USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
CTWR 516:
Advanced Motion Picture Script Analysis
Fall 2016 – (Two Units, Required, Section 19244)

Instructor: Don Bohlinger
Class Schedule: Tuesday 1:00-4:50, SCA 106
Class Location: SCA 106
Office Hours: Monday 1-5, SCA 354, or by appointment
Contact Information: **dfb@usc.edu**

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

To give students the essential tools needed to analyze a feature screenplay or film.
Students will learn how to identify key story concepts, break down three-act structure,
and identify compelling characters by reading screenplays, studying film classics and
current award winners.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"In dreams begins responsibility." – W.B. Yeats

"Man's greatest misfortune is when theory outstrips performance." – Leonardo da Vinci

In a poll taken by the Directors Guild, it was discovered that 75% of their members got
their start directing scripts that they wrote or co-wrote. When Alfred Hitchcock and
David Lean were asked about film schools and how to teach film directing, both agreed
that students should not be given equipment until their second year: "students should first
make films with their typewriters." George Lucas looked back at his education at USC
and advised more time should be spent on writing. The comment heard most often from
graduating production students and alumni over the years is: "I wish I had spent more
time on my writing." In fact many students, upon screening their award-winning thesis
films and 546's, were not offered a twenty-five million dollar picture to direct, but asked:
"Do you have a script?"

Sadly, many of them didn't have a script.

Remember it all starts with the screenwriter. Without your dream, your vision of the film,
there is no dialogue for the actors to speak, no fantastic shot for the cinematographer to
get, no sound, no costumes, no props, you name it. It all starts with the screenwriter and it
is because of this that the screenwriter must be familiar with all aspects of filmmaking as
well as human nature, history, psychology, current events, literature, and art. It's the
hardest, most lonely job in Hollywood. But it is also the best.

I like to tell my students to imagine the moment just before your movie begins: the room
will go dark, the people will sit back, take a deep breath and wait as gradually that

flickering light, that music, those words transform this roomful of strangers into intimate friends gathered to participate in your dream.

Advanced Script Analysis is the essential class of any screenwriter's (and director's) time at USC. It is a course whose tradition dates back to the beginning of art: study what the masters in your field do, and learn, copy, steal, but finally, make it your own.

In this class, we will analyze several very different films. Most of this analysis will be done from the screenwriter's point of view, but since the screenwriter must be familiar with all aspects of screen storytelling, we will also look at the role of the director, cinematographer, editor, composer, etc. We will study how the masters of our art build their characters and tell their stories. We will familiarize ourselves with a wide range of problems writers face when they begin the process of developing a screenplay; and we will be surprised to discover how similar are the resolutions of those problems.

The analyzed pictures are selected in such a manner that they present diverse narrative techniques, story patterns, structures, styles and genres.

The course is designed to give you a firm understanding of three-act structure, character arc, theme, subplot, sequence and scene. We will learn specific techniques such as: planting and payoff, point of attack, twist, exposition, use of ellipsis, backstory, polarity, scenes of revelation and recognition and ways of creating audience identification with the central character (the difference between sympathy and empathy). The last week will deal with rewriting.

The purpose of this class is to demystify the screenwriting process and to help you to build your own screenwriter's toolbox (a place to go to find ways of fixing your own screenplays.) By learning how the masters solved the very problems you are facing in your own work, you will gain an understanding of how to achieve better screenplays and characters yourself.

This is not a silver bullet. We will not talk about plot points and obligatory page numbers. Remember, you cannot and should never write to the model. But you can use these techniques and story patterns to help tell your own story more clearly and to better effect. This is not a cookie cutter course: we want to inspire you to tell your stories in the most original and effective way possible.

Class requirements: Some films are screened twice. You must attend class regardless of whether you have seen the film twenty times before. Class participation is essential - I'd like us to have a dialogue about the films. When a film is screened only once you will be required to screen it before class. There will be a MIDTERM and a FINAL (and a quiz to make sure you are keeping up with the required screenings.) There will be some reading required: screenplays and handouts.

Many of the screenplays of the films we will see are available in the cinema library or on-line. Students should read these. Also, any student serious about making films should be

reading and analyzing at least one screenplay a week. The library has screenplays for this purpose.

Other outside reading will be encouraged but not required. Suggested readings:
- HUMAN NATURE OF PLAYWRITING by Sam Raphaelson,
- THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL by Thomas Uzzel,
- TO THE DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT by Michael Chekov,
- THE TOOLS OF SCREENWRITING (1&2) by David Howard,
- ON FILMMAKING, Alexander Mackendrick,
- YOUR SCREENPLAY SUCKS by William M. Akers

COURSE GOALS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

- To expose students to the work of great screenwriters and directors. By analyzing effective films and screenplays we will teach filmmakers to understand this work from a professional perspective: not "I liked it" but "Did it work? If so, why?"
- To teach writers the basics of good dramaturgy: conflict, tension, theme, character and character development.
- To help writers understand the process of visualization: how do you tell your story visually using character, location, props, action and activity?
- To familiarize writers with story patterns, especially three-act structure.
- To help writers build their "writers toolbox" by screening examples of screenwriting techniques such as: planting and payoff, polarity, sequence, character arc, scenes of recapitulation, revelation and recognition.
- To demonstrate how the masters bring their unique characters to life. To study scene writing and what makes good scenes and effective dialogue.
- To study genre and how filmmakers use and break genre conventions to make their stories fresh and original.
- By studying the scripts and films of the masters we hope to inspire USC filmmakers to tell their stories, not the stories Hollywood wants them to tell.
- We will study how the masters communicate with their audience. How do they tell their unique stories without resorting to tired convention? What techniques do they use to keep the audiences involved, active, and engaged?

