A Phenomenological Alternative to Screenplay Development Methods

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Abstract As a lecturer and scholar in the field of screenwriting, one may grow frustrated with the hegemony of classical dramaturgy, which lays like a wet blanket over the creative writing and carries imbedded patriarchal values which inevitably rub off on the content. This article will show that the story structure method reduces film writing to a mere narrative process without regard or humility for the multimodal qualities and capabilities of cinema to create sensual experiences for a participating audience. It will point out the risks of this alignment for cinema, making the film stories predictable but at the same time estranged from everyday life. Hence, the article will propose an alternative method to the screenplay template: cinematic world-building, based on artistic processes in a hermeneutic framework and a phenomenological approach to the experience of the film world, which transforms the viewer - from voyeur to co-creator. The purpose of the method is to give the screenwriting students a greater understanding of the abilities of the audio-visual elements - as units and as cooperating constellations - to build moods, content, themes and to develop their stories from cinematic spaces with alternative narrative structures. The article will display a trial of the first step of the method performed in a BA scriptwriter course with a very good reception from the students. Their work and their reflections on their writings and on the method are presented. Some shortcomings are discovered, but above all, the method is perceived to have good potential for further development.

Keywords Film World, World-Building, Screenwriting, Screenplay, Method, Phenomenology, Perception, Audio-Visuality, Education, Film Experience

1. Introduction

In creative writing, narratives for the film medium have largely been constructed upon the Aristotelian view of dramatic design: the arc form. In his "Poetica" the Greek philosopher Aristotle [1] reasoned about various qualities of the Greek tragedies, including the structure - and in the late 1970s these statements became a rigid truth for the film industry due to the impact of Syd Fields [2] "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting". The book gathers the unwritten "rules" of the Hollywood film into a template that dictates the development of the obligatory central conflict and the hero's journey in the three acts of the said structure and specifies exactly when, in the timeline, different dramatic highlights must occur. On the book's cover, a tagline clearly states what the purpose is: "A step-by-step guide from concept to finished script". After the era in American film, *New Hollywood*, which during the late 60s and early 70s - strongly influenced by European neorealism and auteur film - broke with the content and production method of the classic Hollywood film [3], "Screenplay" restored control and status to the film producers.

Field's dramaturgical template became a guideline for Hollywood screenwriters and the dramaturg or script guru became an important professional in the industry, not only in the United States but throughout the Western world. If you wanted to take part in the race, you had to write according to the template. Field's three-act model was

refined, and books on how to properly write movies were and still are published by the hundreds each year - a billion-dollar industry. Every film school and script education in the Western world passes this order on to its students. Ergo, conformity, and the template does not consider what type of story is portrayed, what theme it carries, or where in time and place it occurs. What happens must happen according to specified premises at predetermined times.

Regardless of the structure, one wonders why the setup of Greek tragedy with the epic hero and his realization of the fatal consequences of his moral error has been so significant for our time, not only in terms of film but all types of written fiction. The Australian writer and essayist Jane Alison [4] tells in her book "Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative" about the huge influence Aristotle has and has had on novel writing. Like the male ejaculation, Alison suggests, the drama builds a rising ocean wave towards climax and subsequent resolution. She questions why this male structure has been allowed to dominate the narrative and offers suggestions for alternative structures. She also questions the usual interpretation of "Poetica" and believes that the conclusions about, for example, structure drawn by later dramaturges have weak support in the original text. A close reading of Aristotle's works proves her right. Even the Greek hero's realisation of the mistake he has made and the acceptance of his guilt - the basic structure of tragedy - shines with its absence in the dramatic stories of our time, where instead goal, conflict, and decisive final battle are the dramaturgy's main numbers.

Film has not always been told in this way (although advocates of the Fieldian model argue that all stories ever are three-act structures). In his article "Cinema of attraction" [5], Tom Gunning, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, writes about how the early film, instead of dramatic storytelling, wanted to show the medium's potential to attract, deceive and amaze the audience:

> What precisely is the cinema of attraction [s]? First, it is a cinema that bases itself on the quality that Léger celebrated: its ability to show something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analysed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist cinema. […] a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator [in 5 p 382]

Gunning claims to have taken the term "attractions" from the young Sergei Eisenstein, who used the notion in a description of his attempts to undermine the realistic illusion of the contemporary theatre with an interactive model that exposes all the audience's senses in expressive tableaus (a technique further developed by Antonin Artaud in "Theatre of cruelty" [6]). Gunning believes that early film and expressive theatre had much in common.

This article does not want to call for a return to the cinematic expression of the turn of the last century, but one can identify a problem in that Field's narrative structure takes little or no account of the multimodal resources of film (unless they happen to express, underline, or coincide with dramaturgical events).

In a lecture on film, the phenomenologically oriented philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty [7] says that film has yet to prove itself as an art form because it is so preoccupied with its movie stars, with the twists and turns of the story, with cute images, and clever dialogue. To write a film, claims Merleau-Ponty, is not only to convey a literary story in a way that is possible to shoot but also to initiate a cinematic experience that affects the viewer/reader emotionally and intellectually. What the influential film critic and theorist André Bazin [8] means is the film's strength and distinctiveness.

