Matt Marshall

The script writer is not a writer and is

Abstract:

In *Written for the Screen: The American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text* (1997), Claudia Sternberg establishes the film script as a literary text. She argues that it is subject to and suitable for the same analysis and theorization as other literary texts. Sternberg also argues the script is a separate text to any film that may be made based on it. Sternberg then addresses the matter of film authorship, looking for markers of the writer's presence within a number of filmic texts. However, even if we agree that the film script is a literary text, does it follow that the screenwriter is a literary writer? For that matter, what makes a literary writer? And what are the markers of the screenwriter within the film script? For, even if such markers exist, they may not be indicators of a writerly presence, but rather of an implied director. The paper proposed in this abstract will consider these issues and explore them through direct application to my own screen writing experience.

Biographical note:

Matt Marshall is currently undertaking a Doctorate in Communication by research at the University of Canberra. He also tutors at the University of Canberra in creative writing, literary studies, media studies, communication theory and film scriptwriting. He wrote the University of Canberra Masters Script Writing course and has just finished acting as co-course convener in script writing, having worked as an assistant lecturer in that course previously. He is an award-winning writer of short fiction, a performed playwright, and a screenwriter with works currently being considered by Screentime and Village Roadshow.

First: what is a scriptwriter? The most reductive answer seems to be: it is a person who writes a script. That definition can be explored, even expanded upon, by suggesting that such a person is only a scriptwriter while in the actual process of writing a script and, at other times, is … something else. By the same token, perhaps it could be argued that a scriptwriter is only a scriptwriter once he or she has written a completed script, until that a point being only an *aspiring* scriptwriter. But then the question becomes: when is a script finished? The possibility is, given certain cultural and commercial processes relating to film production, that this event may be nominated by an external process of authorization. Thus completion may only occur when the script is optioned by a producer. Perhaps it is when the script is sold to someone else for production into a film. Perhaps even then the script is not considered finished, and the scriptwriter becomes the scriptwriter only once the various tasks of rewrites, edits, pick-ups and so on have been dispensed with and the film is released into cinemas. Given the problems of refining the definition, the reductive may remain the best approach: a scriptwriter is a person who writes a script. So, what is a script?

In the context of this paper, a script is a film script, also known as a screenplay: a particular form of written text. Sternberg provides the following definition for the script in terms of its operation and characteristics:

> As a prestructuring interface of word, sound and image, the screenplay reveals the narrative *and* dramatic potential of the medium's form and content through the use of verbal signs. (Sternberg 1997: 64)

Thus, the script is a written text designed for adaptation into a filmic text. This notion of design for adaptation is a critical characteristic of the film script. Unlike a novel or a poem, a scriptwriter does not write a script to speak directly to cultural consumers. The script is always designed to work as a basis for another cultural product. This fits film scripts within a broad typology of texts that Sternberg intimates towards in the following: 'The *blueprint* is the classic metaphor used to characterize the function and the significance of the screenplay during the production process …' (Sternberg 1997: 50).

This means that the film script has certain generic characteristics that reflect the purposive aspects of this text type. The script's linguistic frame is addressed not towards an undifferentiated readership (or even one defined by factors as potentially broad as language, cultural group, societal placement or socio-economic status), but towards a specific, small, skilled and knowledgeable set: filmmakers. Sternberg discusses this relationship between text and readership: 'The requirements of the medium and the expectations of the blueprint reader not only determine the length of the screenplay but also the distribution of the modes' (Sternberg 1997: 78).

These 'modes' include syntactical constructions, abbreviations and jargon that require an active, professional reading and a level of specific semantic competence. The script's communicative efficacy depends on the reader's expertise, and familiarity with the writing conventions of the form. The modes also require that certain details and instructions are elided: those that are beyond the ambit of the scriptwriter's role. For

example, contemporary Australian scripts (and American ones for that matter) do not, with very few exceptions, provide camera directions in the body of the text. Doing so is a marker of amateurishness. Those particular processes are determined by the director and director of photography.

