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In Focus

Emotional Transportation and Identification in Screenwriting: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Within the academic domain focused on the artistic practice of screenwriting, this exploratory study assesses the presence of emotional transportation and character identification processes within the solitary screenwriter's creative imagination during the writing process. Screenwriting research is facing a dichotomy of the screenwriter who embodies both the role of a narrative specialist and that of a visual storytelling poet. Screenwriters often work in isolation, even in collaborative projects, leading to a tension between solitary work and collaborative roles. Narrative theories in screenwriting have mainly centered on identification of the audience, neglecting the screenwriter's perspective. However, screenwriting can serve as a platform for experimentation and a reflection of new ideas, insights, and hands-on experience, meeting the demand for a systematic understanding of the writer's processes. The results of this study provide preliminary insights into the mechanisms of emotional transportation, identification, and eureka moments in screenwriting practice. The study suggests that the transportation effect in writers is induced by a feeling of security, which arises from the limitations of the assignment. The data also suggests that pressure can lead to more original dramaturgical solutions. As such, this experimental pilot study already sheds light on the screenwriter's artistic process. Yet, it has limitations, including a small number of informants and the novelty of the research method.

KEYWORDS: identification, emotional transportation, screenwriting, imagination

INTRODUCTION

Screenwriting manuals authored by established writers like Field (1979), Seger (1994), and McKee (1999) have predominantly emphasized the technical aspects of screenwriting. These manuals rely on the screenwriter's purported understanding of how audiences engage with audiovisual products, typically adhering to the Hollywood formula referring to various dramaturgical models (see, e.g., Finnegan 2016: 2).

Although these manuals provide valuable insights into the craft, at times, according to Margaret McVeigh (2023: 1),

they overlook the creative dimension. Occasionally, creativity may be presented subordinate to the mastery skills. As an example, Robert McKee, in "Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting" (1999), places a strong emphasis on the importance of craft as the key to unleashing creative potential, as McVeigh (2016: 4) states. In this approach, which is doubtlessly also valuable, craft takes center stage, including the belief that mastering the technical facets of screenwriting will catalyze the subconscious creative process.

However, some authors in the field provide more precise guidance on creative approaches for generating ideas, like Linda Aronson (2001: 2–4), who discusses, for example, Edward de Bono's (see e.g., 2014) creativity theories and applies them in screenwriting, distinguishing craft that corresponds to "vertical thinking" and the writer's distinct perspective on the world, that is, "lateral thinking." In *The Psychology of Screenwriting: Theory and Practice*, Jason Lee (2013: 38) refers to the unconscious as an invaluable resource in creativity and, for example, Linda Seger (1994) and Dona Cooper (1997) acknowledge that creativity plays a crucial role in crafting vibrant and unique narratives for screen, according to McVeigh (2016: 5). Over the last few years, a few screenwriting scholars have also integrated creative exercises into the training of practical skills, highlighting the significance of improvisation, play, and open-mindedness in the screenwriting creative process (see, e.g., Kallas 2010; Waldeback, Batty 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Screenwriting research is historically in its initial phase. According to Batty et al. (2017: 225), the study of screenwriters and their creative processes during script development constitutes an unfolding area of scholarly exploration. McVeigh (2023: 644) confirms the observation and states that within the academic domain focused on the artistic practice of screenwriting, the study of screenwriters' writing processes in the context of script development is a rising area.

In her 2015 article, McVeigh cites the insights of screenwriter Jean-Claude Carriere, who highlights the distinction between the solitary storyteller found in literature like prose and within the realm of collaborative storytelling as seen in performing arts, particularly film.

> There are two types of writing. One is the literary way of writing a book. You can write a book alone, even publish it yourself. You put the words on paper and they do not change … The second type of writing is for the performing arts. In that case, what you write is just the beginning of a technical process. Your words will be transformed and become something else at the end of that process. (MacDermott, McGrath 2003: 82; cited in McVeigh 2015: 25–26)

The quote represents a straightforward and uncomplicated categorization in the screenwriting field. On the other hand, in his essay "How to Think About Screenwriting," Ian W. Macdonald (2023: 34) suggests that screenwriting can also serve as an avenue for experimentation. Consequently, a screenplay transcends being merely a preliminary blueprint for a film; it can serve as an articulation of ideas, principles, or beliefs, and it reflects the knowledge, insights, and lessons that are grounded in practical, hands-on experience of working with and writing screenplays for films and TV.