> The drama on the screen can exist without actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character. […] As Jean-Paul Sartre, I think it was, said, in the theatre the drama proceeds from the actor, in the cinema it goes from decor to man. This reversal of the dramatic flow is of decisive importance. It is bound up with the very essence of the mise-en-scène. [in 8, p 102]

Within the standard screenwriting education, there is no established method of incorporating the cinematic elements into the writing. On the contrary, instructional literature states that scriptwriters should, for the most part, avoid entering visual details or sounds beyond synchronicity. The film as mood creator and experience mediator must instead be subordinated to the story and its main conflict.

The scripts written according to Field's template create products that are recognizable and therefore easy to consume. The authors follow established role models and genres and strive to convey unambiguous conventional messages to a wide audience, a design guided by commercial aspects. In addition, without it being obvious to everyone, the dramaturgy carries patriarchal standards about what should be perceived as "good" and "valuable", for example, the individual perspective (the hero's journey), the conflict as inevitable, the battle as ennobling, the conquest of the goal as life-determining. The Aristotelian ideals have been manipulated to fit the Hollywood (American) myth of the country as triumphant, "home of the brave" [9] and the American as "the self-made man" [10]. The screenwriter's own voice is rarely heard, drowned in the "musts" set by the template.

The vast array of audio-visual fiction has taught audiences to appreciate design but gradually also to read the construction and understand where the story is going. The large range that exists today and the increasing viewership contribute to a saturation of the market. This, in

turn, has caused the major producers to invest in new formats such as true stories and hybridizations of known genres to find attractive expressions for new target groups. With big budgets and digital technology, Hollywood creates increasingly violent [11], visually extravagant, and spectacular films and series, but it has not been enough. The young audience fails. [12]

The streaming services are also looking for solutions to gain profitability after several years of red numbers. Subscription prices are rising, advertising is coming in and mergers are waiting. Started projects, even finished productions, are put on hold. [13]

What has happened, have we, the audience, finally got tired of the predictable stories of the ABC template, or has the gap between our actual lives and the Hollywood protagonist's constant struggle for the looming, life-defining goal become too great?

Has the commercial film ceased to be cinema but only become consumption? Has film lost its artistic values? In that case, could we restore them? As the character Irma Vep says in the meta-series of the same name [14] (a series revolving around a remake of a 1915 film, Les Vampires):

> Movies are a portal to some spiritual world /…/ Some sort of spiritual world we don't have access to anymore. They [the movies] detach us from the material world /…/ They help us question it. [in 14, 6:49-7:35]

The storytelling that is done on social media such as TikTok and YouTube by people who have lived their entire lives connected to the internet has different preferences than the classic dramaturgy. What can get that audience interested in feature film? Movies to watch, write for, and produce?

A new way of training screenwriters for a future film repertoire is therefore necessary. The focus of the training should be on the sensual, aesthetic expressive possibilities of the film; to leave the voyeurism of the narrative form and instead find ways to invite the audience to actively participate in the performance with their own imagination: a movement from narratology to phenomenology. When the narrative is not to lead, the world of audio-visual enactment must do so.

So, this is a proposal for a development process that was tried in a course for screenwriting students: a concept based on an artistic method, reworked for screenwriting.

The method can be named "artistic cinematic world building" as it involves an audio-visual creation of a space as an experiential basis for the film.

In this first step, which only investigates the method's development of ideas, the following questions need to be answered:

- How do screenwriting students respond to a new idea development model such as the artistic world building? Does it contribute positively to their writing?
- Do the students develop any skills in audio-visual writing (during the trial period)?
- Does the teacher's/tutor's commenting on the students' texts have to change when formal postulates are not valid?
- How do screenwriting students read their colleagues' "cinematic world-buildings"? Do they see them as useful starting points for script development?
- Do screenwriting students use their cinematic world-building when writing scripts? (The students could continue their world construction into the next, final course of the program, where the main task was writing a series pilot or a short film script.)
- What is the main criticism of the method?
- What is required to further development and completion of the method?

2. Material and Method

The participating students are introduced to "filmic world building". A literary representation of a room, shaped by cinematic elements such as light, color, shape, sound, objects, signs, symbols as well as borrowings and quotes from other cinematic, artistic, or realistic contemporary/historical worlds. All according to an artistic method proposed by the American philosopher and semiotician Nelson Goodman [15]. He believes that the artist is fundamentally re-creating and his task is to use already existing elements, shape and combine them in a new way. Goodman equates the elements and calls them all references. The references are building blocks in the world of the work.

In the cinematic adaptation of the method, the student creates a room. It can be completely mundane or very special and should have possible openings, connections to its surrounding world. Through the room, we partly understand the outside world. The room has its own organization and a globally valid value scale. Continuous actions or causalities that are not mandated by the space itself should not occur.

The creation process is in five steps where the first three constitute and organize a space (the world), as well as adding a hierarchy of values. With the last two steps, the aesthetic uniqueness of the world is reinforced, and a self-critical attitude is added (a questioning perspective that can change the interpretation of the work. A parallel could be the painting Ambassadors by Hans Holbein [16]. where an anamorph painted skull distorts the motive.)

