

26 November 2017

Honors Thesis Proposal

Working Title

Creative portion: Passenger Seat

Research portion: An Examination of Female Power in the Thriller

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the judgments that people make about each other—how they are made, why they are made, why it is or isn't just to make them, etc.—as depicted in films of the Thriller genre. Specifically, this film examines the ways female characters are capable of making choices about and towards male characters, as well as how audiences react to those character choices. The research portion of this project will supplement this creative exploration of this topic by identifying how this theme is handled and represented in famous film noirs. This will provide context for my piece, as well as provide insights into how the creative media and audiences are used to examining these themes.

Project Importance

Obviously, broadly speaking, gender has been examined in depth in the academic world of film. There is considerable research detailing societal and medium-specific insights regarding issues of gender that can be found in film. I would like to build on this research by looking specifically at one element of gender depictions in film, namely depictions of gender-based judgments characters make about each other, in a specific genre. I would like to participate in this research

by detailing whatever insights I may find in this area. Whether this highlights specific problems or solutions, or simply is a representation of some layered intricacies of human societal interaction, I believe that this research and creative exploration will reveal, or at least point in the direction of, human truths, as film and film studies generally aim to do. Additionally, the goal of my film is to add to the current body of work in this genre, considering how and why female characters have been able to make choices in the past, and filling in gaps of certain experiences that are less commonly represented on the screen.

Project Overview

The primary focus of my work thus far has been in the creative department of my Media Arts Capstone. I have been working on ideation, writing, rewriting, and directing of the script for most of the year so far. It has been challenging to create something that explores these themes candidly and truthfully, without merely highlighting my own biases regarding gender (especially any biases governed by sexism, intersectional forms of prejudice, or anything that leads to discrimination). However, I believe the script moves in this direction, and I will continue to edit it as I move forward through the next two semesters.

Of course, as a result of this creative work, I have done a decent amount of primary source research by viewing films that I believe will be relevant to my own film. Specifically, I have been looking at *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016 directed by Dan Trachtenberg), *The Gift* (2015 directed by Joel Edgerton), *Gone Girl* (2014 directed by David Fincher), *Nocturnal Animals* (2016 directed by Tom Ford), *Fargo* (1999 directed by Joel Coen), and *The Beguiled* (2017 directed by Sofia Coppola). Additional media I have been examining includes the video game

Gone Home (2013 published by The Fullbright Company), and films like *The Graduate* (1967 directed by Mike Nichols) and *Charulata* (1964 directed by Satyajit Ray). Obviously none of these latter three are thriller films, and my focus on them has largely been more from a technical standpoint than a thematic one; however, they all also feature very interesting depictions of interactions between characters of different genders.

For the written portion of my project, I have not yet done much secondary research into academic writing that has been done on this topic. I have a general understanding of the field of feminist film theory, and of the works of scholars like Molly Haskell, Laura Mulvey, bell hooks, Linda Williams, and Tania Modleski. However, this knowledge does not yet currently go beyond a level of understanding simply obtained in prior film theory classes. This is an area of research I am eager to explore more of in my research. I am also excited to study the work of critics and scholars who focus mainly on the genres of film noirs and thrillers.

In my work, I would like to go deeper into understanding the basis of thought and research that has already been done in these fields (feminist film criticism and noir/thriller film criticism). I would then like to apply that knowledge, as well as direct primary analysis, to a few films throughout history. From here, I would like to examine the way that gender plays out in that film, and the implications of the depiction of the amount of choice female characters are able to do.

In terms of the written portion of this project, my work thus far has primarily been to compile a list of relevant historical films which I can study to examine the theme of women's power to choose in film noirs. Thus far, my current list of candidates is *Notorious* (1946 directed by

Alfred Hitchcock), *Straw Dogs* (1971 directed by Sam Peckinpah), *The Third Man* (1949 directed by Carol Reed), *Dishonored* (1931 directed by Josef von Sternberg), *Way Down East* (1920 directed by D.W. Griffith), and *Fargo* (1999 directed by Joel Coen).

Ultimately, the goal of this research and analysis is to create something of a basis for my own creative project to be considered next to. Hopefully I will be able to examine my own work in a similar manner, determining how it depicts gender onscreen, what that depiction suggests about myself and potentially my societal background, and whether that depiction is problematic or a manifestation of any issues facing women or gender minorities today.

Qualifications of Thesis Committee

Advisor: Jeff Parkin

Jeff Parkin is my faculty advisor for my film capstone, and as such he is a perfect candidate for my advisor for this project. He teaches many film production and writing classes, and regularly advises students who are writing, directing, and producing their own projects. He also regularly writes, directs, and produces projects of his own and has a sizeable body of successful works. As such, he is an excellent advisor for the creative portion of this project.

Department Honors Coordinator: Dean Duncan

Dean Duncan teaches many critical studies film classes, particularly those that focus on narrative and non-narrative forms. He also teaches a class on horror, which is relevant to the study of noirs and thrillers. He has done extensive research on films of all genres, as well as film criticism in

many genres, and has produced his own works in both of these areas. He will help guide the written/researched portion of this project.

Faculty Reader: Stephanie Breinholt

Stephanie Breinholt is the Area Head of the BFA in Acting. She is an award-winning director and educator, as well as an actor. She teaches acting for film courses at BYU. As such, she has a thorough understanding of film and the way it communicates, as well as the actor's role in creating meaning. She will have a valuable critical eye for both the film portion of the project and the written film analysis portion.

Project Timetable:

January 2017 -October 2017: Writing, pitching, rewriting of script of creative portion of thesis

October 2017-November 2017: Production of creative portion of thesis

November 2017-December 2017: Editing

December 2017: Viewing of films, secondary source research for written portion of thesis

January 2018: Drafting of written portion of thesis, additional research if needed

January 2018: Other post-production of creative portion (visual effects, sound editing, composing)

Early February 2018: Conclusion of post-production of creative portion

Mid-February 2018: Analysis of creative portion of thesis in consideration of analysis of other films

Late February 2018: Synthesis and polishing

Early March 2018: Thesis defense

Culminating Experience:

* I will be submitting my capstone film to several independent film festivals, including some larger ones such as Sundance and South by Southwest, but also some smaller, more independent ones. It will most likely be screened at at least a few of these.