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MICHAEL KEERDO-DAWSON

DRAMA & ANTI-DRAMA: THE INTERVENTION OF INTERACTIVITY IN THE STORY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR A NARRATIVE FILM, *THE LIMITS OF CONSENT*

Tallinn 2024

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Baltic Film, Media and Arts School, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia

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Supervisors:	Dirk Hoyer, PhD, Associate Professor at Tallinn University, Estonia Craig Batty, PhD, Professor at the University of South Australia, Australia
Opponents:	Marsha Berry, PhD, Associate Professor at RMIT University, Australia Rafael Leal, PhD

The defence will take place on June 21st, 2024 at 10 o'clock at Tallinn University's room M-648, Uus-Sadama 5, Tallinn, Estonia

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Tallinn University
25 Narva Rd
10120 Tallinn
www.tlu.ee

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ABSTRACT

This PhD elucidates a tension between a writer-director's creative impulses to conform to or rebel against dramatic narrative conventions. Two interwoven forms of enquiry are presented: a written monograph, which investigates both the theory and the practice of developing, writing, and editing an interactive film; and the development and production of the interactive film itself, *The Limits of Consent*.

The underlying intention of this artistic research, which uses filmmaking as its mode of creative enquiry, is to examine the effect of interactivity on the story development process of an otherwise traditional unilinear film. When interactivity is applied, the film must accommodate multiple narrative trajectories due to the unfixing of the totality of the film as a set sequence of scenes. In the unfixing it enacts, interactivity becomes a propagator of complexity which forces the writer-director—in this research, me—to seek out different narrative strategies.

The Limits of Consent is the major creative outcome of this artistic research. It is a psychological drama that employs a branching narrative which leads the audience to different endings (nine in total) depending on the choices they make at key intervals. The development of the film's story over a three-year period (2019-22) involved many iterations, from the initial outline to various drafts of the screenplay, to multiple edits of the film. At every stage of the filmmaking process, the inclusion of the multilinear device—interactivity—forced me, the film's writer-director, to employ compensatory moves in order to solve resultant story problems which more significantly impacted the film's structure, protagonist, and endings.

The compensatory moves which interactivity brought about most often involved my embracement of anti-drama. Anti-drama being any screenwriting or editing choice which is in opposition to dramatic conventions. I embraced anti-drama as a narrative strategy to preserve the drama that the film sets up in its opening unilinear sequence. Through the story development process, the protagonist disappeared and the film's narrative trajectory diverged significantly in most of the film's endings. The choice to embrace anti-drama to preserve the film's drama highlighted and then reconciled my contradictory desire to entertain the audience and experiment with the form. Interactivity allowed for the twin pursuit of these desires and consequently encouraged me to explore anti-dramatic trajectories more meaningfully – crucially, without the kind of fear that can undermine experimental ambitions. Finally, the roles of drama and anti-drama reversed themselves; I was no longer using anti-drama to preserve the drama but was instead using the drama as a safety valve to explore anti-drama in a more pluralistic way.

Multilinear devices such as interactivity, when applied to a traditional unilinear medium such as film, force the writer-director to open up the narrative horizons of a given story to a greater diversity of storytelling possibilities and offer paths away from the homogenising tendency of a solitary trajectory and a conclusive scene, but these possibilities need to be actioned with a pluralising intent.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over a hundred people helped me complete this PhD and I am eternally grateful to all of them. 'It takes a village,' as the African proverb goes. There is not enough space to list all of the people who contributed to this research here, but I thank them all once again from the bottom of my heart. You know who you are. I do have to single out certain people, however. Estonia is a wonderful corner of Europe to find talented actors and I found some of the highest calibre. Rain Tolk, Jaanika Arum, Jaanus Tepomees, Maria Paiste, Liisu Krass, Rauno Polman, Rasmus Kaljujärv, Kärt Tomingas, Roman Maksimuk, Eduard Tee, and Alina Karmazina: I could not ask for a better cast. Their work speaks for itself, but I must add some special words for Karin Rask, who had to chew through what film critic Victor Fraga described as 'the most graphic descriptions of sex coming from the mouth of a female movie character since Alma in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona.*' Karin's unflappable professionalism was a privilege to witness as she transformed herself into the film's amoral protagonist, Anna. When I meet with Karin from time to time, I actually have to readjust myself to the real person as she is so far removed from the woman we created together. To any writer-directors who might be reading: if you can get Karin Rask in your film, you should get Karin Rask in your film.