The finished room should be read and experienced as if on a movie screen. The building must speak to the viewer, affect them emotionally and arouse their curiosity. The references should attract the viewer/reader to use their own imagination, noticing connections to other places in other worlds, and to interpret the room's content and implicit claim through them. The mood that rests in the room must have a relationship with the room's emerging theme.

The script students write in running text which leads us to all corners of the room, points to details, or makes the

reader "see" different contexts and relationships within the room and with the surrounding world. Before writing, they have read/experienced examples of world building made according to the method. They have also seen films where the construction of worlds was at the center.

World building is inspired by phenomenological claims about worlds and man in relation to the world – the actual and the artistic (filmic). In both worlds, one must engage in order to actually understand it.

The influential philosopher and aesthetician Mikel Dufrenne [17] believes that the subject's experience of an (objective) world gives rise to thoughts about the world that cannot be conditioned or rationally controlled. Since each subject has its own sensory experience, augmented by that of its imagination, each world generates a myriad of subjective, existential experiences of it. The world does not change, it does not become a subject but remains what it is, which is why Dufrenne calls the experienced world "the aesthetic object". A world of art likewise invites to a sensual experience and makes the spectator a co-creator of the world transcended into an aesthetic object.

The course's students are introduced to texts by, for example, Heidegger, Dufrenne and Merlot-Ponty. A hermeneutic approach (according to Gadamer) to one's own work is also suggested.

Students Interpretations and Discussion

After the world-building exercise, the course participants read each other's texts in small groups, describe them in a phenomenological spirit, where their own imagination enhances the sensual experience of the text before it is investigated based on said experience.

The interpretation is discussed in group as well as possible ways to initiate and develop a story in the different rooms. The discussions and reflections are presented in reports where both individual and joint opinions are given space. The report is governed according to the task description below (here in abbreviated form):

1. The students in the group present and interpret each other's respective rooms and worlds. The starting point is the first impression of the room and its atmosphere.

2. The group members jointly discuss which stories can be developed in the different rooms for optimal resonance - i.e., stories that interact greatly with the physical, cultural, and social conditions of the world: make it sound.

3. Each group member reports creative problems and unexpected difficulties that arose in the work with their world creation. A self-critical perspective is taken here. The experiences are compared in a short joint final discussion.

The reports form the basis for this article, supplemented by in-depth interviews with three of the participating students regarding their personal experiences of the work with the interviews. The actual written world builds are also providing a basis for the discussion part of the article.

At the time of the survey (December 2021), the course participants were 14 people. They were third-year students on a three-year BA course. They had not used prescribed artistic methods and/or processes in their writing during their education. Within the course, they acquired knowledge about so-called Art Cinema, a broad concept that refers to independent film, auteur film, etc. That is, a film that does not have the financial possibilities of Hollywood and that does not make full use of the classic dramaturgy, even if the story leads the script construction.

During the previous periods of study, the script writing was based on texts by McKee, Snyder, Vogler, and others regarding the content and structure of the film narrative. Film and text analyses have been carried out based on standard dramaturgical thinking (Fields).

3. Analysis

The students write their texts over the course of four to five weeks. They have a tutorial session as well as a peer-to-peer venting. As a supervisor, one would consider Gadamer's view of hermeneutic analysis. In a polemic against the representative of romantic hermeneutics, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Gadamer claims in his chapter on hermeneutic experience that a text must be understood only through the text itself. The reader does not have to try by a psychological examination of the author to reveal its secrets, nor unconscious or hidden intentions. [18] Or as in the case of film storytelling: unconscious or deliberate departures from standard dramaturgical regulations.

The supervisor's knowledge of the student must be held back. What the tutor may convey is her experience of the text, how it speaks to her and how she understands it. An understanding that rests primarily on a tradition or cultural background shared with the author. The tutor is here an audience and through her reaction the student can gain some insight into how the text works and choose whether and how they want to revise their writing.

In this article, however, there is more freedom to compare with the students' previous scripts and their work with places, moods, and styles as well as their final project, scripts that were written directly after the world-building course (a couple of students used their rooms in them).

The method proposed by Nelson Goodman is in five steps where the first three constitute and organize the world, as well as create a hierarchy of values. With the last two steps, the aesthetic uniqueness of the world is reinforced, and a self-critical attitude is added (a questioning perspective that can change the interpretation of the work). Since the students' texts are to constitute a world, it must be able to be experienced/read as such and in a first approach the tutor looks at the construction of the world-building based on parameters such as the aesthetics of the room, its internal logic and its order, the possibility of being able to orient oneself in the room, its location/position in the

surrounding world as well as the causality of space. In the next step, the rooms' content - theme or statement - and its references to other worlds will be examined.

Construction of Worlds

The rooms designed are imaginative and complex overall. The complexity lies on different levels. Some texts use anachronisms, others use symbols, signs, and art objects to create interesting diversity. Some have consistent rooms while others open the milieu.

In the first encounter with the texts/rooms, a direct aesthetic experience is immediately created, which in some cases develops and deepens. The first part of each text is referenced here. (All summaries are made by the article writer.)

