The screenplay and the spectator: Exploring audience identification in narrative structure

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Abstract

In 'The protagonist's dramatic goals, wants and needs', published in *Journal of Screenwriting* in 2010, screenwriting analyst Patrick Cattrysse offers a revision of character 'want' and 'need', a common trope in screenwriting guides and manuals, to develop a protagonist's arc throughout a story. His revision expands on this theory to include the audience and their subconscious connection with a character. This connection can generate feelings of sympathy and empathy, which can lead to identification. It can also create feelings of fear or anxiety in the audience based on their knowledge of the character. In 'Her body, himself: Gender in the Slasher' (1987), film analyst Carol Clover identifies the 'Final Girl' theory, a trope found in the horror 'slasher' subgenre. The Final Girl is easily identifiable for both screenplay readers and film spectators and is an ideal theoretical model to explore the revision that Cattrysse speaks of, in a practical setting. This article investigates how the screenplay and screenwriter can play a leading role in better understanding the implied reader or spectator in film studies. It concludes that scholarly research into screenwriting can benefit the writer in a practical setting.

Introduction

Since the earliest screenwriting manual publications dating back to 1911, there has been a continuous effort on the part of so-called 'gurus' to describe the consumption habits of the implied spectator of the film industry to the amateur screenwriter, and to help the writer better understand his or her own methodological approach to the craft. These publications hinge on the authors' supposed knowledge of how audiences engage with a film, typically those of the Hollywood model. Similarly, another collection of how-to guides (see Vogler 2007; Mckee 1999), this time dealing with Campbell-ian mythology and the narratological aspects of cinema, has developed with a focus on a different consumer, the implied reader. The common goal of these publications is to teach the struggling writer how to engage both readers and spectators, by employing narrative devices in a script and by using a self-reflective, practice-led mode of learning. However, academic research into readers and audience response reveals a reluctance by theoreticians to accept such a procedural method. This divide in the perception of audiences, from a scholarly and industrial context, represents just one aspect of a greater rift in screenwriting culture – that is, a segregation of the academe and the industry at large. The result of this divide is, according to Patrick Cattrysse, that 'practitioners and theoreticians have missed opportunities to learn from each other' (2010: 84).

One frequently cited device in these manuals are the character tropes 'want' and 'need'. 'Want' and 'need' are common among screenwriting enthusiasts thanks to the work of 'gurus' such as McKee and Vogler, and describes the character's pursuit of his or her dramatic 'want' and the eventual realization of an internal 'need'. Cattrysse offers a revision of this trope, arguing that the conflict is not between the character's own 'want' and 'need' but between that of the character's 'want' and the *audience's* 'need'. 'The conflict (if there is one) plays between what a character wants to do and what they should do' (Cattrysse 2010: 91). The revision can be summed up as such: due to the structural qualities of the film's narrative, the information that is revealed to the audience may not correlate with that which the character receives in the story. Thus, it can become clear to the audience what the character's 'need' is long before it does to the character in the story. 'It is the audience who judge what a character should or should not do' based on their own value systems (Cattrysse 2010: 91). The writer's ability to understand these value systems is significant. Audiences draw on their own values and project them onto a character as a means of engaging with the story, as Cattrysse explains:

This re-definition links the wants and needs debate with the much wider and far more complex study of audience involvement and its relationships with the value systems expressed in a narrative and those experienced by a viewer. (2010: 83)

This imaginary connection that exists between the reader or viewer and the character can generate feelings of sympathy and empathy in the audience, which can lead to identification. Understanding the character's internal 'need' first requires audiences to reflect on their own characteristics, such as bravery or cowardice, or on the many other traits that characters are tested for in cinema. The process can reveal, consciously or otherwise, an audience's own character traits. Genre can also play a key role in determining the connection between character and audience. The genre of a film helps establish archetypal characteristics in the mind of the audience, which can lead to assumptions of genre convention and inform whether they will engage with, or repel, a character.

This article accepts that from an industrial perspective the screenwriter is expected to consider the audience in their writing at all times, and it will argue that facilitating and manipulating their identification with characters in the story is one means of engaging the implied reader or spectator. It will detail my attempts to apply these academic theories within a practice-led piece of writing, an original screenplay called *At the Crossing*, written as part of my Ph.D. thesis. As a method of analysis, I will be using Clover's Final Girl theory (1987), because it was used as a narrative technique in the writing of *At the Crossing*. Final Girl theory is suitable because of its role in identification studies in cinema, but also because it exemplifies the dialogue that exists between character and audience. At the conclusion of his essay, Cattrysse highlights the challenge that practitioners face when trying to turn these theories into 'workable writing tools' (2010: 95), and this article seeks to demonstrate how a wider exploration of the response criticism of readers and audiences within cinema can help the screenwriter to transform these theories into tools to further his or her own writing.