I was extraordinarily lucky, as Junior Research Fellow at the Baltic Film, Media, and Arts School (BFM), to not only to be able to road test my ideas about interactivity repeatedly (special thanks to the Crossmedia and AV Media classes of 2022-25 for putting up with all that talk of 'nodes' and 'branches') but more importantly, to be able to handpick the talented, diligent, creative, and hard-working students (future-professionals) who helped me make *The Limits of Consent*. Karl-Olaf Olmann, my editor and emotional barometer sat next to me in the gloom of the editing suite on those rare sunny days in Estonia for endless hours putting this multilinear jigsaw puzzle of a film together. Diego Alejandro Barajas, my cinematographer extraordinaire (I will steal his passport if he considers leaving Estonia). Katariina Rahumägi, my young producer who didn't flinch when I asked her to get me a private jet as a location for the film and then proceeded to deliver the goods. Mazin Helal, who rose to the challenge of sculpting the film's sound. From the world of alumni, I was able to pouch Helen Räim, my producer and a consummate professional who did a lot of heavy lifting for me; Grete Rahi, who brought the film's production design in line with the glossy nocturnal mood I wanted to capture; and Mihkel Maripuu, whose gift of a score amplified the film's moods, textures and emotions no end. *The Limits of Consent* would not have been possible without their never-faltering efforts.

I am also grateful for all the support I received from BFM, Tallinn University, and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, which funded the film and much of my travels to various festivals, symposiums, conferences, and doctoral schools to present this research. In particular, I always felt the support of BFM both as an institution and as a collection of colleagues who supported me in big and small ways on a day-to-day basis behind the scenes. Additionally, I extend my thanks to the doctoral defence

committee and the two reviewers of this PhD for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions along with Derek Saunders for cleaning up my punctuation. I would also like to thank fellow doctoral students for their contributions at research seminars and colleagues such as Associate Professor Alessandro Nanì, Associate Professor Andres Jõesaar, the director of BFM, Birgit Vilgats, and the PhD programme curator, Professor Indrek Ibrus, for their encouragement and sometimes tough questions over the years—they were always invaluable.

Friends and family are essential moral support and mine were a constant source of encouragement who kept me going even at the most difficult or stressful moments or when I was a difficult or stressful person to be around. Tristan Ofield sent me a book filled with pictures from our student film productions from 20 years ago to encourage me to get back on the directorial horse. Nicholas March always lent me an ear, and even made a cameo in the finished film as an obnoxious French man (it wasn't much of a stretch for him). My mother has always helped with any difficult undertaking I've set myself upon in this life; she long ago sat next to me at age 17 on a beach in California and asked me whether I really wanted to be a lawyer and, when I replied 'no', offered me the best bit of advice I ever received in my life: 'Then don't.' These pages are part of the continuing fruit of that advice. My children, Karl, Anna-Maria, and Ksenia and my brother Philip support me in ways I cannot adequately articulate here. Suffice to say, it would also be nearly impossible to achieve anything without the loving family they help provide. Which leads me to Jekaterina, my love, my muse, my best friend, and my therapist all wrapped into one. How anyone achieves anything in this life without such a person to help shoulder so many of life's burdens is beyond my comprehension.

I reserve my final acknowledgements for my supervisors. Professor Craig Batty came on board as co-supervisor for the final three years and remotely helped shape this PhD from the other side of the world. Craig was always ready to sharpen a thought, suggest a change in structure, or push me to dig a little deeper into an interesting idea. His expertise in artistic research and screenwriting were a tremendous help as was his attention to detail. It was a pleasure to meet him in person when I visited Australia to present the film and I hope our paths continue to cross in the future.