1. A paradise island. From the harbor, wedding-dressed couples, straight and gay, walk towards a distant volcano. Coffins fall on their heads. In the chests are a Bible and another item and the couple must choose one of them. The choice brings them to a pair of escalators, one leading down into the earth, the other up to the sky.

2. The sunshine shimmers through the glass roof over the marble floor of the station where a train is waiting to depart. Peacefully. Two men enter, sitting on a bench. A low-key conversation. The men throw purple hyacinths into a fountain. A light wind pulls into the station. A pane of glass falls from the ceiling, shatters. A crack in the marble floor, the beginning of an apocalypse.

3. A large warship, a sailing ship with cannon ports lies tilted, frozen in a bay. Snow wines. A post-it note swirls in the wind, sticks to the ship's bow. It can be read: "I'll be late, food is in the fridge". Icicles from the pipes of the masts fall onto a painting on the deck, a portrait of a woman with two children.

4. A heavily trafficked location. Stressed people flamboyantly dressed and a bronze statue. Annoyed honking. The statue changes color and slowly begins to move, people and cars slow down, stop as if frozen but then, as if on cue, they speed up again. The statue solidifies, regains its bronze color.

5. A red carpet leads into the room, stops at a well with winding runs. Liquid drops of paint fall into the grooves. Floating lanterns illuminate a tree that stretches its arched crown of leaves across the chamber. A huge book, an herbarium. Statues in black stone among drifts of books: knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. A man enters, raises his hand, and sounds of stone tapping and raspy writing take off.

6. A circular room with an opening to the sky above. Traces of muddy human feet on the rocky ground. Wooden bunks stained with mud. Stone hoes are scattered. Rails lead to dark tunnels. Here and there are battery-like objects, some with bite marks. A large wooden barrel hangs high on a chain. Covers almost the entire light opening. Sounds of hacking and coughing.

7. A stuffy cathedral. The gates are open, but the sand forms a large dune that covers the entrance and slopes far into the hall. The ceiling is high, lost in shadows, but a blue moonlight enters through the windows. The light colors everything from stone to brass chandeliers in pale blue. There are no benches left, the hall is empty except for stone angels with cracked faces and weathered arms.

8. A hall with warm light walls in a house with a large wooden door. Outside, the rain is pattering hard. Worn rain jackets, large and small, hang on hooks. A large jacket is wet, and a bucket underneath collects the drops. Muddy boots, kerosene lamps. Happy voices are heard from inside the house. The windows have small cracks in the corners, covered with white tape. Tiny white flowers are attached all around the door frame, tied together by a gold thread. Some are wilting, others are holding their heads high.

9. A kind of waiting room with a glazed ceiling, dark worn floor, and descent from a verdant park. A stall sells soothing teas to those waiting, and in the cash register's compartment are hairs of different colors and lengths. A fountain with dirty water. There are mirrors on the walls at different heights. Some have stairs leading up to them, others red skylights over them. A guard stands at each mirror. The reflections show calm water, sometimes rippled by a gust of wind.

10. A warehouse in a deserted industrial area. Broken windows, trees stretching their branches. Graffiti, faded by time on moisture-shiny walls. Dim lights. Surveillance cameras with flashing diodes. An ajar door to a dirty toilet, a dented mirror above the cracked sink distorts the appearances. A bass loop hits the concrete hard, bodies sway with expressionless faces.

11. Screaming white, unbearable. A mouthy ping merrily. Voices. The sun peeks out beyond curtains of snow. A mountain edge leads down into a deep ravine. Something golden glimmers in the glaciated ice down there, but without stopping, feet stomp habitually past the ravine up towards the ridge. Some distance away stands a leafless gnarled birch. A piece of the trunk is scorched and next to it, a gun barrel sticks out of the drift, black with soot. When the sun hits the rifle, it flashes with an orange glow.

12. Dark alleys with shop windows. A statue green with verdigris, a horseman with a raised sword. A neon sign next door stains green. Below, wild ivy spreads over a wall. Shoe heels against cobblestones. A trailing sound brings us to a back street with a restaurant's garbage can, overflowing with bags. Food scraps, bones, and meat scraps – plastic and blood. A surveillance camera hangs above by an arm.

13. Arctic winter. An ice-covered beach where a leather kayak is frozen solid. Waist-high powder snow gives the feeling of an abandoned place. A snowy owl is

barely visible, it scouts from its icy branch. A carcass with large horns is surrounded by blood and footprints, and just a few meters away a large metal door has burrowed into the snow. Small pieces of metal and plastic scattered on the ground and in the trees, lead into the forest.

14. A cutting sound from a trolley. In a dark corridor there are rusty rails and electricity lines run along the ceiling. At the end of the corridor, a room lit by a fire barrel. String music is heard from a screeching cassette player. Boxes of rusty food cans are stacked with rats pawing around. A painting of a red house with white knots can be seen on a cement wall. Above the house, a large truck has been drawn in rough charcoal lines.

The students' previous scripts have not featured anything close to these chiselled environments, but rather used locations as genre-linked illustrations. But there is much more to be gained here than interior design. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty believes that an object's identity and meaning are not fixed but changeable primarily depending on their spatial relationship to other objects, which in turn affects our understanding of space itself. A movement of the object thus changes its properties or our experience of its properties. [20] In many rooms – not all – the writers have succeeded in creating a flow, an order that makes our perception move in a certain way and thus perceive hierarchies and values.

