et al. 2017) this book establishes a solution by drawing on a broad range of theoretical perspectives and first-person experiences to reveal aspects of script development that might otherwise remain hidden. The collection offers readers an opportunity to see how practitioner-scholars engage the topic and the current depth of research in screenwriting studies.

Part One: 'Looking into development: Theories on practice', presents chapters by scholars whose research explores script development from a range of critical and theoretical perspectives. Ian McDonald problematizes the concepts of originality and authorship in developing a screen idea by questioning if we are correct to focus on individual authorship as the prime source of originality in an activity that is distinguishable as highly collaborative. Cath Moore and Radha O'Meara provide a discourse analysis of national screen funding bodies from Australia and Denmark to compare the conceptualization and processes of script development in these two contexts. Through a series of interviews, Petr Szczepanik provides an in-depth analysis of how the precariousness of script development in the Czech Republic impacts national film identity. Glenda Hambly provides a case study of script development practices and the culture of funding body Screen Australia, providing interviews with agency executives and twenty-two of Australia's most successful screenwriters.

Part One progresses to examine television productions from three continents. Caryn Murphy analyses script development in US broadcasting through the classic crime drama *Ironside* (1967–75), investigating the restraints of commercial imperatives and the impact on narrative structure. In collaboration, Carmen Sofia Brenes, Margaret McVeigh, Alejandro C. Reid, and Alberto N. García explore script development to create an anti-hero character for Chilean miniseries *Heroes* (2007–09). Concluding Part One, Rosamund Davies provides a case study of an international co-production – the Icelandic crime drama *Trapped* (2015) – to examine the difficulties and opportunities of cross-national (and cross-cultural) screenwriting collaboration.

In Part Two: 'Looking out from script Development: Practice into Theory', contributors explore script development from the position of an involved practitioner to theorize through real-life experiences or writing, editing, producing and directing across differing contexts. Joshua McNamara provides first-hand field experience as an assistant scriptwriter for a feature film made in Nairobi, building on the notion that participant observation as a means of research during script development embodies ethnography and invites investigations of global culture. Mark Eby reflects on developing a film project conceived as a creative media initiative to create content that engages with the social issue of gender-based violence through participation and collaboration from young people in Papua New Guinea. Christina Milligan provides a reflective case study of Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay to examine his writing process during their collaboration on an unproduced feature film script and the agency of indigenous people to control indigenous image-making through screen storytelling. Through interviews conducted with professional screenwriters, Noel Maloney and Philippa Burne address the creativity,

intensity and tensions that emerge during collaborative script development in Australian television drama writer's rooms.

Building on the premise that a sitcom begins with characters, D. T. Klika posits that comedy emerges from character reactions and actions that develop during the earliest script development stage and critically examines a beat sheet for her own sitcom pilot. Emma Bolland and Louise Sawtell combine to outline their respective approaches to developing scripts and conceptualize a performative process of script development that envisions multiple endpoints and recontextualizes how a script can be perceived and experienced. Siobhan Jackson reflects on her feature film's development process to provide a case study of working outside commercial filmmaking that questions the traditional desire to create a screenplay formula and showcases a 'non-traditional' approach to screen story development that privileges organic spontaneity and unpredictability during filming. The book concludes with Craig Batty and Stayci Taylor, who identify that the implied and assumed discourse of script development is to improve the script in question, a problematic concept due to the subjectivity of improvement as a quantifiable achievement. Against this, the authors draw on critical discussions to explore and theorize the implicit and explicit expectations of betterment in script development.

Batty and Taylor clarify their aim to provide a 'foundational collection that […] will inspire others to research and write about the practice [of script development]' (2021: 5). Contributors are passionate about the subject matter, and each article contributes to the central topic and illuminates the depth of research currently being carried out. The variety of experiences and methods will introduce readers to fresh perspectives and theoretical insights of script development that they may not otherwise

consider. The aim 'to inspire' was abundantly fulfilled in my case, as I am sure will be the case for others. The book is highly recommended to anyone looking to expand their knowledge and understanding of script development.

References

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Heroes (2007–09), Chile, Canal 13; 23/03/07–19/05/09, 60 mins x 8 eps.

Ironside (1967–75), Cr: Collier Young; USA: NBC; 14/09/67–16/01/75, 60 mins x 199

    eps.

Macdonald, I. W. (2010). 'Editorial', *Journal of Screenwriting,* 1:1, pp. 7–10.

Trapped (2015), Cr: Baltasar Kormákur; Iceland: RÚV; 27/12/15–present, 60 mins x 20

    eps.