

PROCESS WORKBOOK

ADPA5015

Short Film Production

Rebecca Jauregui

Student Number: 2400324

29/2/2024

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As an actor from a film and television production background, my professors have always articulated the importance of actors understanding film technicalities. Film is a collaborative art where a group of individuals works towards a common product, with heavy influence from the director. Because there is typically a strict budget and schedule in place, it is important that all collaborators work efficiently. It is greatly beneficial to the production that the actor understands what is needed of them in terms of framing, lighting, and direction. For this reason, I ensured myself to ask Keiron and Lloyd what was needed of me throughout the shoot.

As my group was brainstorming ideas for our story, I reminded them to keep the bigger picture and final product with the audience's best interest in mind. As filmmaker Adelman simply puts it, "Write something you can make" (2004, p.85). What storylines would interest them in the limited time we have to tell the story? We explored and decided on the concept of storytelling with mostly visuals and minimal dialogue to not overwhelm the audience. Bauer states that there is no such thing as a writer setting out to write a scene without dialogue and that these moments rely on the visual perception, the visual logic and power of what we see alone, for insights, for emotional content (2017, p.49). The objective when writing the script was moving through the acts of the story while raising the stakes with the least amount of words possible. Field explains that a screenplay follows a certain, lean, tight, narrative line of action, a line of development. A screenplay always moves forward, with direction, towards the resolution (1984, p.12). When pitching plot ideas to each other, a common priority was the use of readily available locations and resources due to the limited budget and schedule. Grayshon recommends considering personal, emotional, and resourceful reasons when choosing a location (no date). It would be for the benefit of the characters, or simply because the place is free and could save the

production money. Our other potential film, “Cheesecake” was created on the basis that it would be easily filmed in the dorms and did not require hyper-specific props or costumes. Because of the film's simple appearance, we toyed with giving it a complex plot with heavily improvised overlapping dialogue. The idea stemmed from an episode of “The Bear” (2023) where there is a scene that consists of a continuous shot of the family matriarch trying to prepare Christmas dinner while other members of the family simultaneously converse and try to help her to no avail. The idea seemed simple at first, but we quickly realized the idea would require close attention to continuity and plenty of camera rehearsals. Another reason why we dropped “Cheesecake” was because it required rich plot building and there was no room for mystery or audience interpretation. We ultimately decided on “The Hunting of Mississippi Frank” because the plot allowed for exactly that. We liked the idea of letting the audience create their own theories as to why Frank is so unwelcomed in the cultish community. Mississippi Frank also gave us the creative liberty to build a world that did not have to mirror anything from the real world. We created a fictional universe.

When creating Frank's universe, we made sure to properly introduce it to the audience which is why the opening scene is of Allison at the podium shaming those who broke the rules of the town. Batty and Waldeback recommend using the element of the opening image; the first thing the audience sees or hears of the film and how that will impact upon what is to come (2008, p.37). In our case, it was the events leading up to the shaming of the rule breakers. Additionally, Batty and Waldeback suggest that often an effective opening image gives large amounts of concentrated information about character, world and theme (2008, p.37). We individually researched and created our characters by pulling inspiration from other characters in the media. When creating my character, Cynthia, Fiona from “Shameless” (2011) came to mind. From her

appearance to her attitude, Fiona was my muse. For Cynthia's clothing, I decided to go plain but practical. She is constantly looking for a new way out of the town and is always on the run, so I knew she needed weatherproof clothes to brave the elements. Because of my limited wardrobe options as an exchange student, I settled on black boots, jeans, a black long-sleeve, and a green jacket. The green jacket is perfect for camouflage in the woods. I took inspiration from her determination, caring nature, and work ethic despite her difficult upbringing and situation. Fiona is completely independent and finds ways to better her life and her siblings' lives. When creating Cynthia, I wanted to avoid creating just another love interest for the protagonist. I wanted her to be her own freestanding character without depending on the influence of Frank. This basis was also helpful for Frank's character since Grove expresses his concern for the mistake of new writers placing their hero alone without relationships to the other characters and how that results in weak heroes, cut-out opponents, and uninteresting minor characters (2009, p.63). For this reason, I decided to make Frank and Cynthia's relationship complex and let the audience interpret it in their own way. This worked for me since the characters themselves view their relationship differently. That being said, Churcher advises to make brave choices and to take everything to the limit. He advises not to love someone a little, but to make them your whole world. Take things as far as they can go to extremes, but then decide how much the character will show (2003, p.129). Cynthia deeply cares for Frank, but she's not the type to show her cards easily.

When embodying Cynthia I knew I needed to incorporate elements of myself into her. Director Judith Weston explains that the goal of using personal experience as an acting resource is not self-indulgence but honesty (2014, p.55). Guskin recommends that the actor search his memory for experiences in his past that evoked responses in him that are akin to the responses he

has settled upon for his character (2003, p.37). I understand what it is like to be trapped in a small town with no opportunities and a doomed, stagnant, energy. I poured my frustrations into Cynthia. I watched a few episodes of Shameless and observed Emmy Rossum's physicalities when playing Fiona. I referred to Pattie Lemon's (2023) Labon physical acting technique article and took note of how someone with a tough life would carry herself. Rossum played Fiona as a direct and punch character, so I decided to play Cynthia as direct and press since she is not as chaotic as Fiona. Shepard recommends exploring ways to incorporate something physical into your character, so compared to me, I made Cynthia stiffer (2004, p.130). I then dove deeper into Cynthia's backstory and objectives. I heightened the stakes by deciding that Cynthia is tethered to the town by ancestral ties which make it difficult to leave. Before Frank arrived, her attempts to escape were few since she kept getting caught and only she was at stake. But after his arrival, she found the motivation to escape again, this time with higher stakes since Frank depended on her to escape. As Kallas says, A piece that has no conflict creates an atmosphere of despair, of the immediate danger of deconstruction. Without conflict, life is impossible, both on Earth and everywhere in the universe (2010, p.58-59). For that reason, the conflict and plot of The Hunting of Mississippi Frank are the centre of attention.

Reflection

The filming process was a nice sliver of home since I freelance as a PA. It was one of the first times I genuinely felt happy during my study abroad experience. It felt great working on something that felt familiar. An added bonus is that I learned how to work the recorder. Now I feel confident taking that skill home and fully working both the boom and the recorder. I asked a lot of questions about where my frame was in times of filming. This experience gave me the

opportunity to practice asking the camera operator about what I can do as an actor to achieve the desired shot.

After viewing the rushes, I realized that not everything translated on camera the way we intended it to. Film is a tricky art, especially when there were no feed back monitors on set to see what was actively being filmed. Instead of being negative and pointing out every flaw in the footage, I counter the comments and assure myself that with more time, preparation, resources, and budget, it is easier to achieve the desired look. Overall, I'm glad I was presented with this learning opportunity. It gave me a realistic look into what it is like filming a budget-less film and what translates on screen as an actor.

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