

Gender and the Screenplay: Processes, Practices, Perspectives. An Introduction.

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While plenty has been written about gender representation on screen, much less has been written about gender in regards to screenplays. Emerging scholarly research around screenwriting practice often focuses on questions of the craft – is screenwriting a technical or creative act? – and whether or not the screenplay’s only destiny is to disappear into the film (Carrière, cited in Maras 1999, 147). Thus there might be room for further exploration into screenwriters and their practice – to ask who (in regards to gender) is writing screenplays, especially considering the assertion of Dancyger and Rush that the three-act structure (a dominant screenwriting practice) is ‘designed to suggest the story tells itself’ (2013, 38). Moreover, questions of gender representation on screen might be considered from the perspective of screenwriting practice, given this same ubiquitous structure means that barriers, including those related to gender, ‘are still presented as secondary to the transcendence of individual will’ (Dancyger and Rush 2013, 36). This special issue of *Networking Knowledge*, then, brings together a collection of scholarly perspectives on screenwriting theory and practice through the lens of gender.

KEYWORDS

screenwriting, screenplay, script development, gender, feminisms, masculinities

The issue begins with Stayci Taylor’s examination of how a screenplay might be ‘gendered’ through its representation on the page and within individual screenwriting practices. Dr Taylor considers the potential gender biases in mainstream screenwriting frameworks, recent gains made for female practitioners, representation and perspectives in the Australian context.

Following the first article is an exclusive interview with noted screenwriting scholar and practitioner Helen Jacey, within which she responds to our editorial queries on ‘bromance’ screenplays, gender-based industry quotas and memorable heroines, as well as offering reflections on her ground breaking text *The Woman in the Story* (2010), including its recently released [second edition](#). Dr Jacey also discusses whether (or not) there is such a thing as a ‘gendered’ screenplay.

As part of a wider study, the first of its kind in Ireland, Susan Liddy offers a snapshot of the views and experiences of Irish women screenwriters drawn from three in-depth and exploratory interviews. This comprehensive analysis incorporates discussions of motherhood and creative practice, limiting stereotypes and the notion of a female sensibility, concluding ‘creativity is not gender neutral’ and offering an indication of the way forward for the Irish Film Board and screenwriting landscape in Ireland more broadly.

Juliane Scholz addresses a gap in the history of German screenwriting, tracking female screenwriters’ contributions to early silent movies in Germany. Focusing, in particular, on the life and work of Ruth Goetz (1880 – 1965), Dr Scholz draws a parallel between the work of such female contributions to the emerging social and cultural discourse on the so called ‘new women’ in the Weimar Republic.

Making a singular study of the screenplay [The Long Goodbye](#) (1973), Kyle Barrett explores screenwriter Leigh Brackett’s approach to developing the script and collaborating with director Robert Altman. Through this investigation, the author examines extreme representations of masculinity in the contexts of film noir, the myth of the detective and the American New Wave of the 1970s.

Cath Moore makes a case study of Danish screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen's narrative construction. In doing so she explores the narrative function of gender within screenplays in the context of specific world views, asking if the limitations of the Hollywood model, which she argues divides narrative function along gender lines, apply in other cultural contexts.

Rosanne Welch, drawing from memoir, Hollywood anecdote and production diaries offers a broad overview of women screenwriters in the United States context from Anita Loos to Barbra Streisand. The central argument of Dr Welch's enquiry is that the participation of female screenwriters in the development process contributes to greater complexity of female characters. Ultimately, the article asks if 'more diverse writers will create more diverse material'?

Rounding off the issue is Radha O'Meara's analysis of how Hollywood screenwriting practices inscribe gender. Dr O'Meara draws from a sample of contemporary Hollywood screenplays (36 Academy Award nominated scripts from 2014-16), and takes her cue from the very recent (at the time of writing) widespread interest in the Twitter feed [@FemScriptIntros](#) (where American film producer Ross Putnam tweets descriptions of female characters from unproduced scripts) to make a comprehensive exploration of the gendered ways female characters are represented on the page.

In presenting this special issue, the editors acknowledge the skew toward female and feminist gendered concerns in screenwriting practice, representative of the response to the call for papers. The proposals received also indicated that the study of gender in *screenwriting* and *screenplays* may be underexplored (as distinct from gendered perspectives and representations *on screen*, for which we received many submissions, useful and interesting analyses in and of themselves, but not directly contributing to a special issue focused upon the page). The editors are also aware of the almost exclusive focus upon film (over television, gaming and online screenwriting for example) and, most regrettably, the absence of transgendered, intersexed or gender non-conforming perspectives. We hope this special issue might begin a conversation about gendered screenwriting (practices, processes and perspectives) beyond the binary.

References

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Dr Stayci Taylor lectures as the Industry Fellow with the Media program in Melbourne's RMIT University's School of Media and Communication. Her PhD explore gender, comedy and perspective in screenwriting practice, drawing from her industry background as a television screenwriter in New Zealand, which includes co-creating a prime time sitcom, and multiple writing roles on nine series of the award-winning bilingual soap *Korero mai*. Her publications include works in *Senses of Cinema*, *New Writing* and *TEXT*. She currently has a female-centred comedy screenplay in development with the New Zealand Film Commission.

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