MacDonald (2023: 28–29) proposes three clusters for studying screenwriting. Firstly, Orthodox Creative Screenwriting centers on comprehending screenwriting as a collection of practical skills and principles that can be readily applied within the industry. Orthodoxy represents the prevailing, cohesive, and conventional narrative framework encountered in screenwriting guides. Secondly, the Critical Practice Cluster underscores the importance of

innovative self-expression and the questioning of established conventions as in, for example, manuals like *Alternative Scriptwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* (Dancyger, Rush 1991). The third cluster, Critical Analysis, seeks to grasp the processes and significance of narrative construction in visual media from diverse viewpoints. Thus, the Critical Analysis Cluster's challenge lies in conceptualizing and studying the mosaic of viewpoints it contains, including the broad range of topics and approaches explored in screenwriting research and the role of screenwriting in various academic disciplines (Macdonald 2023: 34–35). That said, this article, falling into Macdonald's Critical Analysis Cluster, is not delving into the script's potential to – in McVeigh's words – "inspire others involved in bringing the film to life so that they could contribute" (2015: 31) but a practice-based study on the creative process of a solitary screenwriter.

According to Bridget Conor (2010: 37), the unique and isolated nature of screenwriters' work – which often begins before a project team is established – forms a constant and chaotic tension with the writer's role as a fundamentally collaborative part of a group. While screenwriters may collaborate within teams, the majority find the writing process to be a solitary experience, even when part of larger writing groups. Siri Senje (2017: 283) states in her article that ultimately screenwriters need to contemplate, in their capacities as writers, educators, and script advisors, whether the screenwriter's function primarily aligns with that of a narrative technician or a poet of visual storytelling. According to Senje, the answer lies in the recognition that both roles are indispensable, but their significance may shift at different stages of the creative process.

Within the domain of script development today, it appears that the role of the poet, rather than the technician, is the one facing a higher risk of becoming endangered (Senje 2017: 283). That said, there is only scarce documentation in which screenwriters describe their own creative processes. Consequently, according to Senje (2017: 272), our understanding of the activities occurring within their writing rooms largely relies on speculation.

Comprehending Senje's articulation, it is reasonable to assert that there is a dire need for knowledge to understand the solitary screenwriter's artistic and creative processes in a systematic manner, not least since, according to Finnegan (2016: 2), an estrangement can be detected between the academic screenwriting sphere and the industry at large. While dramaturgical knowledge in the realm of screenwriting is abundantly available, there remains a tone of mysticism associated with the solitary writer's writing process itself. The screenwriting manuals rely on a readily saleable, persuasive assurance, but, as Greenwood and Gibson (2020: 150) point out, they divert attention from the fundamental puzzle screenwriters encounter: the art of writing is a profoundly personal and "mysterious" undertaking.

Myriad quotes from screenwriters and film directors refer to the seemingly mystic quality of their own writing process. In their review of literature, Greenwood and Gibson (2020: 144) claim that artists, scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers, in a similar fashion to screenwriters, have described their creative processes as being linked to the unexpected emergence of the unconscious mind, leading to the generation of original discoveries and innovative ideas. Even though the unconscious mechanisms are undoubtedly significant in the creative processes, including that of screenwriting, they are difficult to study. Bypassing questions about the unconscious – which would be the topic of another study – my attempt is to provide a proposition for comprehending the solitary screenwriter's creative imagination and their encounters with the occasionally surprising moments of character identification and emotional transportation while they are writing. The writer's transportation in this paper is defined in line with Bal and Veltkamp (2013) and Green and Clark (2013).

In her article "Formatting the Imagination: A Reflection on Screenwriting as a

Creative Practice" (2017: 281), Senje describes the writing process of the screenplay of *September*, and in that process she describes: "I placed myself inside the minds and locations of my characters, where I would literally spy, listen, watch and occasionally act out situations." The process of identification Senje portrays here can be, according to Oatley (1999: 446), understood as a form of empathy wherein individuals not only sympathize with another person but also absorb that person's perspective and experiences. In the context of identification, individuals momentarily transcend their own selves to embody and empathize with the perspectives of others.

Screenwriter Ted Tally describes in Joel Engel's book *Screenwriters on Screenwriting* the creation of the character Clarice M. Starling in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*: "I found it easy to let her be my eyes and ears and heart" (Engel 1995: 123). Screenwriter Bruce Joel Rubin portrays his process in the same book: "The rules are not rules. They're just something you feel. You intuit your way into the process of writing. You tell the story from inside the character. That's probably the most important thing in writing, and the thing that least happens in Hollywood" (Engel 1995: 5).