The issue of implied readership

The term 'implied reader' was coined by W.C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983) as a counter-argument to the implied author. This is the projected or 'ideal' reader that the author had in mind when writing the work (Schmid 2013). The ideal reader can be described as belonging 'exclusively to the sphere of the real author, in whose imagination he or she exists'

(Schmid 2013). In short, the ideal recipient of the message 'is a mirror image, who is the equivalent of the author, which duplicates him or her' (Baxtin cited in Schmid 2013).

The screenplay as a medium is unique in that it is written for different readers, not just as the basis for a film that audiences will participate in. These 'ideal' readers exist as agents, producers, directors, actors and in the many other roles that constitute a film's production. I use the term 'ideal' reader in this article because they are unknown to the writer. Even in such cases where the writer knows the identity of their readers, they cannot predict how the reader will engage with the script. In this regard, they are theoretical. Perhaps an agent reads the script looking for sales potential, or a producer might read with an eye for budgetary concerns. A director and an actor may seek out similar aspects relating to character and story, while a cinematographer might read it for its visual cues. Or perhaps the reading is purely for entertainment. This is not unlikely in a medium that is built on the premise of 'distraction for profit' (Harvey 1991: 46). The reading of screenplays has become a popular past time among film fans who see the literary artefact as a window into the production of their favourite film. The reader wields influence over the writing process, and over the writer who seeks their acceptance.

The leap from ideal reader to ideal spectator changes the nature of this presumptuous avenue of discourse. After all, the screenplay and the film are two vastly different forms of media, employing very different consumption techniques. Passolini's 'The screenplay as a "Structure that wants to be another Structure"' (1986) advances a view of incompleteness taken by the industry regarding the screenplay, and acknowledges the complexities of trying to write for the screen using only the written word, in a medium that is considered to be in a state of metamorphosis. Taking the view of commercial cinema specifically, it is difficult to imagine a film being made without the influence of an audience guiding the development process. It is one example of how significant the field of audiencing is for the writer.

Audience identification with character

The field of spectatorship has produced an array of theories to master the reading and viewing practices of the movie-going audience. Identification studies is one such area of research, and it reveals much about how we read and spectate. The abundance of identification studies that exist in film scholarship also provides a valuable spring for screenwriters looking to channel their ideal reader. The term 'identification' can be problematic due to the variety of definitions that are associated with it. While the work of Christian Metz (1975), one of the most prolific scholars of identification studies in cinema, is

acknowledged here, this research privileges the Freudian definition of partial, or secondary, identification as described by Kagan:

> Primary identification referred to the initial, undifferentiated perception of the infant in which an external object was perceived as part of the self, while secondary identification began after the child had discriminated a world of objects separate from the self… Identification was described by Freud as 'the endeavor to mould a person's own ego after the fashion of one that has been taken as a model'. (Kagan 1958: 297–98)

As a literary device, identification 'simplifies the relationship between audience and story' (Dancyger and Rush 2006: 117). Screenwriting analysts Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush suggest that audiences identify with characters 'who are in difficult situations' (Dancyger and Rush 2006: 117). However, it is arguable that it is not the situation that we identify with, as after all how many of us can identify with being in the situations that most Hollywood movies propose? For example, an audience can hardly relate to the life of Maximus, the Roman General, in *Gladiator* (1999), though we can certainly relate to Maximus mourning the loss of his mentor and father figure, Emperor Marcus Aurelias, or identify with his decision to turn his back on the murderous heir Commodus, when he asks for Maximus' loyalty afterwards. The choices and actions a character makes throughout a narrative can play a significant role in encouraging an audience to identify with them. While this is not the only method by which an audience can identify with a text or character, it is a conducive method for screenwriters seeking to use identification studies as a literary device, given the emphasis placed on action and character decisions in screenwriting.

