

*The Wednesday Shift*

English Extension 2

Reflection Statement

*“When art is put in competition, like a god, with the Creator, it too is turned into an idol.”*

**Cynthia Ozick**

The Wednesday Shift is a television situation-comedy (sit-com) pilot that inquires into the notion of the audience, and how it alters and influences the role of the creator. Further, how when the worlds of the creator, creation, and audience collide, their perceptions of the others change and the lines between them become blurred. Script, my chosen form, holds an influential role in the formation and execution of my concept, as it is intrinsically linked to a primitive stage of creation, ready to be altered further throughout the creative process to fit the desire of its intended audience. The pilot script form captivated me, due to the fact, as Edward Murrow explains in Good Night and Good Luck<sup>1</sup>, “Television, in the main, is being used to distract, delude, amuse, and insulate us” and I was fascinated with the idea of challenging and subverting this notion, through the very form perpetuating it. This coercive relationship between the creator/writer and the audience is one that I extensively researched throughout my independent investigation, leading me on two distinct paths: First into the structure, then into the theory.

The role of The Wednesday Shift was not only to explore this concept of creation, but to satirise the modern cultural landscape and over-saturation of media, by presenting this subversive analysis in the form of a situation-comedy pilot script (a form associated heavily with low culture). The work has a distinctly American tone, as the American network consumerist system (Nielsen Ratings, sweeps, pilot season, etc.) marginalises its audience reducing them simply to figures and statistics in a far larger way than the smaller Australian market. Originally, The Wednesday Shift was going

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<sup>1</sup> *Good Night and Good Luck*, dir. Clooney, G., USA, Warner Independent Pictures, 2005, [motion picture]

to be a one-act play script, and my extensive research into Death of a Salesman<sup>2</sup>, Anomalisa<sup>3</sup>, and The Zoo Story<sup>4</sup> among others sought to provide me with the tools to construct this. However this form did not allow the script to meet it's intended audience; the mass consumerist public and obsessive fanbase it sought to represent. The thematic ideas embedded in the plays studied, of loneliness, lack of creative fulfilment, and imaginative corruption carried over despite change in form.

I am indebted to Roland Barthes, Wallace Stevens, and Jean Baudrillard for the theoretical framing of The Wednesday Shift, enriching my understanding of the dynamic and malleable relationship between creator and audience, encapsulated in the script through allusion to Barthes' division of text: plaisir and jouissance as defined in The Pleasure of the Text (1973)<sup>5</sup>. The protagonist (Jack) attempts to achieve jouissance in his audience through subversive, satirical 'writerly' text, but is tainted by the studio's desire for plaisir in ego driven 'readerly' plot lines. The audience, personified through Kelsey, is seen to be struggling with the same dilemma, wanting to believe they are intelligent, but subconsciously desiring a simple, digestible text. Further my work explores the effect of Baudrillard's idea of 'simulacra and simulation' explained in Simulacra and Simulation (1981)<sup>6</sup>, through Kelsey's intellectual removal from the world of reality, instead becoming infected by the simulation of reality presented to her in the Jack's writing. She becomes a representation of a reality constructed to subvert and represent reality, losing touch with her own identity and the objective world in the process. Thus when she meets the creator of the reality she has become

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, A., *Death of a Salesman*, USA, 1949

<sup>3</sup> Kaufman, C., *Anomalisa*, USA, 2005

<sup>4</sup> Albee, E., *The Zoo Story*, USA, 1959

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, R., *Le plaisir du texte*, France, Editions du Seuil, 1973

<sup>6</sup> Baudrillard, J., *Simulacra and Simulation*, France, University of Michigan Press, 1994

infected by, like a worshipper to a god, the perspectives of both the audience (Kelsey) and creator (Jack) begin to breakdown.

I applied the ideology of the meta-poetry of Wallace Stevens to the characterisation of Jack, as I imbued him with Steven's views on the poet's (or in this case writer's) role as a creator; a spiritual 'god' to those who believe in the ideas presented to them in his text. Jack paraphrases Steven's quote about the role of the writer "It is, for one thing, a spiritual role."<sup>7</sup> creating parallels between them, and subverting the expectation of low-art (sit-com) by comparing it's value to that of text considered high-art (meta-poetry). Further, Steven's ideas on the necessity to turn towards poetry (writing) itself once one has lost belief in a god, outlined in *Opus Posthumous* (1957), is evident through Kelsey's insistent belief in the world of *The Wednesday Shift*, despite losing an element of belief in it's god (Jack). She further gets the chance to achieve what Wallace called 'life's redemption'<sup>8</sup> when given the chance to become a part of the writing team that constructed her previous reality, *The Wednesday Shift*.