In their book *Alternative Scriptwriting*, Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush (1991: 85–94) explore extending the boundaries of character identification within narratives. This identification serves multiple purposes, facilitating a streamlined connection between the audience and the story while fostering a broader spectrum of emotional engagement. The authors discuss concepts like sympathy, empathy, and antipathy, contending that empathizing with a character often implies a profound identification with them. Nonetheless, the book focuses on securing the audience's identification and does not mention the identification process of the screenwriter.

In his article, John Finnegan (2016: 3) acknowledges the industrial expectation for screenwriters to consistently take the audience into account during the writing process. He debates that a means of effectively involving the implied reader or spectator is via promoting their identification with the characters portrayed in the narrative. That said, it can be argued that the professional screenwriting manuals do not commonly provide an overview of the screenwriter's identification with their characters, or the screenwriter's emotional transportation to the fictional world they are building.

Within the genre of instructional books on screenwriting, the most offered advice is "show, don't tell." In more direct manuals, writers are told that their prose must evoke a cinematic experience for readers; otherwise, failure is inevitable (Oatley 1999: 445).

In her thesis "Narration in the Screenplay Text," Ann Igelstrom (2014: 201) delves into the narrative aspects in screenplays, linking the screenplay to narrative theories as proposed in the domains of both literary and film theory, and studies how screenwriters employ the screenplay to convey the envisioned film to the reader. One could ponder if the dominant idea of "focalization," a term coined in narrative theories, could be one reason for the lack of studies on the identification processes of a screenwriter? According to Igelstrom, the term "focalization," initially introduced by Gérard Genette, concerns itself with answering the question "who sees?," that is, the focalizer, in opposition to "who speaks?," in other words, the narrator. Essentially, focalization deals with the vantage point from which the narrative is presented. Another scholar, Keith Oatley (1999: 446), suggests that third-person narrative enhances spectatorship, whereas first-person narrative promotes identification. Whichever the line of inquiry or the domain, there still lies a recurring shortcoming: screenwriting studies and manuals refer to the audience when talking about identification, the same way other disciplines, such as narratology, seem to refer to the text or the readers.

Considering the limited exploration of the phenomena of emotional transportation or the identification process in screenwriting literature, it becomes necessary to draw

upon frameworks from other disciplines, such as psychology and communication studies, to address this gap. Assuming their theories are applicable to the writer's processes, it becomes possible to explore the emotional transportation and identification of screenwriters by drawing insights from the research in other domains.

The reader's transportation process has been studied in recent decades (see, e.g., Bal, Veltkamp 2013; Green, Brock 2000; Green, Clark 2013; Johnson 2012), and these studies draw on the remark that the more transportation there is in the reader, the more empathy there also is toward the character. Research on fiction reading suggests that a story can evoke identification in a reader, but only when they are emotionally transported into the story (Bal, Veltkamp 2013: 8). According to Green and Clark (2013: 477), transportation refers to experiencing a profound sense of involvement in the story. This immersion leads to heightened cognitive and emotional engagement and may also form vivid mental imagery. In a study conducted by Bal and Veltkamp (2013: 1), findings have verified that fiction has an impact on the reader's empathy. However, this influence is contingent upon the level of emotional transportation experienced during engagement with the story. Specifically, a lack of transportation results in diminished levels of empathy.

It is fair to assume that, in their identification process, screenwriters adopt the goals and plans of their protagonist, leading to an emotional response whether these plans succeed or fail. In his article "The Protagonist's Dramatic Goals, Wants and Needs" (2010), screenwriting analyst Patrick Cattrysse presents a revised perspective on the paired concept of character "want" and "need," which is a prevalent theme in screenwriting manuals. Cattrysse's revision (2010: 95) aims to enhance the development of a protagonist's narrative arc. In addition, he elaborates on this theory by examining the audience and their subconscious connection with a character. This emotional connection has the potential to evoke feelings of sympathy and empathy, ultimately leading to a process of identification.

John M. Tchernev (2022: 740, 754) primarily explores the formation of emotional bonds in narratives, focusing on identification and liking. He draws from existing literature on audience identification and affective disposition theory to highlight the importance of a strong emotional connection between the audience and the protagonist. The study investigates whether character motivations can explain and predict identification and liking, and the results affirm the role of motivation in identification.

According to Healey and Grossman (2018: 2), the two main categories of empathy are cognitive and emotional. Cognitive empathy is also indicated as perspective-taking, implying the act of stepping into someone else's shoes (Ratka 2018: 1141). Demetriou and Nicholl (2022: 13) refer to the two distinct empathy categories as affective and perspective-taking empathy. The cognitive or perspective-taking dimension involves understanding and empathizing with the other person's situation without necessarily experiencing the same emotional involvement. Engaging in cognitive empathy involves adopting another person's viewpoint. It simply means envisioning what it could be like to be in their position.