Carol Clover's Final Girl, explored in her 1987 work 'Her body, himself: Gender in the slasher film', is a 'slasher' horror film trope that suitably encapsulates the theory of identification through character decision. The Final Girl is the 'androgynous female character who suffers the monster's tortures throughout the film, but who ultimately defeats him and survives' (Briefel 2005: 17). The Final Girl theory is not one generally applied in the construction of a film; rather it is the result of genre analysis and a deconstruction of the completed film. Nevertheless, it is a framework that can be reverse-engineered to help in the writer's goal to manipulate the audience's engagement with a character. After all, the Final Girl survives because of the wise actions and decisions she makes throughout her journey, and this can facilitate audience and reader engagement, if only because of the many times we have found ourselves captivated by the dramatic irony of the scene, shouting at the screen for

the protagonist not to go down the dark corridor alone. The underlying themes of this trope exploit deeply rooted views of masculinity and femininity in cinema, relying heavily on psychological audience responses, such as male castration anxiety. Briefel (2005) explains the significance of Clover's theories in relation to identification studies:

> The Final Girl's subjection to and eventual victory over the monster provide a site of identification for the male spectator. Revising Laura Mulvey's view that the male spectator's gaze is sadistic, Clover argues that his identification with the Final Girl demonstrates a masochistic impulse: 'The willingness and even eagerness (so we judge from these films' enormous popularity) of the male viewer to throw in his emotional lot, if only temporarily, with not only a woman but a woman in fear and pain, at least in the first instance, would seem to suggest that he has a vicarious stake in that fear and pain'. (Briefel 2005: 17)

The theory of the Final Girl is also a theory of cross-identification, because it suggests that audiences shift their identification from one character to another, and also across gender. Klaus Rieser argues that male audiences do not immediately identify with the Final Girl (2001: 384), and that their initial identification is instead placed with the monster or the killer. From a structural perspective this can be explained by the fact that the identity of the Final Girl is elusive early in the story; however, when her identity is revealed, we shift our positioning, and with it our identification onto her, as Clover explains:

> We are linked, in this way, with the killer in the early part of the film, usually before we have seen him directly and before we have come to know the Final Girl in any detail. Our closeness to him wanes as our closeness to the Final Girl waxes – a shift underwritten by storyline as well as camera position. (1987: 208)

The shifting positioning described is facilitated by the narrative. Certainly it is the case that not every 'slasher' film asks audiences to position themselves with the killer. A common argument for our attraction to these films is that we are engrossed in the thrill of escaping the killer, much like a horror videogame. However, it is not unreasonable to think that audiences would feel wholly unsatisfied if they were viewing a 'slasher' film that did not contain any 'slashing'. In *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (J. Staiger, 2000), Staiger uses *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), one of the earliest 'slashers' and an example of

Final Girl theory, to not only demonstrate perverse identification on the part of the audience but also to defend her own positioning with the cannibalistic family in the film.

> They are, after all, worthy of our respect. They have responded ingeniously to their culture and environment. They speak for the value of traditional crafts and the sanctity of private property. They have not gone on welfare. They have decorated their home in a way that reflects their personality (grandmother and the family dog have been dried and put on display, their armchairs are armchairs). Besides, anyone who expresses himself with a chainsaw can't be all bad. (Staiger 2000: 182)

Staiger's amusing analysis stands as a fitting example of how even the most repulsive characters can become a focal point for our identification. The key to the success of these films lies in the perverse corners of our psyche, which is what makes the Final Girl trope such a fascinating and enlightening avenue of audience research. Our desire to position with the monster in these films reveals much about our value systems as viewers and the aggressive tendencies that reside within us.

As Cattrysse explains in his own theory, the audience draws their own conclusions as to what the characters should and should not do next (2010). These conclusions are based on their own value systems, which means that the structural qualities of the narrative must also facilitate audiences to challenge, define and understand such values. Like the characters of a screenplay following a predetermined 'arc', so too are audiences being taken on a journey of growth and discovery. The arc for the audience, in this example, involves challenging their aggressive tendencies by taking up a position with a morally ambiguous character, the killer, before finally transitioning to a morally 'good' character later in the story, the Final Girl.