Last but by no means least, Associate Professor Dirk Hoyer deserves a huge amount of credit for shaping this PhD from its inception. He has the mind of a scholar, the soul of a poet, and the vision of an artist—and I have needed all sides of his personality at various stages in this process. His support, knowledge, experience, creativity, and, indeed, his sense of fairness and philosophy towards life, as well as his nudges, and pushes helped shape both *The Limits of Consent* and this accompanying monograph in his dual role as script (and later editing) consultant and as primary supervisor. He was also a source of moral support when times were tough, making sure I didn't get too comfortable on the floor when I was occasionally knocked down and, crucially, kept me honest with myself and always pushed me to squeeze a little bit more lemon juice out the lemon, as he put it. When I supervise, I endeavour to do so like him.

INTRODUCTION

The Limits of Consent is an interactive film about love and sex and unhappy couples.[1] It is about women who seek connections with unobtainable men and men who contort themselves into unrecognisable shapes in the pursuit of women. It is about power and the need to control the sexual space when freedom and radical vulnerability are necessary. Haunting the world of this story is a desire to connect with one another and the gaps and traps which preclude the very possibility. Using sex as a panacea fails to fix our souls when it is just another wrong move in a matrix of mistakes.

The Limits of Consent constitutes the major creative outcome of this PhD. It had its world premiere at the 26th Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, one of 15 A-category film festivals in the world,[2] as part of the Rebels with a Cause competition. It has subsequently been screened at Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy 2023 in Adelaide, Australia; The International Network of Experimental Fiction Filmmaking Festival in Salford's Media City, United Kingdom; and as part of the official selection for the REC Tarragona International Film Festival in Tarragona, Spain.[3]

The accompanying final edit of *The Limits of Consent* evidences the creative outcome of this PhD, while this monograph excavates the creative process of developing the story of said film through the extended process of outlining, screenwriting, and editing over a three-year period. The film itself can be viewed in isolation; this monograph, however, is designed to be read in conjunction with the film rather than as an adjacent property. I make every effort to describe relevant information about the film where necessary, but the most comprehensive understanding of this research is only possible if you have already watched the film.[4] Creative and critical work do more than simply inform one another: they comprise one work and in so doing provide a singular thesis. This monograph thus presents new knowledge in relation to the central mode of the investigation—the film production itself.[5]

The film's story centres on a high-tech pick-up artist, Anna, who is triggered into eloping with her lover for a few days in Berlin.[6] At a critical moment, Anna discovers her lover with his arms around another woman at an airport gate. Anna cries and then recomposes herself, and a choice appears on the screen:

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(A) Break Him
(B) Break Time
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1 *The Limits of Consent* directed by Michael Keerdo-Dawson (BFM Productions, 2022).

2 According to Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films / International Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAP).

3 See Appendix E for a full list of public screenings.

4 See Appendices A to screen the final edit of *The Limits of Consent*.

5 Craig Batty, Kathryn Beaton, Stephen Sculley and Stayci Taylor, "The Screenwriting PhD: Creative Practice, Critical Theory and Contributing to Knowledge," *TEXT* 40, no. 13 (October 2017): 13.

6 See Appendix B for a full plot summary.

Unlike a traditional unilinearly structured film, at this point the audience must do something. They must make a choice by selecting one of two options. Their intervention at this juncture will cause the film's story to branch in different directions and lead to one of nine possible endings. After viewing any of these endings, the film's credits will roll, and the audience can then either end the experience or go back and explore another branch which leads to a different ending.

This a rare experience for a film audience, and even rarer still if we consider that the film is a European psychological drama made in the arthouse tradition. The novelty of the film as part of an artistic research PhD concerned with the story development process in an interactive context is clear: in a psychological drama, the audience has control over which sections of the story they will view next and in what order; additionally, they are invited to end the viewing experience at different intervals. It is, therefore, neither expected nor necessary to view all the film's material. The incurious audience member can end the experience after just one ending, while the curious audience member can continue to choose further endings (perhaps all of them) and understand the film, via its various conclusions, differently. In these endings, there is a diverse set of possibilities: some are focused on the protagonist, some are focused on secondary characters, some are dramatic, but most are deliberately anti-dramatic; and they all co-exist as part of the same narrative film.