The emotional or affective aspect of empathy, in turn, allows us to immerse ourselves in another person's experience. Affective empathy has been variously defined. According to Cross et al. (2012: 4–5), three essential components define empathy: firstly, an emotional response to another person's situation; secondly, a recognition that one's own emotional state is influenced by the other person's situation; and thirdly, an awareness that one's emotional state is in harmony with the other person's emotional state. Additionally, Cross et al. (2012: 7) argue that this mutual alignment, fostered through a creative process, can be termed "empathic creativity". Concomitantly, as noted by Cross et al. (2012: 6), imitation seems to serve a significant

role in empathy, granting us a nearly first-hand encounter with others and facilitating our ability to identify and internalize their emotional states.

Recognizing the lack of studies within the academic domain that have focused on the artistic practice and empathic creativity of screenwriting, an exploratory study was conducted with the aim to assess the presence of emotional transportation and character identification processes within the solitary screenwriter's creative imagination during the writing process.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, four experienced Finnish screenwriters – three females and one male – all of them seasoned at working both as writers' room head writers and as solitary writers for series episodes and film, participated in micro-phenomenology-inspired expert interviews. Micro-phenomenology provides an intriguing new design for studying the screenwriter's artistic process. It serves as a research tool that facilitates the examination of subjective experiences, and it encompasses an interview and analysis technique that offers researchers the ability to provide intricate depictions of fleeting instances of subjective experience, offering systematic protocols for comparison. Developed by Claire Petitmengin-Peugeot under the guidance of her PhD supervisor Francisco Varela within the neuro-phenomenological research program (see Varela 1996), the method offers a response to the limitations associated with solely investigating physiological activities when studying the human mind, body, and psyche (Petitmengin-Peugeot 1999). It highlights the necessity for a disciplined methodology that delves into human experience while promoting a fruitful dialogue with cognitive neuroscience (Heimann et al. 2023).

According to Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999), the micro-phenomenological interview method is based on the observation that a significant portion of our experiences often goes unnoticed. Whether we are engaging in activities like seeing, listening, imagining, remembering, understanding, or making decisions, a considerable portion of these activities, though subjectively lived, cannot be immediately accessed by consciousness or expressed through words. People go through these experiences, but in a way that goes unrecognized or unnoticed, or happens before conscious reflection. What is especially surprising is our lack of awareness about this absence of consciousness; this poses the initial challenge in becoming conscious of this overlooked dimension.

Currently, micro-phenomenology finds application in examination of lived experiences across diverse fields of study. Heimann et al. (2023: 218) explicate that it is being used as an independent method or in conjunction with other approaches, such as neuro-phenomenology. Its practical applications encompass a wide range of areas, including promoting sustainable behavior, studying writer's block, clinical investigations, and technology.

Study design

In a micro-phenomenological interview, the target experience can be defined moments prior to the interview. In this study the experience was a writing task, becoming the focus of the exploration. It was possible to control the start and the end point of the writing task and the shortness of the prompt (1–2 minutes) was justified to be able to go deep into the details in the writing experience. In this study, the processing time is a minute or two.

Three interviews were conducted and recorded remotely using Zoom, while one interview was conducted on-site. Beforehand, the interviewees were asked to choose a fictional character that they know well. The character could preferably be, for example, a main character in their own film or TV series. Also, the interviewees were assured that their character would remain anonymous due to potential confidentiality issues. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked to choose a writing tool, and all of them wrote with a pen and paper.

The writers were then given a prompt, a writing assignment, in which the writers were asked to take their chosen character and put them in a cafeteria, sitting by a table and looking out of the window, sipping coffee while waiting for someone. The writers were given one to two minutes to complete the task.

At the beginning, the interview contract, including the interview framework – the objective, the principles, and the confidentiality – was stated. The interviewees were invited to an interview on the screenwriter's imagination. They were told that the study explores their subjective experiences, referring to the visual, kinesthetic, and auditory experiences that may be experienced, or may be left unnoticed, while writing a scene.