Psycho (1960) facilitates the kind of perverse spectatorship *that* Staiger speaks of, but it is also appropriate for studying audience identification in cinema. The film, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, demonstrates cross-identification early in the story, as the audience is initially positioned with Marion Crane. However, their attachment soon shifts to Norman, as Leo Braudy explains:

> We follow Norman into the next room and watch as he moves aside a picture to reveal a peephole into Marion's cabin. He watches her undress and, in some important way, we feel the temptress is more guilty than the Peeping Tom. (Braudy 1968: 25)

The male gaze only serves to cement our identification with Bates. Mulvey's analysis of the Hitchcock-directed *Vertigo* (1958) can be applied to *Psycho* also. The viewer 'finds himself exposed as complicit, caught in the moral ambiguity of looking' (Mulvey 1975). This complicity continues in *Psycho* with Crane's murder soon after. 'Finally at peace with herself, she is killed by Norman Bates and we are left in a position of voyeur, and so are implicated in her death' (Dancyger and Rush 2006: 179). It can be argued that it is not just the objectification of Marion that shifts the audience's position from one character to the other, but it is also the character's traits that shift our identification. Though Bates is an unlikely candidate for audiences to identify with, his admirable qualities make it possible. Norman cares for his ailing mother, whom we believe to still be alive in the family home at that point in the story. He also works tirelessly to maintain the family business. It is not difficult for audiences, who are constantly projecting their own value systems onto the characters, to align themselves with Bates, given that we already acknowledge Marion Crane to be a thief. Given the nature of the story, it is also equally possible that this perverse identification is intentional. Hitchcock, as director/storyteller, has frequently exploited our desire to identify with morally 'good' characters. 'He plays malevolently on the audience assumption that the character we sympathize with most, whose point of view we share, is the same character who is morally right in the story the movie tells' (Braudy 1968: 24). The thrill of the film, after the death of one of the protagonists, Marion, now comes in the form of the audience's shared fears and anxieties with Norman, as he tries to cover up the murder. Grodal's analysis of *Psycho* from a character identification perspective gives weight to this notion of 'unnatural sympathy' (1997: 95). Grodal uses the scene of Bates trying to dispose of Crane's car in the swamp as an example of the audience's identification with Bates. The car slowly begins to sink into the swamp, but then it stops momentarily.

> The viewer worries during the short halt in the sinking and experiences a feeling of relief when the car starts to sink again. The viewer has cognitively identified himself with the young man over a longer period of time, and has, during this period, been 'forced' to 'actualize' the emotions which are presupposed in order to give coherence and meaning to his acts ('I must wash off the smear of blood', 'I must dispose of the body and the car', and so forth). (Grodal 1997: 95)

The success of *Psycho* as a thriller, and as a case study for audience identification, is in large part because of how it is structured in the screenplay. Historical insights into Hitchcock's

collaborations with his screenwriters (see Raubicheck 2011) reveal how highly he considered the screenplay above all other modes of film production. This further highlights how instrumental the screenplay can be in directing an audience's responses in the movie theatre.

Application of theory in practice-led research

This article has so far demonstrated how Final Girl theory can be used as a narrative framework for facilitating engagement between audience and character, much like the way audiences engaged with *Psycho*. However, it is also important to explore this theory in genres other than horror, in order to fully demonstrate the usefulness of such a framework to the practitioner. The structural aspects that make Final Girl theory so compelling from the perspective of audience positioning and identification are not exclusive to the 'slasher' sub-genre, and to demonstrate this I offer one more case study. This case study is a piece of practice-led research in the form of a feature-length screenplay, *At the Crossing*, a drama written to industry standards, and a part of my doctoral dissertation.

At the Crossing is a feature film inspired by the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, a subject that has (at the time of writing) yet to be adapted to the screen in an authentic manner. The most well-known attempt to bring this world to mainstream audiences was with the survival horror film *Chernobyl Diaries* (2012), which depicted the people of the area as mutant creatures. I wanted to create a more accurate representation of these people and the region, but in a way that was relatable to a similar audience. The primary goal of writing this film was to better understand audiences' and readers' responses, particularly those related to studies of identification. In keeping with traditional screenwriting practice, no empirical audience data were drawn upon to inform the writing process; rather, I embraced a reflexive approach to the practice, using systematic redrafting techniques, and supported by critical enquiry. This method of revision and reflection is one that is shared by the pedagogical literature in screenwriting culture, from McKee's *Story* (1999) to Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (2007).

The theory of the Final Girl, combined with Cattrysse's redefined theory of 'want' and 'need', acts as the underpinning theories for guiding the development of this screenplay. It follows the creative work-plus-exegesis model, and this allows the creative practice to provide new knowledge on the theories that have informed its writing. Conclusions are drawn from the *act* of writing rather than from the completed artefact itself. It was decided that writing an original screenplay was necessary in order to apply the critical research in a practical setting, but also because a textual analysis of industrial case studies can be

unreliable for such research, as many are altered to better resemble their on-screen counterparts. There is also great value for the researcher in such practice-led research. The act of writing can be a means of catharsis for the author, and can also be a revelatory experience, whereby the writers can learn about themselves through this creative process of enquiry (see Perry in Barrett 2010: 44).