Difficulties that the students testified about are about balance between the whole and details, between composition and content. A student writes in a reflection:

> Sometimes the portrayal can become redundant and take up too much focus. This, in turn, can lead to whoever reads my story placing a lot of focus on things in my room that I didn't really intend for them to take up space. So, the things that I weigh heaviest in my story can unfortunately lose their importance.

The problem of fixating on minor details is a matter of practice. Already during the five weeks of the course, the predominant number of rooms became less plot-rich, without losing complexity. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the room could be something other than intended.

> I also notice that a lot of emphasis is placed on the sense of surveillance that prevails in the room, which is reasonable, but it also makes me realize how you really must think about how you present different aspects in your writing. The surveillance aspect was for me initially nothing that would dominate the experience of the room, but I now understand that, of course, it will, as it is the main sign of conflict in the room.

What is clear from the summaries of the introductions is that the students are actively looking for both opposites and background explanations.

The opposites or opposing forces in the rooms can foreshadow a conflict, as the students are used to writing, but they can also be there to create tension in the rooms, making them less predictable. Here, text 1 and 4 are clear examples. In the other rooms too, opposing forces gradually emerged to varying degrees. For example, power hierarchies were something that took up space in half of the rooms.

An even more clear desire is to create an understanding of what happened before the current situation in the room. Examples 5, 6, 7, 13, and 14 give indications of a prehistory. What prehistory does is that it creates an expectation of a continuation, what will happen next, which robs the cinematic space of being the source of several, yet unknown, stories. Actions in the room should be understood based on themselves, to give a wider interpretation of Gadamer's statement about hermeneutic analysis. It is possible to say that a room always carries a prehistory, but traces of a clear event direct the focus to it and not to the room.

The Lack of Narrative

For many of the students, not being allowed to tell was still a big problem. The story is all-important in cinematic narratives, but not only there. Storytelling as a means of communication is a cornerstone of our society. World building is of course a kind of story, but rather invitations to interpretive proposals than postulates. In the students' discussions, it was a recurring topic of conversation. Here is one of the groups:

> It is common for all of us that it is difficult to let go of the storytelling aspect. As the descriptions of our worlds put so much emphasis on all the details, big and small, it's hard to decide what exactly is too big or too small and so we try to explain it and give it meaning through story to somehow justify why that's where. […] This also connects to the problem we all had regarding symbolism and references, as we all wanted and hoped that the references brought into our texts would be interpreted in the way we intended. However, this is positive for us as writers as it teaches us that we must leave room for readers to form their own interpretations.

The quote thus shows what distinguishes this method from the narrative: the injunction to avoid forming a message or statement that binds the reader's experience. In the discussions held in the groups, it has been clear that the student colleagues' "alternative" interpretations of each other's rooms have been inspiring and constructive, according to the authors.

Furthermore, it was obvious that the students gradually cleaned out their props and highlighted in different ways what weighed heaviest in their world. This is a time-consuming process that probably caused frustration for some.

> The hardest part was figuring out which details in my

room were worth focusing on, so that the design would reflect the image I had in my head. It required many rewrites, and thus tested my creative ability. Filling out my room, to make it as detailed and meaningful as possible, was something that took time. The very fact that it took so long made me frustrated at first that I wasn't getting anywhere.

Another aspect of the construction is the ambience in the room. How is it established? In the film, we talk about mood creation through what is called mise-en-scène darkness, light, shadows, color, image composition, camera movements, scenography, clothes, and mask (make-up). Sound and music are important in creating the atmosphere. One also talks about the mood that follows from the main character's emotional state or from the nature of the main conflict, which we (for this task) can leave aside. (Yet, for example, in examples 4, 10, and 13 there is a residual desire to describe moods through characters.)

So, what remains is the multimodal means of the film medium, and the students have worked more actively with the filmic means than in previous scripts. In their texts, students have not only created light and shadow, colors, and shapes, they have also dealt with aspects of space relations, texture, age, order, to create a deeper emotional experience of the room.

The script students' exploration of cinematic possibilities is something that will be reflected in their writing. A student describes in an interview how her process worked:

> Because sometimes it was difficult to find things that could be added. I thought that now I have written everything I can think of. Then a few days later, I could almost write a page and new stuff. Not because this [text] is really long, but like sometimes it stopped, and then when I suddenly… there was more to get out of the place, so it was very exciting.

She also thought that the multi-step method was good as a basis and helped her to move on when she was stuck.

The World Buildings' Reference Material

The students had been encouraged to bring awareness to the collection of materials for their builds and this gave greater substance to the elements in the rooms. They were mostly well thought out and carefully designed. In their reflections, they talk about where they got their material from and have stated memories of rooms (often from childhood), other experiences of room interiors and places, paintings, statues, photographs, computer games, novels, films, reports. Here the interesting thing is that the students were not faithful to the appearance of the originals nor their spatiality, but the objects were sources of inspiration and were treated with creative freedom.