The interviews were approximately one and a half hours in duration. Following the procedure for micro-phenomenological interviews, the interviewees were first asked, by inducing an evocation state, to report what happened in them during the writing experience. Thus, the first diachronic (temporal) description was collected by the interviewer making handwritten notes. Secondly, a refined description of the diachronic and synchronic (coincident) report was collected by repetition of the experience verbalized by the interviewer, delving deeper into the sub-moments, chosen by the interviewer. By repeating the interviewee's report as accurately as possible, the interviewer confirmed that she had understood the report given by the interviewee. Concluding the interview, the whole writing experience, based on what the participants had reported, was repeated to the interviewees. Their permission to use the interview in the study was requested, after which the interview was concluded.

DATA ANALYSIS

A topic identification and analysis was conducted, seeking inspiration from the micro-phenomenological analysis model of Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999: 49–59). As the author is not sufficiently trained in this method, it cannot be claimed that the interview or the data analysis would qualify according to the procedures of micro-phenomenology, but even at this level of expertise the application of the method gives interesting and substantial results.

The data was analyzed in four steps: the first step was the pre-analysis, including the transcription and translation of the interviews. In this state, there was a distinction made in the transcription between statements that depicted real-life subjective experiences of the writers, and what is referred to as "satellite information," which encompasses opinions, theoretical abstractions, or contextual details. However, these satellites were also grouped, named, and retained for this analysis, thus differing from Petitmengin-Peugeot's model.

In the second step, the data was reduced to descriptive aspects of the experience and grouped diachronically, in terms of their chronological position in the experiential time. As the writing assignment dealt with writing a scene in an audiovisual fiction form, an inherent division arose from the dramaturgical structure of a film or TV scene. The diachronic segments were thus grouped generically according to the following categories:

- The Beginning category is right after the assignment has been given and the writer is prompted to start writing. It lasts approximately 2–10 seconds for each participant.
- In the Middle category the writer is writing the scene.
- The End category consists of the thoughts, emotions, and decisions made only seconds before or after the writing time is up and the writers are told to stop writing.
- Lastly, the Debriefing category includes the concluding stages of the interview, in which the whole description is reformulated and verified, and the interviewee is brought back to the present moment.

In the third step of the analysis, every aspect of the experience was not only described through a diachronic, chronological model but also analyzed by a synchronic model that captures simultaneous dimensions beyond its temporal nature. While the diachronic, that is, the chronological model portrays the experience as a "film," the synchronic, that is, the simultaneous model could be likened to a pause between each individual frame, capturing the instance in an image-by-image manner, as Petitmengin-Peugeot describes in her paper (1999: 54).

In the analysis, the synchronic model was built by systematically abstracting information from text segments that described the same action in different interviewees. It consisted of descriptive characteristics of segments in the text that were interconnected through classification and aggregation. The descriptive characteristic was a direct excerpt from the data that encapsulated a meaningful unit of information. Significantly here, the analysis differs from Petitmengin-Peugeot's model, as satellite segments of the interviews were included in the data.

Five different topics were identified in the data, and named as follows: (1) "From excitement to frustration;" (2) "Where did it come from?;" (3) "With or next to the character?;" (4) "Imagination;" and (5) "I've been taught this."

In the results, of the five different topics identified in the data and portrayed above, three were analyzed and reported, and further focused as follows: (1) "From excitement to frustration" specifies the text segments and indicates the emotions and tactile sensations that were experienced by the writers during the writing task. (2) "Where did it come from?" is a category where an unexpected solution comes to the writer's consciousness – it represents an instant, when a sudden eureka moment happens. The eureka moment, which is also referred to in common speech as an Aha! moment, describes the phenomenon of suddenly grasping a previously incomprehensible problem or concept, in this case a drama plot solution. (3) Moments in the description named "With or next to the character?" indicate the writer's emotional transportation in the scene or identification with the character they are working on during the writing experience. These three topics were analyzed.

Two topics were left out of the analysis. (4) "Imagination" is a description that indicates the cognitive, thinking, reasoning, and imagining processes in the writer and consists of the imagery and auditory levels of imagination that the writer experienced during the assignment. In the data, this kind of reporting existed abundantly, but since the analysis is focused on emotional transportation, the writer's imagination (except for where there is transportation) does not provide findings for this study. This kind of material largely consists of describing the events in the plot and with the character. (5) The last topic, "I've been taught this," consisted of all the context-related, knowledge-based, goal-oriented, and judgmental satellites that were reported during the interview, as well as the dramaturgical, professional, and expertise-related reflections during the Debriefing state, which will subsequently be extremely valuable for future studies.

After grouping the chosen data diachronically and analyzing it with a synchronic pattern, it was time for the fourth step taken in the analysis. This was an aggregating analysis where a condensed representation of the overall experience was created while considering the initial research questions. In the Results section, the report logic is to group all three topics ("From excitement to frustration," "Where did it come from?," "With or next to the character?") under each temporal segment (Beginning, Middle, and End).