To make any definite claims of audience engagement with character is troubling, and my own statements are situated in a theoretical context, based on the literature outlined in the previous section. However, the professional screenwriter cannot expect to 'screen test' his or her writing with a potential reader or spectator, and so I too was aware that a quantitate analysis of the script, which might investigate how readers engaged with it, would be impossible. The challenge in this research comes not from gauging how this mode of writing might be received among general readers or viewers (as such a feat is impossible), but in better understanding the theories that developed in response to the implied reader or spectator of cinema, and to help inform the writer's own creative choices.

As a screenwriter, I am acutely aware of the industrial pressures placed on me to distance myself from other aspects of film production, and to instead operate strictly in the realm of pre-production by using only the written word. With this in mind, I chose to redefine what identification research I considered to be applicable to my writing. I discarded the many theories that detailed an audience's identification with the cinematic apparatus, and instead concentrated on a method of writing that not only borrowed from Freudian understandings of identification but one that also mirrored the pedagogy of conventional screenwriting manuals.

This method was one of writing both character action and reaction, and borrows from the screenwriting adage 'show, don't tell', where writers must demonstrate a character's traits through actions, and, more significantly, their reactions to events in the story. In *At the Crossing*, as was argued earlier, it is the characters' actions and reactions to the events around them that make them identifiable to audiences. We consider their decision-making process during times of crisis and compare it against our own personal character attributes, and our internal criteria for right and wrong. This allows Cattrysse's redefinition to be realized, as readers and audiences can project their value systems onto a character and 'know' what it is they should do next in the cycle of events. The story also employs structural characteristics found in my analysis of Final Girl theory, and uses shifting positioning and cross-identification from one character to another. Thus, in theory, the screenplay functions as a structural blueprint for engaging audiences with the characters of the story, in ways similar to that which have already been discussed.

At the Crossing is a feature-length drama about a young woman, Sofiya, and her teenage sister, Olena, who survive on their grandmother's farm, in the region surrounding Chernobyl, in the years after the disaster. The farm has recently been raided by local poachers, a problem within that region, and so they are forced to travel across the dangerous and forbidden exclusion zone with one of the young poachers responsible, Anton, to find and retrieve their livestock and, in doing so, save their farm. The screenplay follows a conventional three-act structure and uses the 'want' and 'need' trope (as described earlier) as a foundation for developing these two characters across this story.

The story for this screenplay was one that I had been developing slowly for many years prior to this research, and so much of the focus of my writing was in trying to make the story relatable, and the characters identifiable, to an audience. In the case of this story, the concepts of 'home' and 'community' were used to allow audiences of any background to better engage with a story that is otherwise based on a 'localized' incident. Even though the value we place on these concepts differs from person to person, it can activate the reader's engagement, to allow them to form a connection with the story. Like the reader, each sister has a different, albeit valid, point of view on the crisis. Sofiya's journey to retrieve the animals is driven by a loyalty to those who came before her, and to her own desire to succeed in a place that is forcing her to leave. Olena, on the other hand, longs to escape this oppressive landscape, and is driven by a yearning freedom, a curiosity of the outside world and a chance to prosper elsewhere.

The Final Girl paradigm changed significantly when employed in this story. The obvious differences lie in its tone and genre. *At the Crossing* was not intended to be a horror film, nor does it suggest a degree of violence or death that such films are known for. Structurally, the surface qualities of the story are noticeably different, in that Olena is identified early on as a clear candidate for the Final Girl moniker, rather than being revealed later at the convenience of the writer. The lack of a clear and singular antagonist is also something that signifies a departure from the trope. However, from a character development perspective, the story maintains many of the hallmarks of the Final Girl. Olena, while initially appearing antagonistic to her older sister early in the story, grows into a responsible young woman on her own personal journey. She becomes a saviour figure to Sofiya, demonstrates clever survival skills and refuses to turn around and back down when faced with challenges. Her arc mirrors that of the Final Girl. Likewise, Sofiya quickly becomes a morally questionable character, as she grows more desperate to find her stolen livestock. Sofiya occasionally breaks the law, is aggressive when challenged by her younger sister, and

disregards her responsibility to protect Olena by forcing her to follow on the journey even when all hope is seemingly lost. She may not inhabit the role of the killer that we are familiar with in the 'slasher' sub-genre, but she meets the conditions necessary to challenge Olena to change as a character in her own right.