While many parts of the process of story development were affected by the introduction of interactivity, I focus on the film's structure, the protagonist whose story is scaffolded by that structure, and the film's endings, including the meanings they create. This monograph explores these topics by considering conventional approaches to each and then reconsidering them with the effects afforded by interactivity. The main research question for the PhD is as follows:

> *To what extent does the introduction of interactivity to a psychological drama complexify, enhance, and/or limit the process of story development?*

In the completed film, certain branches of the narrative lead to dramatic endings; ones which emerge from the storytelling components set up in the first part of the film and that aim to satisfactorily resolve these components. Most branches, however, lead to what can be thought of as anti-dramatic endings: those which halt, undercut, or truncate the drama, or which aim to frustrate the audience rather than satisfy them. Reaching the final edit of the film where the endings are rendered via dramatic and anti-dramatic considerations was a long and complex process. Traditional approaches to screenwriting and editing in particular were continuously challenged and contorted by the disruptive effects of interactivity as well as my hesitations to embrace the sort of plurality I now find in the resultant film. In this monograph, I reflect on these hesitations, as well as my hedging, anticipatory thinking, and, crucially, *compensatory moves* which resulted in the disappearance of the film's protagonist and an embrace of anti-dramatic trajectories as a narrative

strategy to preserve the dramatic ones. The following supplementary research questions therefore underpin the PhD:

> *To what extent did the introduction of interactivity allow for the co-existence of drama and anti-drama in one narrative space?*
>
> *To what extent does interactivity impact the process of development for the film's protagonist, its narrative structure, and its endings?*

The aim of this research is to better understand the story development process from the practitioner's perspective when interactivity is applied to a traditionally unilinear medium. An artistic research project like this can include iterative cycles which shift between content and process;[7] hence, at appropriate junctions, I reflect on the final version of the film, even though *the primary focus is on what interactivity did to the process of writing and editing the film*.

Filmmaking is the mode of enquiry for this research, but while directing and exhibition are necessary parts of this mode, I discuss each less in this PhD because of the specific focus on structuring, crafting, and then re-crafting the film's story through the screenwriting and editing phases. Editing, as is made clear in this monograph, involved significant changes to the story, the jettisoning of two of the scripted endings, and the creation of an additional five endings. Story development, in this case, extended into the editing process. To this end, while the PhD contributes to knowledge about filmmaking broadly, the specific contribution is to story development and screenwriting, including how these parts of the filmmaking process manifest in the editing stage of an interactive film.

The purpose of interactivity in this PhD is not so much to explore the interactive film in and of itself, but rather to *employ interactivity as a creative method of narrative disruption in the* process *of story development.* I use the production of an interactive film to examine the *effects of the meeting of interactivity and film on the narrative, in the processes of screenwriting and editing in particular*. There is an adage, that in order to break the rules one must first understand them. But what if this is flipped? What if, as writer-director and researcher Christina Kallas considers, in order to understand the rules, one must first break them?[8] This process of breaking rules is not just about thinking our way out of problems, but also about practicing the resolution of those problems.[9] A natural adjunct to this is that sometimes it is necessary to create small problems in order to consider the bigger ones; sometimes it is necessary to break things in order to see how they work and make them work

[7] Marsha Berry, "Ethnography and Screen Production Research" in *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry,* eds. Crag Batty and Susan Kerrigan (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 108.

[8] Christina Kallas, *Creative Screenwriting: Understanding Emotional Structure,* trans. John William Howard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

[9] Brad Haseman, "Rupture and Recognition: Identifying The Performative Research Paradigm," in *Practice as Research, Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2007), 147.

differently. Put differently, I use interactivity as a way of creating many small problems which force me, the practitioner, to employ different and sometimes unconventional *compensatory moves* as a consequence, which then help me frame and consider more significant problems within the process of story development for a narrative film.

Interactivity when applied to film narratives creates effects which can be embraced, managed, or mitigated. Interactivity in this PhD means any conscious action undertaken by an audience which causes the narrative to be in some manner multilinear, by showing that one possibility or another possibility may occur after a particular moment—that there is more than one continuation of the story available,10 and that the selection of one of those continuations is at the exclusion of another. In other words, different audience members may select and then view different pre-recorded sections of the film in different orders and to differing degrees of narrative completion.