RESULTS

Beginning: From excitement to frustration

At the very beginning of the writing task, right after the instructions were given, two writers reported feelings of panic and pres-

sure. There was a feeling of pressure to complete the scene and to make it perfect (W1) or a flash of a panicked feeling that resulted from being observed (W2). Also, Writer 2 reported, related to the pressure, a feeling that sprang up from a thought about if they were doing the task right. Additionally, Writer 1 reported a feeling of fear, but right after recalling that the scene was to be written for a familiar character, the feeling dissolved.

The feeling of being observed led to a sudden and brief sensation of being self-aware, and in turn puzzlement, which was immediately pushed aside by Writer 2, thinking that such things must not disturb their concentration and creativity. The writer described the moment as "zooming in microscopically" and feeling the unpleasant sensation of someone standing and watching behind their back the very moment they are writing. Writer 2 describes a feeling of shackling their freedom, but also telling themselves to let the feeling go and not to give power to the emotion. It must be shaken off to be free: "Well, if I can somehow describe it, it's kind of like a flash of pressure – it's like a slightly physical association like someone trying to suffocate me suddenly by wrapping their arms or something around my middle body so that it's hard for me to breathe" (W2).

The first feeling for one of the interviewees (W3) was enthusiasm since the writer "loves tasks like this." Writer 3 was to start writing the scene directly after the assignment, without the 1.5 minutes' prewriting time.

Before the start signal of the experience (after 1.5 minutes of writing), Writer 1 reported being quite relaxed and in a good mood and satisfied with what was happening. Regarding the unexpected solutions or sudden eureka moments, there were no such "Where did it come from?" experiences in the Beginning. Additionally, there were – quite unsurprisingly – no "With or next to the character?" experiences marking the writer's transportation, or identification, with their character at the Beginning of the assignment.

Middle: From excitement to frustration

After solving the character's coffee issue, which can also be interpreted as an obstacle for the writer, Writer 3 started to develop a slight "anxiety-panic" that felt like a small pressure in their chest. It arose from the thought that they were in a hurry to produce content in the scene. Every scene must move the story forward, and it caused them to feel slightly physically sick, indicating that they did not have time, which made them wonder how they were going to solve the plot and the scene. The writer recognized the feeling from previous times, and recalled them as moments with "breathing difficulty."

> I didn't think about it in such an analytical way (during the writing assignment), but now that I'm unpacking ... So, I immediately know that the scene requires a twist. I'm such an experienced writer that I realize that it automatically must have a twist ... and a mild anxiety arose from the fact that – the content of the scene is now needed. (W3)

Writer 1 reported that they almost started to develop more interest in the writing itself than the "test" at hand. Another writer (W2) felt a straightforward undertow in their writing process at this point. Writer 1 felt great pleasure from what was happening during the Middle part of the writing assignment. For the writer, it just felt good that the writing came quite naturally. Writer 2 reported a "really good feeling," too, due to the sense that there was plenty of time to write. There was an experience of peace and an awareness of time to be in that moment. "It's like writing a diary for yourself or ... It's like savoring. At the same time. If only I could find it ... find the right ... way of expressing it. What are you going through then" (W2).

Writer 1 was also satisfied with the snappiness of the scene and felt contentment with themselves in not forgetting and accidentally leaving out another character

they had put in the scene in the Beginning. Writer 3 felt being in their own area of strength and knowing that they are fast; their feeling was safe, easy, and enthusiastic. “Yeah, ’cause that’s also you know … even writing a little scene like that, you go from excitement to frustration to … all sorts of things” (W4).

Middle: Where did it come from?

The time pressurization in the assignment caused a quick-thinking reaction where the writers could barely keep up with themselves (W1, W3). The writers thought or imagined faster than they wrote (W1, W3, W4). The text appeared “naturally” – there was no time to stop to think or evaluate the text in the making (W1). “I didn’t know what I was doing, my mind was building something more” (W4). W1 realized they had been thinking dramaturgically, unnoticing it themselves, that is, finding themselves writing something that they did not consciously think about. It happened by itself.

W3 retrieved a memory, for a long moment during the interview, of how and where they got the idea to solve the main character’s problem closer to the end of the scene with the first thing that came to their mind – with a solution that was completely intuitive. They felt that the way they resolved the plot was not “bad,” even though they normally would not act this intuitively. The writer described the moment as going into something “as deep as intuition.” Also, the intuitive solution created a new puzzle for the writer to resolve in the brief assignment. “So, I didn’t cook it up, it just happened. Someone autotyped it in my mind and an idea followed” (W3).