For me, as an external viewer, it was the combination of more familiar references that sparked new thoughts. As

example 3, where the ship taken from a video game about 16th-18th century pirates, meets everyday sticky notes, and creates an interface where two worlds appear simultaneously. Or example 2 where shifting frames of reference create ambiguous symbolic games. Example 9 was commented as follows by another participant:

> […] world is a place where nothing is as you think, where a kind of absurdity constitutes a normal state. It is a thoughtful, inner room designed for an inner journey. Even though the room contains unreal elements, the room still feels appealingly real. [...] A room that itself seems to know that it is a strange room in relation to its own context, a kind of homage to Alice in Wonderland.

From Idea to Script

At the end of the course, alternative story structures were presented to the participants. Briefly, but to create an understanding of the dramaturgical diversity that exists. Among other things, they encountered examples of associative storytelling, the Chinese/Korean/Japanese Kishotenketsu, the polyphonic structure formulated by Bakhtin, Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition", the meander structure presented by Jane Alison, numerical and alphabetical structures of the filmmaker Peter Greenaway [20-23]. In a connecting reflection, the students discussed in groups what kind of story could arise in each room and how it could be structured. Here is an example:

> So that the story would go hand in hand with the room and its surroundings atmosphere at its best, a more fragmented structure would probably be better suited. This is to emphasize time/timelessness and to be able to put both viewers and the potential characters out of play and enhance the confusion that could be experienced. We saw before us a circularity where neither a beginning nor an end exists.

Another example:

> In this world, it would be possible to follow a story from a child's perspective who does not want to become part of society. This connects to the Art-Cinema narrative as the character is faced with an existential crisis whose goal is unclear, it rather focuses on identity and psychology.

From my perspective, the important thing here is that the stud The students' previous scripts have not featured anything close to these chiselled environments, but rather used locations as genre-linked illustrations. But there is much more to be gained here than interior design. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty believes that an object's identity and meaning are not fixed but changeable primarily depending on their spatial relationship to other objects, which in turn affects our understanding of space itself. A movement of the object thus changes its properties

or our experience of its properties. [20] In many rooms – not all – the writers have succeeded in creating a flow, an order that makes our perception move in a certain way and thus perceive hierarchies and values.

Difficulties that the students testified about are about balance between the whole and details, between composition and content. A student writes in a reflection:

> Sometimes the portrayal can become redundant and take up too much focus. This, in turn, can lead to whoever reads my story placing a lot of focus on things in my room that I didn't really intend for them to take up space. So, the things that I weigh heaviest in my story can unfortunately lose their importance.

The problem of fixating on minor details is a matter of practice. Already during the five weeks of the course, the predominant number of rooms became less plot-rich, without losing complexity. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the room could be something other than intended.

> I also notice that a lot of emphasis is placed on the sense of surveillance that prevails in the room, which is reasonable, but it also makes me realise how you really have to think about how you present different aspects in your writing. The surveillance aspect was for me initially nothing that would dominate the experience of the room, but I now understand that, of course, it will, as it is the main sign of conflict in the room.

What is clear from the summaries of the introductions is that the students are actively looking for both opposites and background explanations.

The opposites or opposing forces in the rooms can foreshadow a conflict, as the students are used to writing, but they can also be there to create tension in the rooms, making them less predictable. Here, text 1 and 4 are clear examples. In the other rooms too, opposing forces gradually emerged to varying degrees. For example, power hierarchies were something that took up space in half of the rooms.

An even more clear desire is to create an understanding of what happened before the current situation in the room. Examples 5, 6, 7, 13, and 14 give indications of a prehistory. What prehistory does is that it creates an expectation of a continuation, what will happen next, which robs the cinematic space of being the source of several, yet unknown, stories. Actions in the room should be understood based on themselves, to give a wider interpretation of Gadamer's statement about hermeneutic analysis. It is possible to say that a room always carries a prehistory, but traces of a clear event direct the focus to it and not to the room.

The Lack of Narrative

For many of the students, not being allowed to tell was still a big problem. The story is all-important in cinematic narratives, but not only there. Storytelling as a means of communication is a cornerstone of our society. World building is of course a kind of story in itself, but rather invitations to interpretive proposals than postulates. In the students' discussions, it was a recurring topic of conversation. Here is one of the groups:

> It is common for all of us that it is difficult to let go of the storytelling aspect. As the descriptions of our worlds put so much emphasis on all the details, big and small, it's hard to decide what exactly is too big or too small and so we try to explain it and give it meaning through story to somehow justify why that's where. […] This also connects to the problem we all had regarding symbolism and references, as we all wanted and hoped that the references brought into our texts would be interpreted in the way we intended. However, this is positive for us as writers as it teaches us that we must leave room for readers to form their own interpretations.

The quote thus shows what distinguishes this method from the narrative: the injunction to avoid forming a message or statement that binds the reader's experience. In the discussions held in the groups, it has been clear that the student colleagues' "alternative" interpretations of each other's rooms have been inspiring and constructive, according to the authors.

Furthermore, it was obvious that the students gradually cleaned out their props and highlighted in different ways what weighed heaviest in their world. This is a time-consuming process that probably caused frustration for some.