Kelsey's use of *The Wednesday Shift* as the new guiding influence in her life decisions, was inspired by Nietzsche's idea's on the *Urbemensch*<sup>9</sup>, with the ideal human now guiding humanity's morality. I then combined these ideas with those presented in the essays<sup>10</sup> of Cynthia Ozick, that text/art is the new 'god', thus the new form in which the *Urbemensch* is presented to us in. I proposed in my work that the modern 'ideal' human is presented to us through media, and the predominant American cultural entertainment; the sit-com. Thus when confronted with the non-

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens, W., *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton. J. Bates, New York: Vintage Books, 1982 p. 206

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, W., *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton. J. Bates, New York: Vintage Books, 1982 p. 185

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Germany, Ernst Schmeitzner, 1883

<sup>10</sup> Ozick, C., *Art and Ardor*, 'Literature as Idol', 'Riddle of the Ordinary', New York, Random House, 1983

idyllic creator of that guiding literature, her sense of morality begins to breakdown, questioning her own life decisions.

My protagonist's meta-commentary on his position as a script-writer within a script was also influenced by William Shakespeare's own projection and commentary on himself through Prospero in the area of study text, The Tempest. Prospero's, and thus Shakespeare's, desire to be liberated through validation from an audience that respects his work "Let your indulgence set me free"<sup>11</sup> inspired my own protagonist's arc and journey to acceptance from an audience (Kelsey) he values.

Furthermore, his battle with the network that seeks to maintain a sense of status quo and tranquility in it's viewers, was inspired directly by the similar dynamic in Extension 1 'After the Bomb' text Good Night and Good Luck. Edward R Murrow's battle against a studio that doesn't want it's public to be educated directly parallels Jack's, however the removal of the cold war context in The Wednesday Shift broadens Jack's intentions to an overall desire to educate his audience through a higher standard of writing, rather than about a specific issue (the McCarthy trials).

I conducted extensive research into the sit-com script form to encapsulate these ideas not only in a logical and concise manner, but one that is entertaining and functional as a pilot itself; I aimed for The Wednesday Shift to be an enjoyable, comedic script as much a theory-based work. The narrative arc reflects that of a traditional sit-com pilot, and subverts this through reinforcement. Notably, I researched a sample of eighteen sit-coms ranging from Cheers<sup>12</sup> (classic) to The Big Bang Theory<sup>13</sup> (most popular current sit-com), in order to create authentic voice in the composition

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<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare, W., *The Tempest*, United Kingdom, Cambridge University press, 1995, p.145

<sup>12</sup> *Cheers*, Paramount Network Television, 1982, [TV program]

<sup>13</sup> *The Big Bang Theory*, CBS, 2007, [TV program]

of the script. Over the course of the work I investigated the writing style specifically of Dan Harmon, writer and creator of Community and Rick and Morty, who I saw speak at the Sydney Writer's festival<sup>14</sup> on his process. A re-interpretation of the hero's journey for the modern age, his 'Story Circle'<sup>15</sup> method of writing acted as the framework on which I could hang my concept, guaranteeing efficient story-telling, complete character arc, and emotional resonance within the constraints of the 23 minute sit-com format. Dan Harmon also acted as inspiration for the character of Jack, with his anti-network writing style getting him fired from Community<sup>16</sup>, his characterisation influenced a major plot point of my pilot. Several of Jack's lines are paraphrased from Dan.

The English Extension 2 course has afforded me with a highly liberating level of creative freedom through which I can express ideas that have resounded deeply with me throughout my own HSC experience, in a form that I am extremely passionate about. The development of ideas and features of the work was a truly enriching process, broadening my understanding of the philosophies proposed by the more influential figures of the literary universe. The process of creating The Wednesday Shift has also provoked the development of my own creative voice through my independent investigation, and this combination has afforded me with strengthened understanding of concepts and skills that I am certain I will apply in wider society.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Writers' Room – Dan Harmon, Josh Thomas, Celia Pacquola & Luke McGregor, BingeFest 2016*, [online video], 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD-Ww-op-m8> (accessed April 24, 2017)

<sup>15</sup> D. Harmon, *Channel 101 Wiki*, [website], (n.d), [http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Story\\_Structure\\_101:\\_Super\\_Basic\\_Shit](http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Story_Structure_101:_Super_Basic_Shit) (accessed 15 December 2016).

<sup>16</sup> K. Macfarland, *A.V Club*, [website], 2013, <http://www.avclub.com/article/read-this-the-details-on-dan-harmons-firing-from-e-100387> (accessed 24 May 2017)

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