As a result of the interactivity between script and filmmaker, the progression from script to film is not direct: a script is not simply *turned* into a film, but *adapted* into one. In the process it crosses from one text type to another, from one communicative mode to another, from one form to another, with modifications arising from the involvement of multiple cultural producers and from the demands of the new medium. This, in turn, suggests a negotiated and ongoing relationship between scriptwriter and, chiefly, director throughout the entire filmic process. As for this particular relationship between cultural producers over two interrelated media, Sternberg argues:

> The relationship between director and screenwriter has practical as well as theoretical implications. Despite the usual emphasis on the industrially-determined and profit-oriented work process of film production, the position of the director as creative artist has been reinforced in film criticism over the last forty years. (Sternberg 1997: 15)

This brings us to the historical position of the academy in relation to the film script and, by extension, the scriptwriter. From a theoretical position, with the foregrounding of the director – a result of the *politiques des auteurs* movement in 1950s and 1960s film criticism – the film has been foregrounded over the script. After all, it is the director who is the dominant creative figure (from a critical perspective) in filmic production and thus, as Sternberg argues, 'the screenplay occupies a position of minor importance. It is rendered to nothing more than malleable raw material that is to be handed over to the director, who gives it a concrete form' (Sternberg 1997: 16).

What emerges out of *auterism*, and even subsequent critical positions that do acknowledge the collective effort involved in filmic production, is that the academy treats the film script as merely data. The logical progression from this is the understanding that the academy doesn't recognize that the screenplay even constitutes a *text* in any meaningful way. But this is, surely, an almost unique occurrence since in contemporary critical fields, *everything* is a text:

> In the last thirty years, the word 'text' has come to be applied to any cultural object, from writing to dress, food, and even the human body. (Fuery & Mansfield 2000: 56)

Of course, it is a slight overstatement to suggest the film script is the one exception of all cultural objects to what is covered under the rubric of text. However, it is only a very, very slight overstatement. What makes this (what can only be termed an) oversight more remarkable is that the film script is not a new text type. It's older than television. As Sternberg points out:

> Ideally, the first century of the moving picture should have laid the foundation for extensive research into the screenplay. However, despite increased screenplay publication, an extended interpretation of 'text' and 'literature' as well as Modernist and

> Post-modernist intermediality, the investigation of the motion-picture screenplay has nevertheless remained peripheral. (Sternberg 1997: 1)

And this statement introduces the issue of literature in relation to the film script and thus sets the problematic for this paper. The base issue, from which any consideration of the problematic may arise, is that, in the academy, neither film scripts nor literature actually exist.

The argument for the non-existence of the film script (within the academy) has already been presented, but the same must now be done for literature. Literariness, a property of texts determined to be literature, is a marker of quality and the basis for inclusion and exclusion. However, literariness is tied to a particular mode of assessment that identifies texts, within literary fields, as canonical:

> The idea of the canon has been around for a long time, and its powerful presence in the discussion of texts – particularly the literary – makes it a difficult structure to ignore. (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000: 18)

Thus texts that are included within the literary are established as, more or less, canonical. However, as Fuery and Mansfield go on to argue regarding the canon:

> Adherence to the canonical ideal means that the works themselves must be seen to have an intrinsic quality that makes them 'good' or 'art'. There are three major problems with such an idea: first, this line of argument fails to recognize that any work becomes canonical not for what it is or does, but through external forces that define it as such; second, works drift in and out of the canon, but nothing in the works themselves has changed – in other words, forming the canon is a political, cultural and social act, rather than the aesthetic one it purports to be; and third, the very terms of debate, such as 'good' and 'bad', are impossibilities in themselves. (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000: 19)

But even if it is possible to agree that literature *as such* is theoretically, conceptually, technically (what have you) an impossibility, the film script is still not a part of the body of objects called 'literature'. And this is because, surely, a prerequisite for literariness is that the applicant at least be a text of one form or another. Scripts are not – or are rarely – texts. Put simply: scripts are hard to find. Until recently they have not been published as books. They have also not been published in the format in which they were originally written. There is a very, very small number of screenplays available for general consumption that have not been made into films, so it is difficult conceptually to separate them from the field of film. And, of course, on the part of filmmakers, there is a long-standing practice of placing the film into prominence at the expense of its different stages of production. Foregrounding the film means that audiences consume the film, not the script. Such an act of foregrounding also confirms film as a separate, distinct art form. Finally, there is the issue that the proprietary arrangements between writers and film producers place ownership of screenplays in the hands of production companies, who are not oriented towards the notion of such texts as literary in any way, shape or form.