Through the introduction of interactivity, everything from the screenwriting to the editing was disrupted and generated what I repeatedly refer to as *compensatory moves*. The introduction of interactivity set into motion a process of oscillation between the familiar and the foreign, and I utilise my experience of this oscillation, through reflections on my creative practice, for the purposes of creating new knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

The overarching methodology for this PhD is *artistic research,* which according to Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, co-authors of the book *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public,* runs under the guise of an inseparable mixture of research and practice. 'Artistic research = artistic process (acts inside the practice) + arguing for a point of view.'[11] In this way, the emphasis is on the creative *processes* rather than merely the creative *results,* which are not so much separate from processes as continually feeding back into them.[12] As screen production research expert and co-supervisor of this research, Craig Batty, puts it: this sort of research neither speculates on the intentions of another artist, nor examines a resultant film from an external perspective; instead, it *is* the artist's intentions looking *into* the film, from the artist's (internal) perspective.[13]

Artistic research is discovery-led, often effacing hypotheses and initial research questions which are sometimes even counterproductive because they delimit the

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[10] Christoph Bode and Rainer Dietrich, *Future Narratives: Theory, Poetics, and Media-Historical Moment,* (De Gruyter, 2013) 16-17.

[11] Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public* (Peter Lang, 2004), 23.

[12] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology,* 19.

[13] Craig Batty, "Unpacking Critical Theories to Enhance Creative Practice: A PhD in Screenwriting Case Study," *Media Education Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 14.

researcher's creativity and the possibilities which might emerge from artistic practice at the outset.[14] According to Henk Borgdorff, artistic researchers are in favour of 'getting mucky,'[15] following their intuition and remaining open to the random and unpredictable issues and questions which arise along the way.[16] This means embracing the process and eventually finding and formulating the formal research questions at a later stage;[17] this is to avoid the aforementioned delimitation and allow the focus to become clear towards the end of the research process.[18]

The resultant work of artistic research rarely conforms to the classical framework of an academic thesis because the practice itself is so important.[19] As Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, the co-authors of *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public*, observe, the separation of form and content—or research methodology as a tool for obtaining and analysing data—from the data itself can be problematic, for it does not do justice to the reality of artistic research.[20] If the researcher spectrum spans from the dispassionate scientist outside-out to one who lives and breathes their research object inside-in;[21] then I am towards the inside-in side of that spectrum. This means I am constantly aware of the entanglement of theory, practice, and my reflections. Ross Gibson explains that there are two modes of knowing: the implicit and explicit, and that the insider artistic researcher has the opportunity to enmesh these, thereby allowing the embodied and analytical to come together.[22]

The aim is the creation of new knowledge, which comes in different forms. Batty et al. divide this knowledge into two types: that which aims to *explicate the artist's tacit knowledge* or that which aims to *generate ways and means of changing the fabric of their process*.[23] Both forms are relevant to this PhD as I come to understand the tacitly made decisions I took during the creative process and how my process

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[14] Tara Brabazon and Zeynep Dagli, "Putting the Doctorate into Practice, and the Practice into Doctorates: Creating a New Space for Quality Scholarship through Creativity," *Nebula: Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship* 7, nos. 1-2 (2010): 29.

[15] Henk Borgdorff, "Practice-based Research in the Arts," in *Mapping E-Culture,* ed. C. Brickwood (Amsterdam: Virtueel Platform, 2009), 102.

[16] Henk Borgdorff, "The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research," in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, eds. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 56.

[17] Mick Wilson and Schelte van Ruiten, *SHARE Handbook for Artistic Research Education* (Amsterdam: ELIA, 2013), 156.

[18] Griffiths, "Research and the Self", 169.

[19] Borgdorff, "Practice-based Research in the Arts", 102.

[20] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology,* 23.

[21] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology,* 62-63.

[22] Ross Gibson, "The Known World", *TEXT* Special Issue 8 Creative and Practice-led Research: Current Status, Future Plans (2010): 11.

[23] Craig Batty, Sung-Ju Suya Lee, Louise Sawtell, Stephen Sculley, and Stayci Taylor, "Rewriting, Remaking and Rediscovering Screenwriting Practice: When the Screenwriter Becomes Practitioner-researcher," (paper presented at 20th Annual AAWP Conference, Swinburne, November-December 2015), 3.

has changed as a consequence of the consciously undertaken experiment with interactivity.