Cattrysse's redefinition is fully realized in the closing scenes of the screenplay when both characters return home. Olena, once the carefree of the two, is now more understanding of her family's legacy and is driven by her experiences to work harder than ever to maintain the homestead. In keeping with Clover's Final Girl theory, Olena has changed as a result of these experiences and evolved as a character. Meanwhile, Sofiya, now with child, has a different perspective, not unlike Olena's from the beginning of the story, and contemplates her future in this harsh landscape. Both sisters have abandoned their 'want' in favour of their internal 'need', but their 'wants' and 'needs' have also mirrored. Sofiya's 'want' has become Olena's 'need'. Olena's 'need' has become Sofiya's 'want'. The audience has experienced both sides of the sisters' dilemma, to stay or leave, and it is left to them to decide what the characters should do next, based on their values that have been tried and tested throughout the story.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to demonstrate how studies of spectatorship and identification studies can be beneficial to screenwriting practice, where traditionally academic studies are rejected. I wanted to use Catrysse's redefinition of 'want' and 'need' as a starting point on this journey, and I privileged Clover's Final Girl theory as one potential framework for approaching the writing of a screenplay with audience engagement as a key objective. The manipulation of this identification through character development can provide an engaging experience for the reader or viewer that is reminiscent of the case studies explored in the article. The application of academic research in screenwriting can also offer greater agency for the screenplay within filmmaking practice, no longer just a blueprint for a film but one for engagement with a viewer or reader.

The journey of the Final Girl mirrors the structural qualities of Campbell-ian mythology, where the characters' 'growth' is linked to their ability to discard their 'want' in favour of the 'need'. The reader can experience catharsis in these moments, something that the screenwriters seek to encourage from their work. It is important to acknowledge that screenplay structure is not a uniform idea, as is demonstrated by the vast selection of varied stories in cinema. However, the emphasis placed on uniformity within screenwriting manual

culture, as well as screenwriting pedagogy, provides a useful starting point from which such an exploration into audience engagement can commence. I used a textual analysis of *Psycho* to explore Final Girl theory, but in the case of *Psycho* the catharsis is arguably interrupted by the revelation that Bates is the killer. The imaginary link between audience and character is visualized in the final shot of the film, where Norman Bates breaks the fourth wall and looks directly at the audience. We are reminded in that moment of how we were deceived by the killer, and how the film manipulated our engagement with the characters at a narratological level.

The second case study used was an original screenplay, which served as a canvas from where I could explore these theories in a practical setting. I determined that the act of writing, combined with the critical research undertaken to support the screenplay, allowed me to better understand the different ways in which audiences respond to a text and engage with its different aspects. In this respect, the practice-led portion of this research was a success. The script demonstrates the effectiveness of these theories outside of the 'slasher' sub-genre, and offers a solution to the difficulty raised regarding such theories being used by practitioners for their own writing. However, this is just one of many potential solutions that are available to the screenwriter.

Research into spectator responses and the site of the audience has revealed an alarming ignorance to the screenplay medium and the role of the screenwriter in facilitating audience engagement in response studies. This ignorance might suggest that theoreticians deem the screenplay an unsuitable artefact for the exploration of audiences. Mitchell defines a 'medium' as the range of practices that make it possible for images to be created (cited in Rose 2011: 37). Therefore, this article argues that the screenplay is an equally effective tool for the exploration of such theories. While it is acknowledged that conventional audience response studies are valid, the range of practices that the screenplay encompasses also present their own valid sub-field of research. The conclusions of this practice support that theories of reader's response have a place within the field of screenwriting, but that the screenplay can also play a significant role in the field of response studies. I propose that this is a valuable area of research for the scholar and practitioner alike, and one that can help unveil new and exciting approaches to the craft of screenwriting.

The implied reader of screenwriting is not a static idea; rather it is continuously evolving with changing consumption trends. New and innovative practices in filmmaking are affecting the way we consider the script in the production of a film, but also in the way we approach the writing of it. As consumers revise how they engage with the text, the writer

must also revise how they consider the implied reader. No matter what the medium though, the only reader or spectator we can truly understand is ourselves.

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