Middle: With or next to the character?

Two of the writers (W1, W2) indicated living in the moment while writing, driven by their main character, and accompanied by the engulfing quality of the situation. A sensation of immersion was being reported with both writers, and Writer 2 reported forgetting about the interview situation while writing. They were surprised when the time was up and how the time had passed so quickly (W1, W2).

What is remarkable with the transportation effect or the identification with the character is that it fluctuated in all the writers during the writing in the Middle category. It ranged from being the character to being next to or close to the character, up to the point of seeing the scene from a camera angle (W1, W3, W4) or seeing the scene happening on screen or on canvas (W1).

The interviewees expressed being in the shoes of the character (W1, W4), in the situation of the character (W1, W2, W4), in the head of the character (W1), feeling with the character (W1, W2), and being the character (W1, W2, W4). These kinds of wordings can indicate a strong identification with the character.

Writer 1 reported “seeing those pictures” and, on the other hand, also feeling like “sitting there, in a way, in the character’s place” and letting their emotions and the character’s thoughts carry them away. Writer 2 knew how their character feels and how they’ve felt that way too, and this would “somehow be related to identification”: “And that’s what made this experience stronger. Like … towards the end. I just went deeper … I already entered that world. But – do my own feelings get mixed up with the character’s? It’s because I do relate to her” (W2).

Writer 4 described the Middle part of the writing as “strongly being in the location of the scene”; they reported themselves sometimes sitting next to the character, sometimes being the character: “I am sitting next to her, or I am her, so that fluctuates. Because I’m also … I’m looking at her, and then I’m looking at the things around her from where she’s sitting. Um … there are pauses … to allow another image to come or another thought, or another impulse. I tried to see what the character sees” (W4).

One of the writers (W2) described the feeling as they just “knew how to tell [it],” they knew how the character is reacting and feeling. The writer thought to themselves that this is exactly how their character would react.

All the interviewees reported moments of being with the character, which could indicate transportation and, in addition to that, possibly a weak or a slight identification with the character. Writer 3 told of being “so strongly in that moment” with their character, and at the same time “feeling it for my character, because the character was also clueless” (W3).

While reporting, all the interviewees talked about oscillating or fluctuating between being their character and being in the scene as an observer. The pronoun in their speech shifted from “I” to “him” or “her” while describing what their character sees or does.

End: From excitement to frustration

Understandably, when there is a given time frame of one or two minutes for a whole scene to be written, any writer realizes that the time is very limited to complete the task. There was a feeling of pressure toward the end for two writers, Writer 1 and Writer 3. One interviewee stated repeatedly that the time to write the scene ended “really quickly” (W2). Two of the writers (W1 and W3) reported a barely-making-it feeling when the assignment time ran out.

End: Where did it come from?

There was just one eureka moment at the End of the writing assignment reported. “Without thinking about it, I figured out where it ends. And then I just hoped that I had the time to write these last sentences before … you say that time’s up. And I just had the time, just like that – to the second – with amazing precision, to write it” (W1).

End: With or next to the character?

One of the writers (W2) found their experience of transportation was interrupted by ending the task. The writer reported a strong feeling of “being cut out of the world” they were in. “What’s interesting to me at the moment is that I saw all those things. But while you’re writing you don’t have time to write all that down, so … It’s actually not on the paper, like …” (W4).

DISCUSSION

There is a notable distinction between micro-phenomenology and the majority of conventional qualitative methodologies. The latter center on the subjective facets of a particular experience and this implies that their primary focus lies in delving into the psychological realm of representations, meanings, values, judgments, beliefs, and similar elements associated with the subjective experience. This is called satellite data in micro-phenomenology. In contrast, micro-phenomenology seeks an embodied, procedural, and concrete delineation of the experience. Consequently, micro-phenomenology pursues an elucidation of the structure (the “how”) of a given experience. This contrast is evident throughout the entirety of the data collection and analysis procedures in micro-phenomenology (Valenzuela-Moguillansky, Vásquez-Rosati 2019: 147).

However, in this study, the analysis of the satellite data was taken into consideration for the reason of sheer interest to the expertise knowledge the participants provided. According to Petitmengin-Peugeot (2006: 230) the mechanisms underlying processes such as memorization, observation, imagination, and problem resolution remain largely elusive in our understanding. While we possess a general proficiency in executing these actions, our awareness of the precise cognitive steps involved in performing them is often incomplete. The satellite data in this study reveals information so interesting that it could not be left ignored and out of the analysis.