Teemu Mäki, a Finnish artist and theatre writer and director, similarly argues that knowledge produced through artistic research can be artistic knowledge or knowledge about something else which comes about through art or by researching art and divides these types of knowledge into different categories.[24] Two of these are relevant to this research. Firstly, *knowledge of how art is made*: the process of artistic creation, that being art and research which feeds back on itself and potentially allows the production of even better art. This seems to be a clear enough direction for this PhD: to understand how interactivity influences the story development process, or what narrative opportunities and difficulties emerge in the process. Secondly, *what the artist meant*: knowledge about the artist's intentionality which can only be discovered through self-reflection. This is also partly my intention; I am, like many writer-directors, striving to explore and improve filmmaking practice and the process of completing a PhD in audiovisual arts is the best opportunity I have had to do so, providing a formal structure of feedback with my supervisors, critical assessment as part of a peer review process, and the necessity of self-reflection to write this monograph.

Educational researcher Morwenna Griffiths argues that in artistic research it is impossible to escape from one's self, as artistic researchers themselves are central to the necessary activities.[25] Self-reflection as a method of data collection and analysis has a basis in the auto-ethnographic tradition and therefore comes with a belief that one cannot extricate oneself from the research and that trying to write objective truth in a field as subjective as filmmaking is inherently fallacious. Self-reflection is an imperfect antidote to the desire for objectivity and is thus a natural accompaniment to artistic research as it too embraces impure and situated knowledge.[26] Art is so often personal that it would feel unnatural—indeed, disingenuous—to efface oneself from research that is based in artistic production. Of course, the self can be minimised in the process but it can never be completely removed. In this PhD, I first textualise (i.e. write down or articulate reflections through my subjective prism), then I analyse. The analysis is thus always of textualised data;[27] always of my actions upon the event rather than simply the event itself. This acknowledgment is important because, as bell hooks argues, whatever one's conditions or background, we all are vulnerable to being co-opted, fooled, or sold on something or bought out by something else, '[t]here is no special grace that rescues any of us.'[28]

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[24] Teemu Mäki, "Art and Research Colliding," *Journal for Artistic Research* 5 (2013).

[25] Morwenna Griffiths, "Research and the Self," in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts,* eds. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 184.

[26] Mäki, "Art and Research Colliding".

[27] John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 95.

[28] bell hooks, "Remembered Rapture: Dancing with Words," *JAC* 20 no. 1 (Winter 2000): 7.

TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

This PhD is first and foremost for the independent film writer-director who views filmmaking primarily as part of their artistic practice rather than as a commercial endeavour. The aim here is not to optimise industrial processes but to elucidate and explore the artistic practice of filmmaking and certain tensions and problems that arise when a disruptive mechanism such as interactivity is applied to an otherwise unilinear medium such as film.

I use the term *writer-director* for a particular reason. I wrote, directed, co-edited, and co-produced an interactive film. I have never seen these roles as particularly separate during my filmmaking practice. Using the term *filmmaker* to encompass all of these roles seems problematic as it is too broad and could just as easily be applied to any member of the cast and crew if they so choose. It is, however, less problematic than the term *auteur*, which in my view is unnecessarily grandiose and lessens the contributions of other talents to the collaborative artistic process. In this PhD, I opted to use the slightly clunky term *writer-director* to encompass the role of an artist attempting to tell a story via film, with all the flexibility that scenario necessitates. My use of the term extends to being a co-editor and co-producer.

I unavoidably speak of the *audience* or *audience member* in this monograph. My assumptions about the audience are entirely limited to *my perspective as a writer-director*. My thinking about the audience is anticipatory and adjunctively informing pre-emptive creative decisions that I made in the story development process as a writer-director trying to divine how audiences might understand or feel (or not) about a particular dramaturgical, directorial, or editorial move or development. Documentary writer-director and scholar Susan Kerrigan describes how the writer-director exists on a spectrum which vacillates between creator and audience member; what she termed the 'filmic agent' is enabled by a multitude of factors, including mastery of storytelling as well as narrative conventions and codes which have been internalised by watching other films. This vacillation allows writer-directors to judge the quality of their work and anticipate whether it is acceptable to their imagined audience member.[29] In my case, the imagined audience member is a lover of experimental and arthouse film, a festivalgoer attuned to trends in world cinema, who wishes to be challenged by the films they watch.