But, again, an argument for the non-existence of the script is, like the definitions of the script and the scriptwriter, an example of reductive thinking. Scripts can be found, and could be studied within the academy where there is still of course some notion of literature, in spite of attacks upon the canon. There are social processes of belief and authorization that make this so:

> The canon is a body of texts institutionally determined and culturally 'accepted' as constituting 'Literature', or 'Film', or 'Art', and hence the literary/filmic/aesthetic work of art. (Fuery & Mansfield 2000: 18-19)

And, equally, it would seem a film script does, as a cultural object, constitute a text and, thus, may well possess literary merit.

Given the location of the film script within the overall process of filmmaking, there is a possibility that the film script doesn't sit within the literary field at all, but rather in the filmic field, making the question of literariness moot. However, a script is not a film. It is a written work. It can thus be compared, in this particular respect, with a theatre play, which is not its performance, but rather an independent literary text with an independent literary writer. The confusion, as Sternberg points out, arises out of the different reading responses required of drama rather than prose: 'The screenplay and dramatic text precede a performance and require readers at all reading stages to actualize the implications of the text's performance potential' (Sternberg 1997: 58).

What this highlights is the difference between 'performance potential' and performance. A performance is not the text. It is the product of the text. This distinction has proven easier to grasp in relation to theatre as one written play can give rise to multiple, widely differing performances. This is not the case with film, in which one script gives rise to one performance. However, the basic distinction between text types, between screenplay and the film based on the screenplay, remains the same.

The film script should therefore properly sit as an object of study in the field dealing with writing, which is that of literary studies. It has an established form, as readily determinable as the novel, play or poem. As discussed already, the film script follows certain set communicative and linguistic modes, as Sternberg calls them, though I tend to regard them as frames. These frames convey the different segments of information that need to be conveyed to the various readers of the film script. For example, the base unit of the script is the scene and the frames a scene will always have include a slugline (the line nominating a new scene, and containing the location of the scene and the time of day when the scene occurs) and big print (the actions the characters within the scene perform, as well as whatever props, set, sound or other effects also required in the scene). The directions contained in the big print are always written in the third-person and in present tense. Diegetic and non-diegetic elements are all noted and distinguished one from the other in the big print. Often, though not always, scenes have a third major linguistic frame in the form of dialogue (what characters say), all of which is attributed and direct.

A film script, beyond the linguistic frame, has characters, plot, story, perspective and voice. It does not have narration as that term is understood in novelistic frames. Narration is subsumed under the descriptive purposes, aspects and elements of the text with varying degrees of subtlety. The text nevertheless contains a perspective and approach to the subject matter that is beyond the supposed neutrality of the camera eye that will record the action based on the text. A script, in spite of initial appearances, is not simply reportage of a yet-to-be-made film:

> It is rather the individualism of the author … that becomes manifest in the relationship between dialogue and scene text, and the design of the modes of report, description and comment. (Sternberg 1997: 84)

Here Sternberg attributes perspective to the writer of the screenplay, opening up issues and questions of authorship: indeed stating that the writer of a screenplay is an author with all that that term implies. Importantly, the fact that the author only becomes 'manifest' in a 'relationship' rather than through the narrative voice is one of the distinct features of the screenplay as a form of text. As Sternberg points out in describing characteristics of the screenplay as a text:

> … what distinguishes the *screenplay* as substratum is exactly that *telling* by a narrating agent does *not* take place despite its high degree of prose. The text only anticipates a narrative perspective in the target medium of film … The presentation of words and story, therefore, takes place without a mediating, that is narrating and focalizing agent. (Sternberg 1997: 157)

Given, then, that the script can potentially be a literary text, and given the relationship Sternberg has described between scriptwriter and script: what then is the scriptwriter? Surely, the scriptwriter is not what is meant, cannot be what is meant when the academy refers to the literary writer? But, to return to Fuery and Mansfield:

> What is essential to acknowledge … is that any work defined as canonical exists as such through a set of value judgments placed on it, which are in themselves entirely arbitrary. (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000: 19)

If a text can be defined as canonical, if a script can be established as literature, then perhaps a scriptwriter can be not only a writer, but a literary writer. And at this point criteria for literary writing could, with varying levels of success, be established and compared with, say, my own experience of scriptwriting. For I do define myself as a scriptwriter. So I could tick off where my form of writing satisfies the criteria in an attempt to convince those who are, without doubt, literary writers, of my literariness. Equally, I could draw a parallel between writers and authors of other blueprint texts. The case of the dramatic stage play has already been discussed and authorship most definitely, in academic and popular fields, sits firmly on the side of the play rather than the performance and so with the playwright rather than the director or actors. Another blueprint text worth mentioning in this context is perhaps also the blueprint itself. The architect, for instance, is the author not only of the blueprint, but of the building based on

the blueprint. In fact it would seem ludicrous to ascribe authorship to the site foreman. And yet, I could very well argue that, in the case of film production, this is precisely what happens.

However, both this argument about various degrees and divisions of authorship, and the categorizing of what constitutes literariness, both seem retrograde steps in relation to contemporary literary studies. It is unlikely one could fix authorship so neatly that it could be sliced into manageable portions and – if literature could be convincingly and comprehensively defined, given the troubles with definitions – it would have been done long before now. What I will do, however, is state that I am a literary writer because I say I am, in the same way that novelists once had to make that claim against writers of the epic or poets (Bakhtin 1967: 131), in the same way that filmmakers had to establish film as an art (Fuery & Mansfield 2000: 19). It begins with a statement of belief. I believe I am a literary writer in a literary field.

More importantly for the discussion in hand, however, are the missed opportunities on the part of the academy to review, analyse and argue the various characteristics, rotes, functions, processes, contradictions, difficulties, modes and relationships involved in film script production and the interaction between film script and film writer. As much as theoretical history, gaps in fields of study and intersecting issues of power, place, ownership and identity seem to complicate the positioning of film script and scriptwriter in relation to the literary field, these are the very points that make a consideration of the scriptwriter as literary writer so fascinating. In addition, beyond the ambit of the film script alone, but in the context of broader systems and instances of cultural production, where fields of study do intersect and interanimate, where there is a burgeoning number of textual types and multi-media, or multi-type texts, the screenplay is an instance of the issues at play across those areas of inquiry.

A screenplay is a multi-type text: a written text that acts as a blueprint for a further cultural product, which is cast in images and sounds, not written words. The screenplay is a piece of property that can be traded, divided, shared over numerous writers and, ultimately, is taken out of the possession of any of the people who could claim to be its writers. The screenplay is an unfixed text that can be modified by writers, directors, actors, editors and producers. It can be abandoned or ad-libbed on in the process of shooting and, finally, there is definitely no *auteur* theory for screenwriter to shackle academic study to a monolithic fantasy figure, whose theoretical existence is a perhaps convenient but probably misleading and limiting mythology.

It must be pointed out that the types of texts considered in literary studies are expanding in number, not decreasing. It is very likely that raising a case for the screenplay as a type of literature fifty years ago, even twenty years ago, would have proved impossible. The fact that graphic novels, multi-media texts, interactive texts, and so on have all variously made inroads into literary studies gives hope for the eventual possibility that the script type will exist as a text within the field. And it has already begun with the work of Sternberg and others. However, even though the work has begun, it is still only a

beginning, an inroads into the consideration of a distinct text-type deserving of better treatment than it has had in past criticism.

With that injunction in mind, it seems an appropriate time to consider some of the already discussed issues in relation to a specific film script text. This will hopefully provide an indicator of the types of problematics that can emerge in a study of film script texts and the areas of exploration, inquiry and analysis generated as a result. Of particular interest to me in terms of the film script is this matter of authorship. Sternberg, as previously considered, has stated that the general thrust of the limited theory conducted on the matter has established that traditional models of authorship do not operate in relation to the film script (1997: 7). I suggest in turn that such a determination cannot be made without further comparison of the characteristics of these traditional modes of authorship to a film script. I further suggest that if traditional modes of authorship do not operate in relation to a film script, that does not automatically indicate that no modes of authorship operate. Surely there is the possibility that new modes of authorship, new systems and processes, new interactions and interanimations, operate in place of such traditions and that it is precisely the new that is worthy of investigation and study? In fact, the new may well illuminate not only itself, but also the *old*. By old, of course, I mean the traditional, or rather what has been understood traditionally in the academy: literary prose.

I feel that the question of authorship in a film script is innately linked to my own practice as a script writer. That means that any study I conduct is not going to be disinterested, but it does open up a type of authorship study suggested by very theorists that so tellingly destabilized authorship in the field of literary prose: Foucault and Barthes. After stating the death, in philosophical terms, of the author, they both variously suggest a new way in which the author can be revived and then reconsidered. What such a reconsideration entails is a view of the author, not as the 'explanation' (Barthes 1977a: 143) of a text, but rather as an agent in an ongoing processive, mutually inter-defining relationship with the text in the course of its development and production.

Foucault presents a study of the author as follows:

> I believe that it is better to try to understand that someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his books, in what he publishes, but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books … The work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work. (Foucault 1987: 184)

What I suggest is precisely this kind of authorship study in relation to the writing of not a 'book', but a particular film script. Further, as this matter of authorship touches on my own practice, I want to look at the relationship between text and author in the context of that very practice. As stated, this threatens the disinterestedness of any potential study. Disinterested survey of an author is surely impossible when observer and object of observation are one and the same subjectivity. However, as Foucault has intimated, such a subjectivity is not fixed. In fact, the standing theoretical works regarding authorship in the field of prose literature deny virtually any existent positioning of subjectivity. Barthes expresses this proposition accordingly:

> … today the subject apprehends himself elsewhere, and 'subjectivity' can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage … (Barthes, 1977b: 168)

And such a proposition permits, not only a study of the relationship between text and writing subject of the text, but a study in which the writing subject is also the writing subject's observer. As Barthes concludes the above argument:

> … why should I not speak of 'myself' since this 'my' is no longer 'the self'?

And so, I shall 'speak of myself' and *my* film script, as much as I can lay claim to any ownership on that front. Authorship of a film script, at this stage, has still not been established. However, before looking at myself and my film script, I should point out that, in the pursuit of ensuring my 'deconstructed, taken apart, shifted' subjectivity:

> *I am speaking about myself as though I were more or less dead.* (Barthes 1977b: 168)

So, as one dead, I present a discussion of the feature film screenplay I'm writing as part of my doctorate in communication. The historical trajectory of this project accords closely, to my mind, with the traditional conception of a literary prose text's linear development, which is a further reason to focus on it, and provides me with an opening for discussion of the text.

During the last three years or more, the screenplay has been developed over several drafts (six to date) in ongoing consultation with a supervisor, Felicity Packard, who acted in the role of editor, while I performed the role of sole writer and, until the screenplay enters into the legal system of ownership, author. I wrote the text, I chose what goes into the text, I am responsible for the content of the text, I make modifications currently to accommodate suggestions for improvements to the text, and I correct errors in the text. As authorship constitutes elements of responsibility, authority and control, the above situation would seem to posit me clearly as the author over the script.

However, what is interesting to note is that my authorial status is not a stable position over the life span of the script. While I am perhaps currently the author of the script, I may not be in the future. Once the script enters into legal and juridical areas the corporate entity that purchases the script from me becomes the author of the screenplay at law. At the same time, again according to the rotes of *auterism,* once the screenplay is used as a template for the production of a film, the director becomes author of the film, or, at best, joint authorship is variously distributed across every person involved in the filmic production, while the script is relegated to one minor facet of the overall process. Meanwhile, in the field of literary studies, as matters stand, I was never the author, because the script is not a text and therefore not literary, meaning I am not a literary writer.

I may be in such a circumstance a non-entity academically speaking, but there is some scant possibility there may be some consideration of me as scriptwriter in academic,

cultural or popular fields. If this possibility eventuates, I may then perhaps be considered, not a literary writer, but rather a mere hack writer: a mercenary, selling my skills on the open market like a hawker. And it is possible that, given the fact that show business is and remains a business (albeit with no business like it, least no business I know), that the texts produced in the course of the business, not at the final iteration in the cinemas but on an ongoing, involved and continuous process – such as in the case of screen writing – are ignored altogether.

So, while I've already stated that I am the author, that statement is clearly unstable. However, is it any more unstable than an equivalent statement if I were the writer of a *prose* literary text? And this seems the best point to introduce some of the positioning on the author that emerges from literary theory, and relate it to the film scriptwriting process. So, in the case of a screenplay, *my* screenplay, if there is an author, is that figure distinguishable from the writer? Is that figure a discursive construct used to limit the meanings within a text? Is it a figure that permits an infinite play of significations, is it a transcendental subjectivity? And so on and so on. Finally, does the uncertain nature of authorship as theoretical construct in film scripts indicate more or less that a writer of a film script can be a literary writer? What must be clear at this point is that the questions revolving around authorship in novelistic works find new cachet in the analysis of film scripts.

In regards to a specific theoretical framework for authorship in prose literary texts: Bakhtin (in his own writing and as described or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say, introduced, by Kristeva) speaks of the author as operating on a dialogic plane with the characters, settings and meanings of a text. The author's voice is but one among many, the author's perspective but one among many. The entirety of the text is in quotation marks and constitutes an instance of polyglossia. This is the defining characteristic of the novel and stands in contrast to the epic form, which is fixed in formula and mode, is mono-vocal, mono-semic and historically distanced through the epic or mythic frame from the audience position (see Kristeva 1980). Now, is a film script, is *my* film script, epic or novelistic? Do I, as author, whatever else that role may be, operate in a dialogic relationship with the text, or from a position of epic distance? Am I as author, writer, possibly literary writer, in, of, adjacent to, beside, excluded from, anonymous to, murdered by, dead to, even reanimated as spectre by the text?

Any markers for a presence or absence are surely found in the film script text, just as they would be in a novelistic or other prose text. However, as discussed when outlining the characteristics of the film script as a text type, there is no authorial voice in a film script: there is no direct narration, because the text is designed to act as blueprint for a future filmic form. Thus, the regular indicators of an authorial presence (perspective, point-of-view, and language choice) are absent. There is a presence there, but it is suggestive of camera angles (while not explicitly presenting them as such), diagetic and non-diagetic elements; in short: framing. That is the narrative position within a film script, the position of the frame and hence my preference for it over Sternberg's term, 'mode'. Just as Sternberg finds the blueprint the effective metaphor for the overall form of the film script

text type, so I find the frame the appropriate metaphor for the communicative function of the film script, especially as the frame suggests the potential delineations of the screen the script will be eventually adapted for. Whatever is inside the frame is included for consideration, analysis and review, while whatever is outside is excluded.

Among what is included are the characters, presumably without content or filter. In the construction of a script, all characters are given attributed dialogue. But the dialogue is usually provided with very little in the way of commentary as to delivery, sub-text or judgment on the part of the narrating frame. While there are exceptions to this, it is particularly the case in my project as the purpose of the film script again projects forward to another form, in which actors perform their roles by discovering and then embodying subtext. It seems, after all, to be the actor's job.

So, with the various voices unconditionally presented within the frame, with the reduction of narrative control to the frame, it seems that I, as writer, operate in a dialogic plane to the text: I am but one perspective among many and it is a subsumed perspective at that. The film script is thus novelistic in the Bakhtinian sense, which would be supported by the content that doesn't rest its didactic burden on one character's shoulders, or even have a specific, fixed didactic approach.

However, to counter that, the frame is a powerful tool for limitation. Its processes of inclusion and exclusion, while not seemingly epic in 'tone', are perhaps epic in function. Furthermore, there are authorial operations that I have not performed, or have rather shared, or subsumed within traditional generic requirements. One of the criticisms levelled against screenwriting is its reliance on rote and formula. My project is no different. At various stages, I have used the Hero's Journey of Joseph Campbell as filtered through Vogler (1992) and Felicity Packard. Of course, I prefer the term 'mythic form' over 'Hero's Journey'. And this is not least because in stressing the mythic nature of the form, that it is repeated again and again, it demonstrates its epic nature. The mythic form is fixed in structural terms, it is approached from historical distance and it occurs in an abstracted time frame that repeats itself over a variety of iterations. I believe, as a writer (rather than perhaps as an academic), that in employing the mythic structure, in re-presenting the unchanging, stable, fixed and perhaps comforting epic in my scriptwriting I am satisfying the very desire in the majority of audience members that draws them to see films in the first place.

I have discussed in this paper the predominant presence of the director across the process of film production, in academic theoretical positioning and even at law. I have also, at the same time, destabilized just that presence within the film script if not the film. However, as already stated, there is a relationship between director and scriptwriter that runs in concert with the relationship between a script and its film. It would seem logical that the director's presence, just as it is evident in every other aspect of filmic production, would be present in the film script in the same sorts of ways as the writer is present. And the first indicator of this would be surely evident in the fact that the screenplay is written for an expert, engaged, decision-making readership *headed* (in many respects) by the

director. Given the relationship between writer and director, presumably there would be a dialogism between the writer's and directorial presences in the film script. However, as must be readily apparent now, dialogue is perhaps not always the best term for the director's and writer's ongoing interaction. There is surely just as much contestation, persuasion and coercion where power hierarchies between the two are not as clear as initial investigation might suggest. Sternberg posits that the writer in relation to the film script subverts the directorial presence in both script and perhaps even subsequent film, according to the following operation:

> Dialogue and scene text, in which film technique and narrative are combined, demand a certain degree of cinematic-technical imagination from their readers. If these combinations are very complex, the directorial input can be anticipated to a large extent. The screenwriter therefore becomes a *hidden director*. (Sternberg, 1997: 231)

What this suggests is that in a 'hidden' manner, in a carefully obfuscated and masked form, the writer builds within the script a powerful monological presence – and more powerful because it is subsumed and difficult to recognize. This presence is designed to, not only circumvent the director, but rather *direct* the director him or herself.

As a side-note this is actually something that is well and truly recognized in the area of prose literature. It is one of the component elements, from Foucault's perspective, of the process of the 'author's death':

> Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of dead man in the game of writing. (Foucault 1967: 102-103)

 Of course, strictly speaking, in the case of a film script, the scriptwriter is not exactly an 'absence', but rather, an absence in one respect and a false, or perhaps projected while simultaneously hidden, presence in another.

Bakhtin spoke of the novel arising from the intersection of the comic and epic, of the introduction of laughter to the mythic form. It was a reconciliation between two seemingly disparate impulses the combination of which was inherently paradoxical. What my script project reveals, what many other such screenplays may also reveal, is the possibility that the novelistic and the epic may now be combined under equally paradoxical terms. There is no terminology for that, no consideration of how such a situation might be analysed and constructed, but in relation to the writer's position within or adjacent to the text, that location becomes even less fixed than under previous traditional literary studies. Because the position of the writer may, in the case of this hybrid of seemingly contradictory forms, be not just present or absent, not just outside or in, above or below, but both and neither at the same time. I suggest that authorship, that the writerly position, the authorial perspective in, at least, my film script is parallel, simultaneous, shifting, multiple and definitely paradoxical. It varies over time. It is projected out of itself and into a future, different textual form. It operates in complex

ways within and without the text. It is bound within legal fields and discursive operations. It is separate from the text, but simultaneously bound within the text and linked to the historical transitions the text undergoes.

To be a film scriptwriter is not to be a hack or a mercenary and yet it is. It is not to be an artist and yet it is. It is not to be an author and yet it is. It is not to be a hidden, or monologic projection towards a future ideal director of a future ideal film and yet it is. It is not to be a literary writer and yet it so very is.

But then again, there is no longer any such thing as literature, or the canon, or the high and low art distinction. And yet there is.

List of works cited

Bakhtin, M 1967 'From the prehistory of novelistic discourse' in D Lodge (ed) 1988, *Modern criticism and theory, a reader*, London: Longman

Barthes, R 1977a 'Death of the author' in *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana Press

Barthes, R 1977b *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (trans R Howard), London: Macmillan

Benjamin, W 1978 *Reflections*, New York: Schoken Books

Blanchot, M 1982 *The space of literature*, Lincoln: UP Nebraska

Burke, S 1992 *The death and return of the author: Criticism and subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP

Foucault, M 1967 'What is an author?' (trans V Harari) in P Rabinow (ed) 1986 *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin

Foucault, M 1987 'Postscript: An interview with Michel Foucault by Charles Raus' in *Death and the labyrinth: The world of Raymond Roussel* (trans C Raus), London: Athlone Press

Fuery, P and N Mansfield 2000 'Deconstruction, the death of the author, and intertextuality' in *Cultural studies and critical theory*, South Melbourne: Oxford UP

Kristeva, J 1980 'Word, dialogue and novel' (trans A Jardine, T Gora and L Roudiez) in T Moi (ed) 1986 *The Kristeva reader*, New York: Columbia UP

Sternberg, C 1997 *Written for the screen: The American motion-picture screenplay as text*, Tübingen: Stauffenberg-Verlag

Vogler, C 1992 *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for storytellers and screenwriters*, Studio City CA: Michael Wiese Productions