“The same, but different”– a broader perspective on the screenwriting craft.

Sessions and workshops by Dr Monika Maslowska, University of Malta

**Session 1 | A Writer’s Voice | Monday, 27 March 2023**

In mainstream screenwriting, having a writer’s voice is one of the key screenwriting skills which sets a screenwriter apart from other screenwriters.

Put simply, a screenwriter’s unique but recognizable voice begins with their creative vision and writing style that shape every aspect of the script from the phraseology, rhythm, punctuation, word choice and elevation.

The writer’s voice comes through the five elements:

1. Scene description
2. Attitude
3. Tone and atmosphere
4. Pacing
5. Dialogue style

However, how do you develop a writer’s voice? Well, it comes with professional growth and self-awareness as well as nurturing one’s “inner landscape”.

Reading screenworks by Diablo Cody, Gillian Flynn, Phoebe Waller-Bridgers, Aaron Sorkin, Steven Moffat, Martin McDonagh, Anthony Minghella, and Billy Wilder is also immensely helpful.

**Workshop**

Analysis of the selected scripts written by Aaron Sorkin, Steven Moffat, Martin McDonagh, Diablo Cody, Gillian Flynn, Phoebe Waller-Bridgers, Anthony Minghella, and Billy Wilder.

**Session 2 | Micro-Budget Scripts | Tuesday 28 March 2023**

Writing micro-budget scripts are easier to finance and produce—they involve less financial risk. Therefore, a strong, character-based contained script can be an attractive project for producers.

But how do you take your ideas and characters and write a script for a low-budget film that could attract a strong cast and talented directors? How do you make the most of constraints and limitations?

1. Identification of good source material and/or ideas and concepts.
2. An in-depth understanding of the aspects to keep in mind when writing a script for a low-budget film.
3. Collaboration and culture.
4. Case study: *The Maltese Fighter* (20min), viewing, analysis and discussion.

**Workshop**

Writing 2 short cinematic scenes that focus on imagery.

**Session 3 | Film Genres for Screenwriters | Wednesday 29 March 2023**

Most mainstream films are genre hybrids, and it is very important that screenwriters understand genre conventions and their impact on iconography, narrative structure, character development, world, conflict, theme, and resolution. As screenwriters, we have to remember that just as audiences evolve, so do genres-we need to tell the same story but in a new guise.

Each genre has its own distinct characteristics, which will differ from one genre to another. The audience wants something unfamiliar but in a genre. Certain genre elements must be included for a story to feel satisfying, otherwise, a contract between the audience and the screenwriter is stretched or even broken.

During our session, we will look for answers to the following questions:

1. What is frightening, or what possibilities do we fear? (horror films)
2. What is criminal, or what are the boundaries of social morality that we must not cross? (gangster, crime films)
3. What is morality? (melodramas)
4. What is acceptance and belonging? (romantic comedies)
5. What is the future? (science fiction)

We need to be aware that answers to the above questions will vary from generation to generation as values change. Genre films are a product of the socio-historical context; observing them becomes a cultural ritual in which hegemonic values are studied and either change or reinforce the answers.

**Workshop**

Writing an outline in different genres:

1. An adventure that turns bad.
2. The workplace has its own rules.
3. Avoid commitment at all costs.
4. Good intentions are never enough.
5. Ambition helps one and hurts many.
6. Leaving home.
7. My father/mother the disappointment.
8. Technology is a threat.

**Session 4 | Kishōtenketsu | Thursday 30 March 2023**

Kishōtenketsu is a story told in four parts that subverts our Western story structure concepts. Kishōtenketsu is most closely associated with Japan, but it is also used in classic Chinese and Korean narratives.

The plot of a Kishōtenketsu story relies on the third-act twist. This is what puts the whole narrative into context. A traditional Western story starts by introducing conflict and builds to a climax. In Kishōtenketsu, the story is mostly set up that builds towards the story’s major twist:

**Ki**: Introduction (a scene is set).

**Shō**: Development and Elaboration on the scene, flushing out the characters and their relationships.

**Ten**: Twist (complication) Climax, an unforeseen event that doesn’t have to do with Ki and Shō directly; things become more complex.

**Ketsu**: Conclusion (reconciliation) Resolution, focuses on how the third act interacts with the previous ones.

The unique thing about Kishōtenketsu is that it does not offer a transformative story. The protagonist doesn’t have to suffer trauma and come out better or worse for it. There is a twist, but the twist does not t have to be earth-shattering or even a negative event.

In addition, by applying the Kishōtenketsu structure, screenwriters have more freedom to develop characters as a phenomenon that is not catalyzed by conflict.

In the Western structures, we are expected to finish everything at the end so as not to leave any questions unanswered (unless they are preparing a sequel, in which cliffhanger questions are still expected to be answered eventually).

Kishōtenketsu examples:

*Spirited Away* and most productions by Studio Ghibli.

*Rashomon*, Akira Kurosawa

*Parasite,* Bong Joon-ho,

*Shoplifters,* Hirokazu Koreeda

**Workshop**

Writing or rewriting your own script or creating a beat sheet as per Kishōtenketsu story structure.

**Session 5 | Script Supervision & Your Own Scripts | Friday 31 March 2023**

On a film set, we are called “editor's eyes and ears”. Our basic duties include the repeated reading of the script, its analysis in terms of the plot continuity and the internal logic of the story. We cooperate closely with the director and actors. We make notes of the way shots are staged in order to (1) maintain editing continuity and (2) obtain spatiotemporal verism of the action. In summary, the role of the script supervisor in television or film production is to maintain the “suspension of disbelief”.

The knowledge associated with this profession is very useful when one writes their own scripts. (Han Jin-won, who co-wrote the script for *Parasite*, worked as a script supervisor before he started writing.) The most important element is an in-depth understanding of how a script you wrote becomes a shooting document in the hands of other professionals. Is it as clear and filmable as you thought it was?

**Workshop**

Breakdown of your scripts in terms of the story continuity and story’s internal logic.