Undoubtedly, there are many other possible ways of approaching the audience when studying the effects of interactivity on film in the qualitative and quantitative realms which are beyond the scope of this PhD but offer fruitful avenues of further research (e.g. comparisons with cinema exhibition and home distribution; how audiences received the film; which choices were selected and which endings were reached more often; specific narrative phenomena which emerged in the creative result). However, finally, it is my relationship with my imagined audience which

[29] Susan Kerrigan, "The Spectator in the Film-maker: Re-framing Filmology through Creative Film-making Practices," *Journal of Media Practice* 17, nos. 2-3. (November 2016): 195.

remains relevant to this research because it informed the choices I made in the story development process, while my relationship with any real audience I encountered during the film's exhibition did not.

CONFORMITY & EXPERIMENTATION

Through my experience and perceptions of screenwriting and editing *The Limits of Consent*, I try to consider not simply what I did but why I did it. I hope that by highlighting the decisions I took, the mistakes I made, and the tensions I encountered during the process of creation as well as the resultant successes and shortcomings of the finished film, I might illuminate what could be useful for not only myself but for others who wish to tell stories on film (whether they be interactive or not). As Annette Arlander articulated, I assume that others reading this can apply the findings to their own practice and/or research without a need for me to feign quasi-universals.[30] There is, however, one tension in particular which I believe many writer-directors experience, to which I wish to give special focus here.

During the editing of the film, my primary supervisor, Associate Professor Dirk Hoyer, asked me to consider *what kind of writer-director I wanted to be*. It was my first time making an Estonian film and in that domestic context the film would say a lot about me and the kind of films I wanted to make in the future; my reputation would be established by this first Estonian-language output. This discussion came at a critical and tense junction in the film's development where I felt that I was making a slow arthouse film, and my supervisor's attempts to increase the film's pace were at odds with my intents. This vexed me because of my experience with a previous feature film I wrote and directed, *Confession*,[31] where an experienced editor hijacked the film and went about cutting scenes short and introducing flash-forwards, which had never been planned, to the first half of the film. I felt at the time that the editor was re-creating that film in his own image and without my consent. I was too young and inexperienced to object to his choices. I consider *Confession* a personal failure and I still, in part, attribute this to my inability to stand up for my initial intentions. With such memories in my mind, my first reaction was to dismiss my supervisor's question of what kind of writer-director I wanted to be as coming from someone ignorant of the workings of my mind. I recall vehemently stating that I did not care what people thought about me; I only wanted to make the best film possible. Of course, only the second part of this statement was true.

The honest answer would have been that I did not know what kind of writer-director I wanted to be. *Post factum,* I understand that the tension in the creative process from the first outline of *The Limits of Consent*'s story to the final edit was my seemingly

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[30] Annette Arlander, "How Should I Write about my Work? Notes on Publishing Artistic Research," *Journal for Artistic Research* (Posted in *Reflections*) December 29, 2022. https://www.jar-online.net/en/how-should-i-write-about-my-work-notes-publishing-artistic-research

[31] *Confession*, directed by Michael Keerdo-Dawson (Five Frames Left, 2010).

irreconcilable desire, as a writer-director, to explore both drama and anti-drama, or, to put it another way, the desire to entertain the audience and the desire to experiment with the form.

The editor of *Confession* was trying to make the film more accessible; I could have dismissed him from the project if I had wanted. But I did not. Why? Because part of me wanted the audience to be entertained. A decade later, the same battle was playing out again; the critical difference this time was that interactivity offered me the chance to do both. It offered me an opportunity to explore both considerations; to please and alienate the audience at the same time with both dramatic and anti-dramatic endings; luring the audience in with the offer of something entertaining only to offer them routes through the narrative which either attempt to deliver that entertainment or deliberately try to do the opposite—to frustrate that anticipation.