ASSIGNMENTS:

Note: since each film will be demonstrating many of the techniques and patterns mentioned above, the weekly objective will be fluid; there will be constant review and comparison. The films have been chosen to explore specific aspects of screen story telling.

<u>Week 1-6: The Basics</u>

Aug. 23:   *In Bruges*, 2008, Martin McDonagh
                 Discussion of character, relationships, backstory, character, character
                 character, three-act structure, planting-payoff, character arc and theme.
                 Read screenplay for *Middle of Nowhere*
                 Read Definition of Film Terms Glossary

Aug. 30:   *Middle of Nowhere*, 2012, Ava DuVernay
                 Discussion of character and relationship. Need vs. Want. Drama vs.
                 Melodrama. The writer-director and DP as storyteller. Rewrite.
                 Read Structure Grid and Sequence Definitions

Sept. 6:   *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 1975, Laurence Hauben, Bo Goldman,
                 writers, Milos Forman director
                 Discuss character, goals, sequences, planting-payoff, subplot, building a
                 good antagonist, comedy vs. tragedy, theme, adaptation.

Sept. 13:   *The Piano*, 1993, Jane Campion
                 Discuss character, defining scene, first culmination or midpoint, scenes of
                 aftermath and preparation, dramatic irony, resolution, character arc.
                 Reading: Cameron Crowe's *Conversations with Wilder*

Sept 20:   *The Apartment*, 1960, Billy Wilder & I.A.L. Diamond
                 Discuss openings, first sequences, routine and status quo of main
                 character, voice over, point of attack/inciting incident, revelation vs.
                 recognition, dramatic irony, need vs. want/character arc, resolution,
                 planting and payoff.

Sept 27:   *Lars and the Real Girl*, 2007, Nancy Oliver, writer, Craig Gillespie, dir.
                 Discuss character, suspension of disbelief, hope vs. fear, want vs. need,
                 resolution, writing parts for actors, second culmination, resolution and
                 "need-based stories."
                 Suggested need-based films: *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*.
                 In-class screening/clips: scenes of introduction.

<u>Week 7: Comedy</u>

Oct 4:   *Bridesmaids,* 2011, Kristen Wiig, Annie Mumolo, Director: Paul Feig
                 <u>The naughty comedy</u>. Discuss screwball comedies, comedic characters,
                 the naughty situation, want vs. need, the well-meaning comedic character,
                 the "beating heart," comedic family or friendship comedy.

Oct 11   <u>MIDTERM</u>
                 Film TBA. Ten to fifteen short answer questions reviewing concepts
                 discussed thus far in the course.

Week 9-11: Independent Film:

Oct 18:   *Fruitvale Station,* 2013, Ryan Coogler
               The bio pic, recreating a real situation, creating tension by showing the
               ending, empathy, character, sequence.

Oct 25:   *Frozen River*, 2008, Courtney Hunt
               Flawed protagonist. Tension. Three-act structure. Want and need.

Nov 1:   *Celebration*, 1998, Thomas Vinterberg,
               Character: immediate and long term history and backstory, obstacles,
               mise en scene, cinematography, writing parts for actors, location, planting
               and payoff, use of props. Cinema as statement!

Week 12: Alternative Narrative:

Nov 8:   *Touch of Sin*, 2013, Zhangke Jia
               Alternative narrative structure. Character. Want. Visual storytelling.
               Suggested Screening: *Pulp Fiction, Amore Perros*
               Required reading: Allan Ball's first draft of *American Beauty*
               Required screening: *American Beauty*

Week 13: The Rewrite Process

Nov. 15:   *American Beauty*, 1999, Allan Ball, writer, Sam Mendes, director.
               Discuss character and goal, want vs. need, subplot, theme, culmination
               and resolution, writing the scene, and the process of rewriting a script.

Week 14: The One-Hour Episodic Television Pilot

Nov. 22   *Scandal* Pilot, 2012, Shonda Rhimes, writer/creator.
               Discuss character introduction and series setup, tone and network episodic
               structure.
               Breaking Bad Pilot, Vince Gilligan, writer/creator
               Discuss and compare, character introduction and defining scene, empathy,
               setup, tone and one hour structure.

Nov. 29:   Semester review with clips. Final film TBA. Take home final distributed.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

CNTV 516 grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas of the
students' work:

1. Performance on the mid-term and final.
2. Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of visualization, structure, theme, creating compelling characters, tension, conflict, dramaturgy.
3. Keeping up with the homework: out of class screenings and readings. Performance on quiz.

Attendance is expected. Lateness will not be tolerated.

GRADING WEIGHTS:

CNTV 516 grades are based on:

    Midterm…………………………………………30%
    Final………………………………………………..50%
    Homework/Quiz……………………………….....20%

LETTER GRADES:

100-93....A	82-80....B-	69-67.....D+
93-90......A-	79-77....C+	66-63.....D
89-87......B+	76-73....C	62-60.....D-
86-83......B	72-70....C-	0-59.......F

LAPTOP AND CELL PHONE POLICY:
No laptops. Cell phones off.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety of the whole USC

community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Disruptive Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX