

**Can the Role of Actors Help Develop Character Driven Feature Film
Scripts for the Independent Producer on a Low Budget, Using an
Improvised Method of Working with Actors as Pioneered by Mike
Leigh?**

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Screen Project Development

School of Arts and Creative Industries

Edinburgh Napier University

14 September 2009

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the academic staff and administration staff at the Edinburgh Skillset Screen & Media Academy, Edinburgh Napier University. I would like thank both Alistair Scott and Hayes Mabweazara for their guidance and support throughout this project, and also for their understanding that I was also busy working on other film based projects at the time of writing this dissertation. Would like to thank Stuart Hazeldine, Stephen McCole, Cora Bissett, Justin Molotnikov, Clare Mundell for taking part in the interviews and questionnaires which I conducted with them, which have added knowledge to the dissertation. Acknowledgment also for the valued contribution of actors Danielle Farrow and Colin Brown, who volunteered their time and energies into the improvisational workshops, super special thanks to my wonderful devoted and loving wife, Shazia, who has patiently supported my efforts, and made hundreds of cups of tea and coffee, providing me with sustenance and giving me the time and space to research and write the dissertation. To my wonderful children, Shaahan and Rummana, for there incredible patience and endurance, supporting me to complete this dissertation.

Abstract

Reduced budgets in the UK feature film production are threatening the fragile Film Industry of becoming redundant. In an effort to prevent the Film Industry of becoming redundant, this project report examines a method of film development called actor improvisation, which has been used extensively in a number of recent innovative low budget films made in Scotland. To help gauge the nature of actor improvisation as a viable tool and as an alternative to traditional script development, I examined the film works and methods of film pioneers such as John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh, which have championed alternate film methodologies over the last few decades to critical acclaim. These examinations indicate that given the right context, actor improvisation to be a valid tool for the development of film scripts or as a replacement for. To ensure that low budget filmmaking not only in Scotland but globally is nurtured; film producers should take into consideration actor improvisation as a film development method, which could reduce film production times and film development costs.

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Introduction

I remember back in the year 2006, in the small hours, sitting in a darkened room, jostling with the editing suite, trying to create the structure for the narrative of a documentary I had shot in the year 2004. It had taken me nearly two years from the point of shooting the documentary to finally getting it into the editing suite. I had been side tracked by life and my mind was now full of new stories to tell.

Bo Kata (2007), premiered on a cold, stormy February night, snow blizzards engulfing most of Scotland. I thought the premiere would be a wash out. I was wrong. Queues lined the Dundee Contemporary Arts Cinema, and the premiere was sold out within minutes. People had travelled from as far as Dumfriesshire to attend the screening of a twenty-six minute documentary. There was a real buzz, and I could sense anticipation and excitement within the crowd. *The Full 10 Yards* (2004), a short drama piece I wrote and directed would precede the main event as a surprise film. It was a filmmakers' dream come true.

At the post screening drinks reception it became clear why the night had gone so well. Majority of the audience had read Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) book, and were interested in seeing the world of the real kite runners, their environment, and the industry surrounding it, even though *Bo Kata* (2007) depicted the true lives of the kite flyers of Lahore, Pakistan, whereas 'The Kite Runner' fictional world was set in Afghanistan.

Bo Kata (2007), met audience expectations and the film was picked up by other art-house cinemas across Scotland for screening that year. It intrigued me how the worlds

of fact and fiction, the real and the make believe could co-exist so happily in cinema terms, in film consumption terms, in box-office receipts terms.

It was clear to me that choosing the right subject matter was fundamental to success at the box-office. The story of the real kite runners I had filmed in Lahore, Pakistan during 2004, had hit a chord with the audience. This story was not scripted, it was real life. The participants were real, whether kite flyers or kite merchants, they were tangible with tangible stories. Yet these real characters held the attention of the audience on the big screen. Real life is not scripted. Yet my other film, *The Full 10 Yards* (2004), was meticulously created, structured, scripted. Each word was carefully considered before putting pen to paper. I had already thought of the fictional characters, their back stories, their scenarios, before writing the script. The numerous stages that a writer goes through before the writing starts, clearly defining the goals of the character, the environment where the action would unfold, the plot.

Then inevitably I was bombarded with questions about my next project. What was it about? What was the story? Was it going to be another documentary or was I going to develop a fiction project?

Of course, I already had an idea about my next project. The time between shooting *Bo Kata* (2007) and editing it, allowed me to sketch out some topics I wanted to investigate. I wanted to look at a contemporary issue and deal with it as truthfully as possible. I had already been affected by films such as *Naked* (1993), *Secrets & Lies* (1996), *Shadows* (1958) and *A Woman Under The Influence* (1976) from directors such as John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh, their humanist approach was what drew me to their material in the first instance, but what made me go back for more was the sheer rawness of the performances, and how close to reality the actors managed to get, burrowing deep

underneath the skin of the characters they were portraying, to find the heart of the emotional truth.

I had written up a four page loose outline of my story during May, 2007. The story dealt with loss, reflecting the personal, social and human ramifications faced by a family, and by a community. Which I duly pitched to The Script Factory (a specialist script development and training agency) based in London via the story outline I had created, who were then selecting participants for their Scene Insiders programme which would take place in Edinburgh in August, during the Edinburgh Film Festival 2007. Upon being selected to take part in the programme, I took a redrafted version of the story, in the hope that I could develop the idea further into a script further down the line.

The story idea was strong enough to get a one-to-one session with script developer, Lucy Sher, of The Script Factory. Lucy commented on the salient aspects of the story. I realized at this point we were in script development mode, regardless of whether I had a script or not. Questions were being raised about the characters, their validity, their backgrounds, and the plot. None of which I could expand on there and then, but I could at least think about it. I had only just scratched the surface of my story idea and needed to delve deeper into the characters to find out the possibilities of where this story could take me. So I pitched the story again personally to Lucy. A proud family has to come to terms with the loss of their soldier son, Grant, killed in action. The family grieves, but finds the very glue that had kept them together is now in danger of creating a chasm between them, each blaming the other as the relationships begin to crumble not only between Father, Peter and mother, Catherine, but also the within the community itself, as divisions occur, but tensions are raised further when Peter's brother Paul returns to the community to find his brother has been going to the local mosque, wearing their

clothes and praying with them. Lucy and I debated on ‘whose story it was’, were we following the grieved father Peter, or were we following Paul, the estranged brother? The meeting left me inspired and energized as Lucy indicated the story was worthy of continued development, eager to see it in its finished form.

I wrote another draft of the story outline, with themes identified, plot clarified, additional characters added to help the main characters with achieving their goals, but I seemed to be going in endless circles, and the essence of the story kept eluding me. I was aiming to find the truth and the reality, and what I was ending up with was a story that was becoming cloudier, the characters seemed forced and unnatural. Not what I intended.

The journey for me had just started.

Review of Literature

Emotive Expression

Script advisor and film and Television lecturer, Ray Frensham, in his screenwriting book entitled *Screenwriting* (2003), is ideally placed to lead this literature review by stating the unique aspects of film which the screenwriter is tasked with in comparison to other forms of expression:

They say film is the major art form of the twentieth century. Certainly other forms cannot reproduce the camera's controlled ability to enlarge and focus on what an audience sees, making it seem more real than real. This enlargement and focused intensity generates a level of emotional realism and emotional identification which is incomparable: it is to have this experience that audiences flock to watch the screen. However, this experience takes place in the mind of the audience – and that is the area you must inhabit. The territory of the screenwriter is the emotional experience of the audience. But to say that a screenplay is an emotional experience is not enough. A screenplay structures that emotional experience, giving it direction and meaning and a final climatic moment of catharsis (2003: 6).

The screenplay then being the primary source of packaging the emotional content, and the film, the delivery platform for the audience to consume, can therefore in contemporary filmmaking terms be defined as: following the story of a main character who allows us to connect with in emotional terms, who then at the start of the screenplay, is faced with a crisis, requiring a clear goal to be met, but with the seemingly insurmountable tasks that await, the main character is continually redefined through the challenges faced, enabling the final objective to be reached (2003: 6).

Inspirational Seeds

However this journey which faces the screenwriter cannot be taken lightly, since before embarking, requires an idea to be conjured up; an initial thought which will spark the creative process and ultimately decide which methodology will be used to arrive at the end result. Robert McKee (1999: 113), in his book, *Story*, states: ‘Storytelling is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story’s event structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea...without explanation’. This is the hurdle which must be overcome by the screenwriter and which will allow the appropriate method to be selected and applied to dramatize the idea.

Traditional scriptwriting paradigms alleviate this hurdle using structured methodologies, which take the initial story concept, the idea, through a filtering process designed to evaluate the merits before putting pen to paper. Lagos Egri, in his book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (2004), points to the premise as being at the heart of this structured methodology. Lagos offers the notion, that without a premise, no matter what modifications are made to the original idea, the journey will be marred due to the lack of a road map to take you there, thus finding yourself lost (2004: 6). It is clear that the traditional structured method aims to guide and steer the screenwriter down a particular path, or rather, keep the screenwriter off the beaten path, from the very outset within the confines of an architected process.

Mike Leigh tackles this altogether differently. Leigh has only a very rough non-descript idea floating in his head, and possibly some thematic embers (Movshovitz 1994: 53). Leigh contends that his job is to come up with the story since he is the writer, but

even before any actor is cast for the film, he has a vague notion in his head about the film he eventually will make (Raphael 2008: 260). This internalized soul searching approach is instinctive of those who have a strong desire to tell their stories from the heart, and then carry that initial creative seed to bed for grounding, so that it may sprout and grow.

However, it is not all plain sailing, as this ‘unstructured’ approach has caused concerns for Leigh’s financiers when his producer has pitched projects to them:

‘The thing about my job,’ says Simon Channing-Williams, Leigh’s producer and partner in Thin Man Films Ltd., ‘is that I have to go to financiers and say, “I’d like you to give us a very large amount of money, but I can tell you nothing about the project, not even who’s in it.” It’s a terrible leap of faith for them, and however much you explain how Mike works, they always say at some point, ‘But there must be a script; you have to have a script’ (Kenneth 1996).

The script therefore from a film industry perspective, appears to be the vital element to convince film financiers to back the production of a film, and pursuing finance without one would be deemed going against the grain of industry norms.

Ray Pride provides an historical perspective citing silent-film historians, who indicate that films from that era offered better fare prior to the script being founded, allowing silent-era filmmakers to work in an improvised way, shooting as much film as required, thus; the script became the object from which producers could raise finance from and know how much money was on the line (Pride 1996).

Mike Leigh offers a much starker view. Leigh says the reason why the conventional route to filmmaking through scripts, fail to be an attractive proposition to him, because the film essentially has been prefabricated and the end product has already been witnessed by all concerned, even before the film has been shot, precisely the

opposite of what Leigh is trying to do, which is to get excited about the filmmaking process, favouring the journey where the film will reveal itself, when it is finished, until then he is just as much in the dark as his film financiers (Raphael 2008: 260).

Casting

That journey though cannot start without a cast, as in Leigh's improvisational script development process, for him actor is the key component, since there is no script at this point. Leigh begins his casting process only with a vague idea of the characters which the actors may play, but through detailed discussions with his actors, the characters are fleshed out (Movshovitz 2000).

Former wife of Mike Leigh and long time collaborator in his films, Alison Steadman, describes Leigh's cast selection procedure as not only his number one concern and priority, but also states: 'the act of choosing the first actor is for him like an artist choosing the first brush stroke' (Kenneth 1996). This in turn then would require Mike Leigh to acquire a strong palette containing the properties and attributes from which to build his mosaic from, and be able to apply and guide his strokes on the canvas. Leigh says his selection criteria for his actors dictate that they must possess certain qualities such as intelligence, be able to play characters other than themselves, have a sense of fun about them and see the funny side of it, and understand reality and be curious about life and all that it entails (Kenneth 1996). This is a stringent criterion for Leigh's selection process, and arguably would negate the vast majority of competent actors in the industry, but Leigh is looking for more than just an actor.

David Mamet, in his book, *On Directing Film* (1992), cites Stanislavsky, stating actors come in three flavours; one which follows the text precisely without adding to the role, going through routine behaviors, the second type of actor reads the script but then reinterprets the text from his viewpoint, whereby the third type of actor dispenses with the behavioral aspects of acting and but instead focuses on the actual act that is required by the script, following this through based on his understanding of it without preconceived notions and be flexible as the scene develops; this is Stanislavsky's ideal 'organic' actor (Mamet 1992: 85). This is from a traditional structured viewpoint, where the script has already been written and the actor then has to act the scenes in the screenplay, guided by the Director. This is a different process to Leigh's, as his actors must 'act' their way to finding the script, guided by Leigh.

In his book, *Sculpting In Time*, Andrey Tarkovsky (2006: 140), says that the film actor must be different from that of a theatre based actor, since the theatre actor has to go through an internalized process to arrive at the character, which the actor has drawn out, whereas Andrey believes that there is no room for such as actor in film to create extraneous detail or make choices, since only the film director has the complete working knowledge of the story and how it will unfold.

This traditional filmmaking philosophy is echoed by David Mamet who states:

Most actors try to use their intellectuality to portray the idea of the movie. Well, that's not their job. Their job is to accomplish, beat by beat, as simply as possible, the specific action set out for them by the script and the director (1992: 70-71).

This convention of filmmaking is deeply rooted in film industry traditions and a hierarchical knowledge based departure, which compared to Mike Leigh's philosophy

and process, can be argued that it bears no resemblance, since they arrive at the knowledge together, all the participants embody that knowledge as a whole without compartmentalizing it.

Building the Character

Once an actor (and the cast) has been selected, the process then shifts to turning an actor into a character. The importance of these transitions cannot be stated too highly. Sidney Lumet (1996: 31) states the relevance of character: ‘In drama, the characters should determine the story’, adding that ‘the story must reveal and elucidate the characters’. The character therefore becomes the focal point in the narrative to be followed by the audience. The character will need to possess a number of attributes which will define them. A character may be thought of as being three dimensional by exhibiting ‘thoughts, actions and emotions’ (Seger 1994: 181).

Having to contend with these dimensions requires getting underneath the characters’ skin, not an easy task. Victor Freeburg states:

The actor is the surface value of the character he interprets. In the case of a good actor this surface value is an accurate index to the character which lies beneath. In the case of the bad actor the surface value is like a gaudy curtain which prevents our seeing the character created by the author (1918: 17-18).

A case can therefore be made, that if the actor has been accurately cast, then the character will be truer and be able to get underneath the skin, since the audience will want to get deep into the layers of the character so they can find some common ground. Victor

Freeburg (1918: 196) says that it becomes problematic if the audience cannot relate to the character since they will have no vested interest if they lack knowledge of who this character is, who unfortunately will be unable to evoke any emotional response nor any sympathy in dramatic terms. Ray Frensham backs up this argument explaining that character investigation and study is vitally important to undertake, since as Ray Frensham (2003: 93) points out, character actions and why they do what they do are what essentially what audiences want to know the most. Robert (1999: 103) goes further by saying: ‘The revelation of true character in contrast or contradiction to characterization is fundamental to all fine storytelling’.

Mike Leigh bears the same level of weight and importance on characters as his traditional counterparts, as his improvisational approach to working with actors is all about finding the character, even though his methods oppose industry practice. Leigh starts by using a real person as the focal point to draw on character, by getting the actors to think about various persons they may have encountered and then discuss them, and which Leigh describes his role being: ‘to push and pull and cajole it and bully it in the direction of what’s dramatic and cinematic’ (Movshovitz 2000). Using this process, Leigh is able to extrapolate the character from the actor. The characters which Leigh is after are not like any other, wanting instead to search for an inner truth which makes them believable compared to characters which appear in other films, and so he is after the non-conventional, deviating from the customary, and achieves this by going through ‘processes of detail and heightening and distillation’ (Movshovitz 2000).

The traditional method of screenwriting would involve the creation of these characters from the screenwriters’ own personal experiences, or researching characters that exist in real life and maybe basing some of their characteristics to develop the

writer's creations. If the writer is able to know as much as possible about the characters being created, then they are more likely to connect with an audience, and if the information about the characters is unexciting, or the writer makes the character behave and say things in an unrealistic way, then this can be attributed to the writer not spending the time to really understand the characters (Frensham 2003: 70). Where the traditional screenwriter works in a cocoon and personal confinement, the improvisational approach requires an altogether collaborative method. Whereas Mike Leigh will slowly create the characters' past collaboratively with his actors, starting in the order of occurrence of the events that have happened to the character (Raphael 2008: 26). Leigh is creating a 'back-story' for each character, which will aid in building the character from the ground up, and in the process the actor will begin to transform into that character or at the very least begin to get underneath the skin. How far back the 'back-story' is created for each character is dependent upon the actual story (Frensham 2003:76).

Creating a detailed past about the character for the sake of reality is one thing, but knowing where that character is heading is another. The audience will soon become uninterested in a character who only has past, they will want to know what is the character hoping to achieve in the future and what is making them want to achieve it. The character (protagonist) needs to complete a task before the finale of the script, and the audience needs to see this goal being attained with clarity, and this happens because the character is motivated to accomplish this task, causing dramatization of a struggle which is compelled into a final resolution (Frensham 2003: 93).

Improvisation through Rehearsals

Once the characters have been investigated and researched, endowed with histories, associated biographies, and motivations, then in Mike Leigh's improvisational method, the process advances to the next stage, rehearsals. The actors are then allowed to join the other actors and participate as the characters to interact and react (Raphael 2008: 32). However to keep the process organic and spontaneous this will not occur if the actors are aware of each others' characters. Mike Leigh makes sure that all the actors concerned observe a strict rule of keeping their characters, their motivations and anything that has been discussed, a complete secret from everybody, partners included (Raphael 2008: 32). It is this organic process inherent in Leigh's method which is missing from the traditional screenwriter's toolbox, as the element of surprise is eluded.

The rehearsal process is an important part of Mike Leigh's toolbox and leads to a number of outcomes being derived. Leigh says the idea and the point of the rehearsals is to derive a premise from the investigations and research that has taken place, which will then lead to a basic outlined structure for the film (Movshovitz 2000). In the traditional screenwriting sense, the premise is derived at the start of the writing process, which anchors the writer and paves the way for creating the road map from which a final script can be created. Whereas in Mike Leigh's process, he is not necessarily looking for the final product, rather he is experimenting with the actors looking at all potential scenarios which can develop. Mike Leigh says that he is basically, through intensive periods of acting, improvisation, character development, relationship building, trying to find avenues which may not necessarily end up in the final product (Movshovitz 1994). This is

an investigation that is leading to a much more rounded overview of the world of the characters, leaving ‘no stone unturned’ as the actors are allowed to be spontaneous in their actions. Viola Spolin, pioneer in theatre based improvisation techniques says:

Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression (1999: 4).

Improvisatory techniques are deeply rooted in the theatre realm and widely used during Shakespearean times and indeed by Shakespeare himself. Improvisation has also been used by a number of film directors such as Woody Allan, and Robert Altman in movies such as *Mash* (1978), and has been used by director Sidney Lumet to resolve issues which otherwise would have been problematic. In his film, *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), a scripted scene proved to be too contentious for Lumet to film as verbatim, and resorted to improvisation as way to resolve the issue. Each improvisation was noted and typed after every rehearsal, which resulted in improvised dialogue coming out of those sessions (Lumet 1996: 34). In comparison to Mike Leigh who would use actor improvisation carte blanche across all his film projects, Sidney would use improvisation selectively.

In a particular scene in *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), Sidney (1996: 41) did not want the actors to characterize the parts, but instead wanted the actors to be themselves in the scene, and although he more often uses improvisation as a general acting tool, on this occasion it was used to generate dialogue, and finds it is worth using ‘If the actor is having trouble finding the emotional truth of a scene, an improvisation can be invaluable. But that’s about the limit’. In Mike Leigh’s case, he wants to find the truth in its entirety

and that process always starts with the character. Rehearsal is the process which enables the character to start to breath, allowing all aspects to be researched and improvised in collaboration with the actor, thereby making the character truer to life (Raphael 2008: 25).

Where the traditional screenwriter faces a solitary internal battle to bring to life the characters for the story and trying to create connections with the characters, Mike Leigh is working collaboratively exploring and creating characters and the choices they would make in real life. Mike Leigh describes the process of rehearsals as creating a ‘three dimensional metaphor’, saying the actor needs to be fully knowledgeable about the character they are playing, have the characterization, but also that the whole improvisation experience becomes embedded or ‘hard-wired into the actor’s character memory’ (Raphael 2008: 30). Responsibility is shouldered on the actor to take charge of the character which will be available as an instant recall when required. Mike Leigh makes a point of saying that the rehearsals are only the stepping stones to actually making the film itself, and before he starts to shoot the film, he writes a short structure containing no dialogue or descriptions, just basic scene setups (Raphael 2008: 30).

The short scene structure which Mike Leigh writes are basic compared to the traditional screenwriters scene construction. Ray Frensham states:

An actor will approach a scene by finding out what their character is doing there; where they have been and what they have been doing since their last appearance in the script; what they did immediately before this scene happened; where they are going and what they’ll be doing after this scene; what their purpose is in this scene and why they are there (2003: 161-162).

When Mike has completed the rehearsal period and has written down his short scene structures and notes, the improvisation stops. Unlike the work of John Cassavetes, for instance, absolutely no spontaneous speech is allowed once filming begins; a situation that demands that actors be able to switch from the free-flow of rehearsal to absolute precision. (Kenneth 1996)

Methodology

The research question posed in this dissertation will be answered through a research based practical workshop project. Research has been defined as ‘seeking through methodical processes to add to one’s own body of knowledge and, hopefully, to that of others, by the discovery of non-trivial facts and insights’ (Howard and Sharp, 1996: 7).

This research aims to add significant knowledge and to develop a new understanding in the field of study undertaken, and therefore present these findings as relevant for investigating the question of research in this paper, asking whether the role of actor improvisation can help to form part of a method, aiding a screenwriter through the script development process. Through applying the investigated methodology and processes described and documented in this dissertation on my own feature film story idea entitled, *Shooting Ducks*, I have attempted to answer the question.

I have been on a number of film and TV courses in the past, but have found in particular, the Script Factory Scene Insiders script development programme helpful in this investigation, as well as studying for the MA in Screen Project Development at Edinburgh Skillset Screen & Media Academy Scotland, in addition to gaining industry experience, both as a script consultant for regional film agencies in the United Kingdom, and also as a filmmaker, credited as writer/director and producer on a number of short films, some of which have gained both theatrical and Television broadcast in the United Kingdom, prior to which, the films received national and international film festival coverage, gaining recognition by either winning awards or receiving award nominations.

Recent awards received include the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2009 Trailblazer award, and the nomination for best film award by the Satyajit Ray Film Foundation in 2007, for documentary film, *Bo Kata* (2007).

This dissertation, through qualitative based research on my own project, *Shooting Ducks*, has expanded my knowledge of actor based improvisational methods for the purposes of developing scripts from a filmmaking perspective. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 11) describe qualitative research as ‘any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification’. Denzin and Lincoln, in their handbook of Qualitative Research, state:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2000: 3).

I have approached my research by observational means, through interviews, workshops with actors, noting and by recording material through video photography, and is represented in this dissertation as critical reflection of the process undertaken. In recent years, there is a growing trend among academics to utilise the mechanisms of both practice-led and ‘participant observation’ in the areas of the performance arts and media. The Arts and Humanities Research Council widely offer research grants and Fellowships to undertake practice based research in their guidelines for grants, and define such

projects in their *AHRC pamphlet for Practice-led researchers* (www.ahrc.ac.uk) where ‘Research which forms an integral part of the creative process in developing a work or art in whatever form or media...’.

The outcomes of the research and investigation help in adding knowledge value to my own future projects, but should also enable other screenwriters, film/Television directors and producers to benefit, either in their own projects or building on this research for further exploration and study.

The Research Argument

Shooting Ducks, as I had called my story idea, was skimping on reality and felt superficial, touching the surface, unable to penetrate deep into neither the characters nor the subject matter in a satisfying way, and the underlying result was a complete malaise. The socio-realist drama I envisaged was missing the humanist narrative, and the characters needed to connect not only with each other but with themselves in an intrinsic manner that portrayed realism of the scenario in which they found themselves. My latest draft seemed to set the stage for the characters to interact, but failed to get beyond the stereotypes they evoked. I was looking for realism, something out of the ordinary which would connect and engage in a meaningful way that would take an organic turn, but I was writing with a formulaic mindset. If *Shooting Ducks* was to attain the measures which I had set up for it and reach those milestones created by both John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh, I too would need the story to touch on the fine threads of humanity, cut through the façade and reach the depths of emotional engagement layer by layer. I needed to review my writing strategy if I was to reach my goal.

I needed to examine the narrative methods which had worked so well for both John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh in their realist documentary like character driven ensembles.

Mike Leigh states: 'My films Aspire to the condition of documentary. If you're a newsreel cameraman and you go and shoot a real event, you know that world exists whether you film it or not. What I want to do is create a world with that kind of solidity to it, something so three dimensional and solid you could cut it with a knife' (Kenneth 1996). The writing methods I employed involved long hours typing on a keyboard thrashing out fiction, lacking an aspiration for realism, curled up knee deep in structured writing processes. Maria Viera (1992: 14) interviewed Alruben, a long time actor collaborator on many of Cassavetes films, indicated the role of the actor in discovering the story, causing a catalyst in others, which enabled the story to organically shift for the betterment of the original script. This method of script development is actor improvised and provides a new dimension through their involvement. Mike Leigh, describing it generally as being an exploratory investigation, allowing the actors to be spontaneous, thus enabling an organic process to occur (Raphael 2008: 22-23).

This was not unlike the process I had used to film the documentary, *Bo Kata* (2007), where I gave the participants' free reign to explore and engage as they saw fit in front of the camera, albeit within structured confines.

Would I be able to in a short period of time, effectively align the improvisatory processes to my needs, customizing as I saw fit, so that I could find the deep rooted truth about the characters, and the choices they would make in real life, and would I be able to make *Shooting Ducks* real and believable as a story, evoking emotional resonance and cultural relevance, or would it all crumble on top of me?

Through practice-led research I intend to find the answers by following the core processes which have been used by filmmakers such as John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh, by adopting their actor based improvisatory methods and then customize these processes to my needs as I see fit. I will examine and scrutinize the traditional methods of script development against those of the improvisatory kind, investigating and researching texts, gauging their merits and their alignment to the methods.

Historically, traditional methods of script development which have been applied rigorously from initial seed idea to the formulation of a structured story have adhered to formulaic paradigms contained in recent texts such as Ray Frensham's (2003) *Screenwriting*.

I have three objectives which I will carry out using primary and secondary research, the examination of which will allow me to finally apply the knowledge gained using a practical based project.

Firstly, I will identify by research, the key aspects of the actor based improvisatory methods used by filmmakers such as John Cassavetes, briefly, but in detail, Mike Leigh, the collation of which will allow me to develop an improvisatory model of script development.

Secondly, I will interview a number of independent filmmakers actively experimenting with actor based improvisational methodologies, and then examine how actor improvisational methods have been used in a number of recent film works.

Thirdly, I will apply the newly constructed improvisatory model of script development to my story idea, Shooting Ducks, choosing a potential scene from the story as a candidate, thereby constructing an actor based improvised scene through a filmed workshop, which I will then edit, and analyse.

Adapting the Method

To answer the original research question posed in this dissertation, I have decided to extrapolate the following processes from the primary and secondary research undertaken, which are based on traditional screenwriting and improvisational methods. I have broken down the processes into defined stages.

Stage one would require the writing of a story synopsis, which would act as the initial premise. This is taken from the traditional screenwriting process.

Stage two would require the casting of appropriate actors who were suited to improvisational based work. These actors would help inform the script through the improvisational workshops. This is an important step in Mike Leigh's improvisational method, since he is looking for more than mere actors, and therefore would be interviewed to ascertain suitability.

Stage three would be to select an appropriate workshop space and dates/times for conducting of the improvisational sessions. These workshop venues would require being suitable for long sessions of improvising.

Stage four would be to have individual character building sessions with the actors in private. The actors would read the story synopsis with the through line for the eventual character they will play, discussing with the writer all possibilities, where actors would draw on personal experiences, friends or other people to build up an expression of possible candidates. This stage would also include talking and discussing the characters. The final outcome from this stage would be for the actor to start to get underneath the characters skin. This stage would be filmed.

Stage Five would be to bring the previously unmet actors together for a group improvisation session. Here the actors would be able to go into deep improvisation with guidance from the writer. Exploring the choices which the characters could make, thereby helping to develop and inform the story organically. Although improvised, the actors would go through a scene which has a skeletal structure, but the 'meat' would be created improvisationally. This stage combines both the traditional screenwriting scene development processes and also the improvisational aspects. This stage would also be filmed.

Stage six would require the output of a revised story synopsis or longer form story treatment, and also either the scene or scene-by-scene structure without dialogue, in traditional screenwriting terms, a step-outline, detailing the very basics of what happens in the scene.

Stage seven would require the writing up of the actual scene or script in traditional screenwriting format, using the notes collated from the workshops.

There would be four planned workshop sessions with the actors at a suitable venue, easy to travel to and from, giving ample space which is comfortable and noise free, to carry out the sessions free from distractions. Two workshop sessions would build the characters in collaboration with the actors, and the other two workshops would be used for group improvisations. Each workshop session would last no longer than three hours in total.

The workshops which will be conducted are contractions, and honed down due to time constraints, not only on the actor availability but also in consideration for the dissertation timescales. Importantly, the workshops will be filmed thereby the notes that

will be taken during the workshop process will be in short form only. Since I will be filming the workshops, it is not possible to take down notes on a continuous basis; therefore, the workshops will be evidenced by the actual filming. The filming of the workshops will aid in exploring highlights in the improvisation which may be suited for further exploration, as well as detailing spontaneity which may give rise to unexpected results, and therefore the filming process will aid in documenting this aspect.

The actors will be cast based upon experience working with improvisational methods. I have selected the actors who will take part in workshops. I know one of the actors, Colin Brown personally, since he appeared in my very first short drama film, *The Full 10 Yards* (2004). The other actress, I was recommended by a fellow filmmaker, Arturo Delgado. These two actors will form the core of the of the planned improvisational workshop sessions.

The following investigation and research will analyse the methods invoked in applying the collated processes on my story idea, *Shooting Ducks*, the final analysis of which will allow the output of a written scene in traditional screenwriting format, which will be attached as an appendix to this dissertation. The changes in the story synopsis will be highlighted in the analysis and the pre-workshop and post –workshop scenes will be compared and analysed.

A number of Scottish based independent filmmakers who have recently applied actor led improvisation on their feature films, were interviewed and question, and the results documented, and the details of theses findings are given in Appendix B (page 34).

The investigation and research analysis were carried out as part of a practical project, and the resultant workshops were filmed and documented, and the details of the findings are given in Appendix A (page 30).

Conclusion

Improvisation, whether in the context of traditional screenwriting or methods employed by filmmakers such as Mike Leigh, John Cassavetes, or Sidney Lumet for example, all have one thing in common, the desire to get closer to the truth. And for the traditional screenwriter, working in isolation and creating aspects of character, clearly has to be a disadvantage, compared to methods employed by filmmakers such as Mike Leigh, whose improvisational processes which are geared towards collaboration of ideas, tapping into a kaleidoscope of opposing energies, the search for inner truth, the intrinsic values of spontaneity, and the greater dimensions of the ‘what if?’, and all aspects of exploration cannot be fully matched by one solitary writer. There is an advantage to numerical superiority in the contexts of creativity on this occasion.

Shooting Ducks, my story idea, started out stale, uninspired and bordering on social stereotyping that both negated what I was trying to achieve but also inhibited the true possibilities which the story wanted to exhibit in its entirety. The research and investigation into the actor’s role in script development has been a positive experience. It freed me from putting pen to paper on every occasion. There was an alternative to sitting alone, pondering about how a particular character may act, what traits could be applied, how they would respond in certain scenarios and what choices they would make. Ponder no more. The seven stages which I had uncovered during the research phase of this dissertation, proved successful. I still had to write up an initial story synopsis as a guide to take into the workshops and this proved invaluable, since I was able to steer the actors from a tangent, once they were in full flow. I had picked the cast appropriately from my own experience of having worked them before or been referenced them, and this proved

to be very positive, as the actors were not scared to experiment, which was helped by having booked a free room at Craighouse Campus, Edinburgh. Building the characters with the actors was an illuminating experience, seeing the actor slowly being replaced by the character was an interesting, which can be evidenced from the DVD of the workshops. I found that once the actors met for the first time for the group improvisation stage, they were already in their characters, and this was a huge benefit time wise, to be able to get into the workshops without spending lengthy time 'warming up'. However, once the filmed workshops were complete, I edited the film, and found that I could write the scene without putting pen to paper, since the scene could be edited, distilled in video footage format, thereby forming a potential scene from the film. The accompanying DVD to this dissertation contains all the workshop sessions and the final distilled scene (instead of a written one). Once the improvisational processes were applied to my story idea, *Shooting Ducks*, it once again felt like the idea I had when I first started writing it all those years ago. It became fresh and importantly alive. It felt real, something which an audience could relate and engage with. As a writer I was set free to think about the finer details of the story, and escape the mundane ritual of formalized patterns that a writer sometimes feels necessitated to go through with a script developer. Where, before I had got stuck in the cogs of the writing mechanism, the improvisational workshops, which were completed over a very short period of time, fast tracked the writing process.

However, one of the most interesting aspects that occurred working on this project, was the realization that once the workshops were completed and even more importantly filmed, there was a ready made trailer for the film, albeit needing fine tuning in the edit suite, but nonetheless, there was a finance tool available other than a traditional script to take to perspective film financiers for funding. Also, there was ready made cast

already prepared to participate in the film, if film financing came through. Not to mention that I had also experimented with a number of filming styles without realizing it.

It has to be added that traditional screenwriting methodology has been the backbone of the film industry and a very successful one at that. It is clear that it would be fool hardy to completely denounce any method which has been functioning for decades. Although it has to be pointed out that filmmakers such as John Cassavetes have been using improvisational methodology in some form in their film works since the 1950s.

Upon embarking on this journey I would not have considered improvisation, and actor based at that, as a possible tool for a screenwriter to embrace. However, it is evidenced in this dissertation, that improvisation would also be beneficial to film producers, who may see it as tool which may decrease script development times, which in turn would decrease film development times. Importantly, film producers would have a potential film trailer to screen to film financiers. The interviews I did with leading Scottish based filmmakers, who had worked with actor based improvisation methods had been very positive about the process and the results on their film.

However it also became clear from the questionnaire, that improvisation is a double edged sword, where you may be reducing costs from the script development side, but increasing costs in the rehearsal phase, where actors will need to get paid, and associated costs such as booking venues for rehearsal and catering covered. The question at the start of this dissertation was ‘Can the Role of Actors Help Develop Character Driven Feature Film Scripts for the Independent Producer on a Low Budget, Using an Improvised Method of Working with Actors as Pioneered by Mike Leigh?’, although there is no one method that would suit all feature film projects, having participated in a practical project-led research, where I was able observe the performance of the actors,

apply the knowledge gained from the research into my feature film project, *Shooting Ducks*, I would say that the method worked for me, and would probably work for other filmmakers, independent producers on a tight budget and schedule, since the turn around for the scene was only a couple of days, yet to have got to that stage with the traditional screenwriting method would have taken many months, in addition to costing more overall time wise.

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Appendix A

Research Analysis Notes

Shooting Ducks is an original story idea and subsequent story treatment which I wrote and developed in October 2006, and as such is copyrighted to me. The story treatment was then further developed during 2007. However, I lost focus on the idea, and had to let it rest, as I had difficulty in trying to make the characters both believable and compelling for an audience to connect and engage with. As part of my MA in Screen Project Development however, the opportunity presented itself in 2009, when I decided to select my dissertation topic. *Shooting Ducks* appeared to be the perfect candidate for selection as a story idea for the practical side of the dissertation.

Draft Pre-workshop Synopsis for Shooting Ducks

Proud parents Paul and Catherine, find their lives are turned upside down, when their only soldier son is killed in action in the Middle-East. The story follows the journey of Paul who becomes estranged with his wife Catherine, falling further apart as the very glue that joint them together has disintegrated. Paul's journey takes him to the Islamic religion, as he tries to make sense of the death of his son. His quest finds him studying the Islamic faith, and tries to dress, act and participate as an s Muslim, in the hope of finding an answer. However, the local white community is distressed and turns it back on both Paul and Catherine, but just when things could not get any worse, Paul's brother, ex-installation security officer, Peter returns home, only to find Paul has seemingly changed his ways and he wants to get to the bottom of it.

Workshop Venue

Edinburgh Napier University Craighouse Campus was chosen as the venue to host the filmed workshops, since it was relatively easy to get to and from, and there was ample space available there to allow comfortable long sessions to take place with both distraction, interruption, and from a filming point of view, it was a much quieter venue.

Casting

I had telephoned actor Colin Brown, with whom I had worked with before, where Colin acted in a short film drama which I wrote and directed in 2004. To me Colin was an ideal candidate to take part since he fitted my visualizations of the character, which I thought he could perform, and he was aware of Mike Leigh's improvisational actor based methods. Colin Brown volunteered to be part of the practice based project. A student at Skillset Screen & Media Academy Scotland, Arturo Delgado, gave me details of an

actress who may suit working in an improvisational way, since she had been on a number of improvisational based courses for actors. I looked at her online profile and watched her in some short films online, thereafter I spoke to her on the telephone about the project and she agreed to volunteer to take part in the practical workshop sessions.

Workshop Session 1 - Individual Session with actor Colin Brown

I discussed the character which I thought Colin was suited for asked him to try and elaborate on the character, and if he could picture other people, friends, who may exhibit attributes or traits which his character could assume. Out of this session a key point that came out that Paul, the character that Colin had assimilated felt he was on a quest to discover the Islam religion but had not fully converted to it. Also, we discussed the possibility of Grant, Paul's dead son having a girlfriend.

Workshop Session 2 – Group Session

I assumed the role of two characters, Ahmed and also Paul's brother Peter. Ahmed had been Grant's best friend before he was killed in action in the Middle-East. Peter is Paul's estranged brother. The scenario I wanted to investigate was surrounding a surprise visit by Peter to Paul's house. At that time, Ahmed is also there. I wanted to see how far Paul's character could be pushed, and what sort of character he really was, when he had to confront Peter, who is the aggressive of the two. The fact I had to play two characters was problematic, but the scenario brought out two things for me. One was the Paul stood up to Peter and he supported Ahmed and his culture. The other was, how deeply resentful Peter was towards Ahmed, as he did not like his faith.

Workshop Session 3– Individual Sessions with actor Danielle Farrow

I discussed the character of Sophie with Danielle. Sophie was an arbitrary name, as it was not a character I had originally wanted Danielle to investigate. However during workshop session 1, Colin and I decided that Grant should have a girlfriend, and so I decided that this character should be a key player in the story, or at the very least needed investigating in the session.

I asked Danielle to go through some people she may know who may have some traits which could use to embellish Sophie's character with. Danielle then talked at first about the character, but then drifted into Sophie's character part way in. This has been captured perfectly on film for further analysis. Danielle while talking about Sophie's character started to cry. I asked her after the session had finished through email, what made her emotional? She stated the following:

Empathy over things that is sad or difficult. I simply feel what I am describing, feeling what it would be like for me in their

situation - it comes when I am open and allow myself to 'go with the flow'. I associate it with the openness and vulnerability that an actor needs, I think, and which helps things to come easily rather than requiring hard work. Of course, getting into that state can be anything but easy!

So, in talking about Sophie, I was imagining myself in that situation and letting whatever feelings came along to just be and show themselves. It wasn't emotional recall, if that is what you were wondering - thinking of some specific experience in my life - but imagination: putting myself in the character's position (August, 2009).

Workshop Session 4 – Group Session

This session involved both actors Colin Brown and Danielle Farrow. They had not met before and had not discussed their roles or anything else like motivation or goals. I set a very simple scenario for them both. Paul was at home, and Sophie was visiting Paul. Sophie was there to tell Paul about the pregnancy, or rather that the father was not Grant but someone else. Paul however assumed as did the community, that the baby would be Grant's when it arrived. The outcome was, that Paul thought the worst, he began to think that the father maybe Peter, his brother. This was an unexpected turn, since I had not thought about that angle, and Sophie's character certainly was taken aback also.

Draft Synopsis Post-Workshop

Proud parents Paul and Catherine find their lives are turned upside down, when their only soldier son, Grant, is killed in action in the Middle-East. The story follows the journey of Sophie, Grant's former girlfriend, who finds life for her has changed dramatically. However, she finds out that she is pregnant and starts to feel confined and withdrawn from the community. Paul, who has become estranged with his wife Catherine, is falling further apart as the very glue that joint them together has disintegrated. Paul's journey takes him to the Islamic religion, as he tries to make sense of the death of his son. His quest finds him studying the Islamic faith, and tries to dress, act and participate as an s Muslim, in the hope of finding an answer. Paul's hopes are raised when he finds out that his son's former girlfriend, Sophie, is pregnant. However, the local white community is distressed and turns it back on both Paul and Catherine, but just when things could not get any worse, Paul's brother, ex-installation security officer, Peter returns home, only to find Paul has seemingly changed his ways and he wants to get to the bottom of it. Sophie however finds that she has become the target for not only wrath of the community, but also Peter too, as she is in the middle of a brewing domestic war.

Analysis

All the workshops were filmed extensively. I also took notes when I could, since I was filming most of the time and asking questions, probing and trying to cause scenarios for the characters, so that the actors could think about possible directions in which they could take them.

I thought that a number of useful of development had taken place in such a small period of time, which I would not have thought about using traditional screenwriting methods. The interesting aspects were seeing the choices being made by the characters. This presented me with a number of routes the story could develop to, and also there was possibility of creating additional support characters too.

I had enough information to re-write the original synopsis and also write out the scene between Paul and Sophie, where the Sophie wants to disclose the real father of the baby.

Appendix - B

Questionnaire Based Interviews

Questions compiled by Shehzad Afzal (August, 2009), which were emailed to Writer/Director/Producer Stuart Hazaldine, Writer/Director Justin Molotikiov and Producer Claire Mundell. Results were collated by the middle of August, 2009, and the answers are listed below.

List of Questions (you can be as brief or expansive as you like)

1. Have you undertaken any workshops or seminars on actor improvisation, and if so, what elements did you find most interesting?

Justin Molotnikiov - *I have only undertaken workshops in the context of film development but I will be holding educational workshops in the coming months. JM - Seeing actors who are brave enough to free themselves from the conventional rules by trying something new and then seeing the positive effect it can have on them not just as actors but as people.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes I have. We did workshops as part of the script and story development process on 'crying with laughter'. I have also participated in actor improvisation workshops with Stephen McCole. The part I found most interesting was the way in which fine story points are thrown up into the air when actors do not 'feel' that a character would behave in a certain way. I am fascinated by the ways in which actors' improvisation strengthens story and deepens character.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *No.*

2. Do you know about the Mike Leigh improvisational method of working with actors (or aware of the techniques used by John Cassavetes), and did you find anything interesting about his method?

Justin Molotnikiov - *The collaborative process, the use of actors to enrich development and end product. How group intelligence can offer up originality and layers of character and story.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes i am aware of both methods and find both interesting. I find it interesting to ponder on how the element of fear is taken away from performance and production when we know less. Knowing less, is the antithesis of how production and filmmaking is generally conducted so it's interesting to see that once every one (performers and crew) have got beyond the initial fear of not knowing what is going on, everyone is forced to engage their trust in the director in a way which is deeper than usual trust relationships on a set.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *I know about them but they basically bring actors into the writing process from the first stage and I prefer to write a shootable script before bringing actors in to add their contributions to the characters. The destination is mine but I'm happy for them to make it a more interesting journey.*³ *What is your process of script development in general terms? In other words is there a structure that you adhere to or is there a plan overall?*

Justin Molotnikov - *I do not apply a process to a project, I look at the project and ask q's about what process it needs. With Crying with Laughter. I worked with the two main actors from a very early stage and discovered the characters with them and then built a story around them. I then took this story document into workshops with all the cast and through improvisation, worked on characters and story with them. I then wrote a script just before filming, based on the recorded workshops and used that script as a leaping off point during the filming.*