The reported analysis topics in the results indicate preliminary findings in the emotional transportation processes, identification, and the eureka moments in the screenwriting practice. In the data, both the identification and the transportation effect occur strongly in screenwriters. Only one of the interviewees (W3) did not report transportation or identification since they were in a hurry, given only one minute to complete the task. It can be concluded that Writer 3 was writing a treatment,[1] an aspect

1 A treatment is an outline of a scene, or a script.

they also mentioned during the Debriefing, while others were writing out the final script of the scene. A cautious finding could be that a "third-person narrator" emerges in a screenwriter in a pressing writing situation.

The results show how the writer's emotional transportation into a scene causes vivid imagery and detailed descriptions of the events and characters in it, regardless of whether the process is being called transportation or identification, confirming the findings in the literature (see, e.g., Bal, Veltkamp 2013; Cattrysse 2010; Demetriou, Nicholl 2022). The writer sees and senses the scene and the action in far more detail than they are aware of. Their imagination operates on such a subliminal level that the details are soon forgotten. In their writing, the speed of their thoughts exceeds the speed of their hand by multiple times.

Following Oatley's notions (1999: 446), the fluctuation of point of view in the screenwriter's techniques serves as the most direct method to modulate the balance between being with the character and being the character, that is, identification. Oatley (1999) suggests that when audiences engage with a narrative, they interact with the characters in two distinct manners: through spectatorship, observing the characters from a distance, or through identification, forming a connection with the characters. As the audience's mental engagement can shift between these two modes throughout the narrative, screenwriters also have the flexibility to navigate between these modes in their storytelling.

With cognitive empathy, defined by Anna Ratka (2018: 1141), the screenwriter is trying to tap into the idea of placing themselves in someone else's situation and gaining a better understanding of their experience. This is the type of empathy that the interviewees reported.

A very preliminary observation retrieved from the data is that the transportation effect in the writers is induced by a feeling of security, which is generated in its turn by the limitations in the assignment. The limitations, that is, the time frame, the character, the given location of the scene, and the given action for the character, all delimit and mark out most of the variables that can be overridden in the task. All the interviewed writers "loved" or were "relaxed" with the assignment after the first brief feeling of pressure or panic.

Based on the data, it can be stated that eureka moments and transportation are two separate phenomena. Even though the transportation state itself does not seem to produce eureka moments, they still can happen in that state.

In fact, the complete opposite can be argued that often quite the contrary happens: the moments of insight or realization occur without transportation, without immersing oneself in the fictional world. The results indicate that insight and the sudden solutions occur under pressure, which could be considered an antidote to the sense of security. Furthermore, the eureka moments seem to relate to the dramaturgical tacit knowledge of the screenwriters, as well as their familiarity with the fiction at hand.

While the study is to be considered experimental as a pilot study, it opens intriguing new windows to the artistic process of a screenwriter. The weaknesses of this study lies in the paucity of data as there were only four informants, and in the novelty of the research method for the researcher, in which case it could not be fully used. Future studies could address questions such as further revealing the tacit knowledge of professional screenwriters, addressing the problem of the written language that does not – per se – translate into images, and the benefit of obstacles and limitations in screenwriting.

In the Debriefing sessions, all the writers reported a realization or understanding of their own dramaturgical writing methods, which they had never consciously become aware of before. The very detailed recalling of the experience in the interview made them realize and see their own methods. In the "I was taught this" topic, the profound professionalism of the writers showed

itself. This is the kind of tacit knowledge of screenwriters that has not, to my knowledge, been studied with a systematic method so far.

Another, more profound problem inevitably arises from the interview material. The above-mentioned speed of the thought processes during the writing raises another interesting question. The words used in the script often cannot portray the whole experience of the writer. This "translation-from-images-to-language problem" can be considered a significant pitfall in screenwriting.

Also, it seems that the more pressure there is, the more original the writer's dramaturgical solution. In the data, the writers tended to call the eureka moments "dramaturgical solutions." The solutions came to the writers' minds in the data characteristically when there was considerable time or other kind of pressure.

Based on the data, it can be hypothesized that the constraints and limitations given to the writers led to quick and strong transportation as opposed to a set-up in which the writer would have all the time to hand and no content-related barriers. This could be in connection with the above-mentioned feeling of safety provided by a safe sandbox where the writer can play. Hence, a fertile ground for future scholarly exploration could be constraints and obstacles that propel eureka moments and give pressure as well as a feeling of safety to the screenwriting decision-making processes, which in turn can lead to unconventional outcomes in the screenwriter's writing process.

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