> The hardest part was figuring out which details in my room were worth focusing on, so that the design would reflect the image I had in my head. It required many rewrites, and thus tested my creative ability. Filling out my room, to make it as detailed and meaningful as possible, was something that took time. The very fact that it took so long made me frustrated at first that I wasn't getting anywhere.

Another aspect of the construction is the ambience in the room. How is it established? In the film, we talk about mood creation through what is called mise-en-scène darkness, light, shadows, colour, image composition, camera movements, scenography, clothes, and mask (make-up). Sound and music are important in creating the atmosphere. One also talks about the mood that follows from the main character's emotional state or from the nature of the main conflict, which we (for this task) can leave aside. (Yet, for example, in examples 4, 10, and 13 there is a residual desire to describe moods through characters.)

So, what remains is the multimodal means of the film medium, and the students have worked more actively with the filmic means than in previous scripts. In their texts, students have not only created light and shadow, colours,

and shapes, they have also dealt with aspects of space relations, texture, age, order, to create a deeper emotional experience of the room.

The script students' exploration of cinematic possibilities is in itself something that will be reflected in their writing. A student describes in an interview how her process worked:

> Because sometimes it was difficult to find things that could be added. I thought that now I have written everything I can think of. Then a few days later, I could almost write a page and new stuff. Not because this [text] is really long, but like sometimes it stopped, and then when I suddenly… there was more to get out of the place, so it was very exciting.

She also thought that the multi-step method was good as a basis and helped her to move on when she was stuck.

The World Buildings' Reference Material

The students had been encouraged to bring awareness to the collection of materials for their builds and this gave greater substance to the elements in the rooms. They were mostly well thought out and carefully designed. In their reflections, they talk about where they got their material from and have stated memories of rooms (often from childhood), other experiences of room interiors and places, paintings, statues, photographs, computer games, novels, films, reports. Here the interesting thing is that the students were not faithful to the appearance of the originals nor their spatiality, but the objects were sources of inspiration and were treated with creative freedom.

For me, as an external viewer, it was the combination of more familiar references that sparked new thoughts. As example 3, where the ship taken from a video game about 16th-18th century pirates, meets everyday sticky notes, and creates an interface where two worlds appear simultaneously. Or example 2 where shifting frames of reference create ambiguous symbolic games. Example 9 was commented as follows by another participant:

> […] world is a place where nothing is as you think, where a kind of absurdity constitutes a normal state. It is a thoughtful, inner room designed for an inner journey. Even though the room contains unreal elements, the room still feels appealingly real. [...] A room that itself seems to know that it is a strange room in relation to its own context, a kind of homage to Alice in Wonderland.

The students' previous scripts have not featured anything close to these chiseled environments, but rather used locations as genre-linked illustrations. But there is much more to be gained here than interior design. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty believes that an object's identity and meaning are not fixed but changeable primarily depending on their spatial relationship to other objects, which in turn affects our understanding of space itself. A movement of the object thus changes its properties or our experience of its properties. [20] In many rooms – not all – the writers have succeeded in creating a flow, an order that makes our perception move in a certain way and thus perceive hierarchies and values.

Difficulties that the students testified about are about balance between the whole and details, between composition and content. A student writes in a reflection:

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Students see the story's possible identity and development possibilities in the constructed space. Some of the rooms seemed well suited for a classic film dramaturgy, then a choice, not an obligation and the student is vigilant about the imbedded set of values coming with it. The artistic approach is still there and will influence

the aesthetics and content of the story.

Most students were positive or very positive about world building as an idea development, even if some saw no future for the concept in a commercial context:

> Themes of vulnerability, the location's geography and characters are made visible successively and go in and out of each other, something that is constantly shaped and reshaped but must also be shaped and reshaped in the experience. That said, I don't think this method of working necessarily lends itself to the demands of the film industry rather than the subjective experience of writing.

Three of the students continued to work on their world-building in the following course's script assignment and another couple worked on their scripts in the spirit of world-building. With one of the former, the room is part of a larger world. A place of transition between worlds in a fantasy story. The room is special, its complexity and inherent magic stands out against other environments, at least in the pilot episode. The second room appearing in the following course is intact and sets the tone for the entire story. The idea and mood of the world building follows up in the script, even if it was very dialogic. The third is most faithful to its previous world-building and the script was an existential drama of symbols and ideas with broken time linearity.

Of the other scripts mentioned there is a description of nature. In ambiguity and as a mysterious presence like the author's world-building. But, however, there is an imbalance between the world and the story, there is a lack of interaction, and the plot becomes cryptic.

In another script with a carefully crafted and dialectical world, the plot fails to arouse interest in the world whose construction also has some logical question marks.

With these comments, the aim is not to criticize the authors. There are many aspects that affect the result, but they make it evident that in the step from world building to script, the method needs to be further developed and strengthened.

4. Discussion

The starting point for this attempt is thus a critique of the hegemony that classical dramaturgy holds in the film industry. A conformity which, for example, is not found in stage drama and one can ask what is behind it. Why has the literary theory been allowed to dominate over the expressive, the perceptive?