Claire Mundell - *My script process begins with instinctive reactions to what's on the page - how it makes me feel, what it makes me think, what I don't understand or am confused by. I then follow those responses through to determine what is or is not working within the script and asking questions to find out where else the script and the characters need to go.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *I plan as much as possible before I write the first draft as it saves time doubling back to fix things when writing. I rewrite four or five times before shooting, the last rewrite incorporating actor's changes in rehearsal.*

4. If you have used improvisation in developing a script (in your work), what was the process involved?

Justin Molotnikov - *As above*

Claire Mundell - *In our recent film, we used improvisation to inform script by having actors work through a story document / sc x sc in order to flush out issues with the story and to refine plot points and character depth. After a period of 4 weeks of working with the actors and the story document, Justin Molotnikov, the writer director went on to write a script informed by the workshops with the cast. This script was then conventionally shot so as to make it achievable within the production timeframe.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *We workshoped each scene in sequence over three days, making changes as we went, then I wrote up the changes between that stage and shooting.*

5. What were the timescales involved in your chosen method of script development (whether it be traditional screenwriting or using actor improvisation)?

Justin Molotnikov - *Traditional script development 1 - 3 years*

With Improvisation involved 6 months (but could be quicker if funding were secured up front).

Claire Mundell - *For the script i have just co-written with Justin - 'white fang the taming of the wild' - the script now at 3rd draft has taken 2 years! The cwl script took 5 days to write after intensive workshops. There is no blueprint – every project is different.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *A few months of research, a month to plan then a month to write the first draft. Each subsequent draft tends to take progressively less time until the final polish before shooting which usually only takes a day or two.*

6. How important are treatments in your script development process (or do you create that as a selling document once the script has been completed)?

Justin Molotnikov - *Ideally not as I would have hoped the funding would've been secured based on a story outline (for improv projects only).*

Claire Mundell - *I start with a treatment, move that onto a sc x sc and then write the script. It's like giving yourself a road map.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *Very important for selling and for writing. I never start a draft without a solid roadmap from beginning to end.*

7. If you using the improvisational method, do you use a story document, and how long does this document have to be for a feature length project?

Justin Molotnikov - *You need to have a sense of a story to take into workshops but that can be as small as one line to a detailed scene by scene.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes I do use a story document. It needs to be however long the story requires it to be.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *N/A.*

8. If using a story document, is this the same as a treatment?

Justin Molotnikov - *It can be whatever you want it to be.*

Claire Mundell - *Not necessarily. A treatment talks about the way the story will develop, the story document tells you the actual beats of the story.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *N/A*

9. How did the actors contribute to the development of the script?

Justin Molotnikov - *They helped build the characters, they put them test in the story and they informed the dialogue of the script.*

Claire Mundell - *The actors in an improvisation informed script process are essential in giving the story depth and clarity, but one individual still needs to be in charge of steering the story as a whole.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *They're good for tracking the consistent viewpoint of the characters. 'my character wouldn't say/do that' is always the most useful thing an actor can say in rehearsal. Most of the time this leads to small tweaks but occasionally it can lead to larger revisions.*

10. How long did it take from idea to script, if using the actor improvisation method, and how long did it take from idea to script, if using the traditional method of script development?

Justin Molotnikov - *6 months and 18 months*

Claire Mundell - *Again this is a difficult question to quantify as the process does not neatly fall into exact periods of time. It depends as to when you as the writer feel the story is ready to move onto the next stage of the process.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *Actor method N/A, trad method about 3-4 months. Occasionally 6.*

11. What were the advantages of using either the actor improvisation method of script development or the traditional screenwriting method?

Justin Molotnikov - *Speed, actors knowledge of characters, characters pre-tested in scenes before filming, knowing your cast better and seeing if they are right before filming, ownership and responsibility taken by actors, group intelligence.*

Claire Mundell - *The advantage in my view of the former is greater character depth and enhanced performance - the actors know as much as the director when they come to shoot the scene which aids a much more truthful performance.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *Films are as expensive to make as building a building. Your plan needs to be as specific as an architect's plan when you start shooting, and yet you have to remain flexible enough to adapt it when actors and crew heads input in prep. I always use the trad method as it's tried and tested and few actors have enough of a grasp of the overall arc of a story to help with the development of an entire script. They specialize in creating characters so that's what I have them focus on.*

12. What were the disadvantages of using either the actor improvisation method of script development or the traditional screenwriting method?

Justin Molotnikov - *Harder to get funding, restricts budget, getting time with actors.*

Claire Mundell - *Improv, if not carefully harnessed, can become indulgent and make the story unfocussed.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *Haven't found any to the trad method yet! It's trad because it's the best system for the most filmmakers.*

13. Did you notice fundamental benefits of actor improvisation methods in actually helping to get the film developed in a shorter space of time and also in helping to reduce script development costs?

Justin Molotnikov - *Yes, development much shorter, although costs higher as you need to pay for cast and rehearsal time and associated overheads, although less drafts needed so cheaper in that sense.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes, 'crying with laughter' was made in two years and this would have taken much longer had we had a script.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *No.*

14. As a writer or director (and even producer), would you consider using the actor improvisation method in future (whether you have used it or not in script development)?

Justin Molotnikov - *For sure, it's a great development tool.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes absolutely.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *I'm not sure it's something to played with once or twice. It's a working method you either warm top or don't probably. I love watching films that have used that method but I'm not sure it's my style.*

15. Do you think that traditional script development overall takes too long, in addition to being a costly process?

Justin Molotnikov - *It's all relative to how much financial resources are thrown at a project but in the present climate, both TV and film could benefit from it in terms of time and costs but it takes a brave and wise producer/exec to engage with it as it takes away a lot of their control, especially in TV*

Claire Mundell - *Not necessarily - it all depends on how the project is handled. It's impossible to make a hard and fast rule. What is true, is that in times of shrinking budgets etc, there are merits to exploring all ways of storytelling and movie making which help get something made, rather than languish in development for ever.*

Stuart Hazeldine - *It is what it is. More problems result from films being over-developed through too many writers than from not including actors in the process.*

16. Do you think that actor improvisation is something which needs to be seriously looked at, in the context of speeding up film/script development times and thus reducing costs?

Justin Molotnikov - *Used in the right way, definitely.*

Claire Mundell - *Yes absolutely but it is very difficult to do this on bigger budget films as financiers need the security of seeing words on the page, unless the director concerned is already bankable. The process - and deciding which one is appropriate for your project - is entirely related to the financiers and what they will or will not be comfortable green lighting.*

Stuart Hazeldine - No.