Things that play a part are finances and the need for control. By creating a template that everyone has to follow, film and TV producers can read the script's ability to meet structural and other requirements. To create such an order, there must be economic driving forces and means of pressure behind the words. Which then the big media companies in the USA and other English-speaking

countries have. Another stakeholder in the maintenance of classical dramaturgy is the publishing industry, which annually pumps out hundreds of titles about screenwriting for film and TV.

In relation to an authentic reality, the Hollywood film offers an escape with its simplified narrative where there is a hero, a goal, and a conflict. And with its wide range and financial muscle, it has taught audiences to accept and internalize the form. The Mexican filmmaker and writer Raul Ruiz [24] expresses his critique of the hegemony of the central conflict in "Poetics of Cinema":

> The voracious appetite displayed by this predatory concept reaches far beyond theory. It has become a normative system. The products which comply with this norm have not only invaded the world but have also imposed their rules on most of the centers of audio-visual production across the planet. […] And yet there is no strict equivalence between stories of conflict and everyday life. [in 24, p 15]

But paradoxically, looking at the Hollywood repertoire, one wonders if the main selling point is really the story? Isn't it in fact swirling, drawn-out action scenes, digital fantasy landscapes, raw brutality, music, dance, and close intimacy, that draw an audience, that are the true attractions?

Recognizability has become of great importance to today's audience, the expectation of all the die-hard fans who swallow sequels and prequels, spinoffs, and remakes. Originality is then no longer desirable among the media giants, and the billions of film and TV production budgets are thrown at more of the same, only bigger, more spectacular.

The Swedish culture writer Hanna Fahl [25] states in the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter a comment on the premiere of the Hollywood film "Don't worry darling" [26], that the film itself is a joke but the buzz surrounding the lead actor, pop star Harry Styles and his dating with the film's director Olivia Wilde, and her public custody dispute, as well as an incident at a press conference where Styles allegedly spat on a co-star, are what generates interest and the desire for tickets. Fahl sums up: "Fiction has completely melted down into a post-post-postmodern muck where the meta-events, the lore, surrounding a work are equally or more important than the work itself." /Authors translation/

In contrast to this, the last couple of decades film theorists have analyzed with renewed interest the spectacular, carnal, and sensual attractions of contemporary film, and there is a kind of slippage going on in both production and theory, to regard the film as an audio-visual experience more than a logical and consistent narrative.

The major European festivals might sense a turning point and prise films that don't care so much about a logical narrative but soar out into what might be called cinematic flesh, the presence of an encompassing audio-visual event,

a sensuous existential experience. Leos Carax' "Annette", Julia Ducournaus' "Titane", Ruben Östlund's "Triangle of Sadness", Jude Radu's "Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn" and Robert Eggers' "The Lighthouse" are examples. [27-31]

But isn't this cinematic world-building just a return to the old *auteur theory*, (promoted by, among others, the film critic and director François Truffaut in a famous essay in the French film magazine Cahier du Cinéma" [32]) where the director's audio-visual vision and cinematic style are said to be the most important elements of the film, as the film represents the director's artistry? Yes, there is of course a connection when it comes to highlighting the importance of audio-visual over the text. But world-building is not an intellectualization and politicization of cinematic storytelling like the auteur theory, or a critical positioning towards contemporary film and filmmakers. The method does not polemicize against anything but builds unique film worlds and stories in artistic processes.

5. End Words

The audio-visual story is not dead, but it needs new blood, and a start is to offer a different development method than the one currently used in almost all Western film/TV education.

The proposed method, tested on 14 students studying a BA in screenwriting, was well received. It was noticeable that the students, both in the assignment writing and in reflections, reported an understanding of how mise-en-scène creates content even without a leading narrative. The worlds that were built were exciting compositions and had many interesting features despite the short writing time and the not yet fully developed method. Here is a group's reflection:

> We have sometimes had difficulty finding the right way to convey our ideas and then get stuck and doubt ourselves. We are used to creating stories first and then the world itself second. The creative process in this task gave us an insight about how the starting point can be the world building itself and that the world can create a story. It is a useful tool for future projects, not to limit oneself in one's work process and creativity and dare to start one's work in a different way than what we are used to.

In an interview, a student says, completely in the spirit of Bazin (without having read him):

> And most of the time, I'm probably such a person that I think the world is usually more interesting than the characters in the beginning, so that the characters are born out of the environment rather than the environment being born out of the characters [...]

Development of Method

The next step in the method making is to make progress all the way to a screenplay. Through the process, the method should hold on to a proposing and encouraging attitude, although the subtext always will be to use the cinematic means and to invite the audience to participate in a sensuous experience.

Students' criticism of the method's prevention of story development when building worlds is understandable, as they have been trained to do so, and of course, as screenwriters, they are committed to telling stories. The possibility to insert a theme or a research topic in the building process is considered, supporting the writers' understanding of their room contence.

Leaving the immersive phase of world-building, the writer-student will surely have many ideas on possible stories. The method could suggest some potential approaches: introduction of characters, of story structures, connections to the outside world and places within the world.

The step from world-building is important, but it doesn't have to be instant. The start-up of the story and the progression of the world can be simultaneously entertained for a while.

There is a need for an alternative technique opposed to the conventional narrative template, when developing screenplays. This artistic method with its surrounding theories could be a strong contender.

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