I examine the tension between conformist and experimental tendencies to better elucidate the sort of extended and extensive iterations which were necessary to achieve radical effects, and how a writer-director might become more mindful of precisely the sort of filmmaking education and knowledge which seeks to eliminate them. Between the desire to experiment and the need to entertain, a writer-director routinely finds a dilemma which is central to this research: to challenge and provoke one's audience but risk alienating them in the process, or to conform and craft carefully to satisfy one's audience but risk creating a mediocre mainstream experience. Then, there is one further danger: that a writer-director hedges the impulses to experiment and entertain, thereby doing neither. This falling between two stools—the tendency to be experimental undercut by conformity and a desire to please my audience—is perhaps the danger I most clearly recognise in my artistic practice to date.

This was a constant and often surprising battle through the filmmaking process. The strong *gravity of narrative conventions* pulled me towards a more standardised approach to film narrative while my conscious experiment to apply interactivity to a psychological drama had to overcome this gravity for the film to improve.

LIBERALITY & LINEARITY

Finally, in this Introduction, I wish to articulate my ethical position regarding filmmaking, which stems from notions of *liberality.* I choose the word *liberality* very carefully as I see it as a sentiment and therefore as less problematic than the more ideologically loaded term *liberalism*, which unfortunately shares the same adjective and is explicitly connected to political and religious agendas.[32] The fundamentals of liberality as a sentiment, which lays the groundwork for a moral order, are generosity, candour, freedom from prejudice, and open-mindedness.[33]

[32] Daniel Innerarity, *Ethics of Hospitality,* trans. Stephen Williams and Serge Champeau (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 117.

[33] Philip A. Hamburger, "Liberality," *Texas Law Review* 78 (June 2000): 1225; Lesley Brown ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)*:* 1577.

Epistemologically, liberality offers liberty as a principle which overrides reason; one which observes that the perspectives of individual human beings offer an immovable private dimension which need not be interpreted as a universal.[34] A person who embraces liberality values plurality in the world and knows it is neither temporary nor something to be fixed on the path to homogeneity.[35] All of this means that a writer-director who espouses liberality, as I do, is constantly on guard for a reduction in complexity especially in concert with an agenda which almost inevitably leads to a simplification. Simplifications are seductive but shift one towards more narrow-minded and prejudicial conceptions of this world and those who occupy it.

As a writer-director embracing liberality, I believe that the representational power of film couriers various epistemological and ontological limits. When interactivity is employed, as I have done in this research, it can go some way towards undermining said limits by cracking open the totality of a film and offering us more than simply *the* end, instead moving us more towards *an* end and consequently broadening the possibilities for the narrative field as a whole. The plurality of outcomes which interactivity offers avoid, through the necessitated structural complexity, the simplification of the one definite end.

I sometimes fall short of my ideals. I see in the final edit of *The Limits of Consent* many untaken opportunities for a more generous depiction of the human beings represented in the film's narrative, a more candid deliberation on the issues at hand, and a more open-minded approach to the scenario, in general. Most of the male characters in the film, for example, are unforgivingly portrayed as amoral and singularly motivated by sex and self-interest next to their more sympathetic female counterparts. While I took great pains to problematise and complexify the protagonist and the secondary protagonist, additional effort could have been made to render the antagonists more sympathetically. Indeed, the narrative scenario of paying a high-tech pick-up artist to aid in the seduction of a vulnerable woman could have been examined less through the prism of moralising said scenario.

However, as I explore in this PhD, to write and direct a film which follows multiple narrative paths borne of interactivity is to adopt a *propagator of complexity* which will not let the creative force rest with the natural or obvious solution to a narrative problem but will instead continue to generate compensatory moves and require an openness of mind to make such a narrative meaningful. This propagator of complexity less easily lets the film rest with one resolution which therefore less easily allows the film to fall into the realm of didactic simplification of a narrative situation or character. While the finished film is not an exemplar of liberality and film narrative, the complexity that interactivity afforded it did move it closer to my sentimental ideals than would otherwise have been the case.

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[34] Innerarity, *Ethics of Hospitality*, 117.
[35] Innerarity, *Ethics of Hospitality*, 118.

CHAPTERS

This monograph is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters are most relevant for the reader more interested in the theoretical considerations which underpin this research. *Chapter 1: The Entertainer & The Experimenter* discusses the gravity of narrative conventions and how writer-directors are encouraged by their filmmaking education to embrace dramatic storytelling conventions as opposed to anti-drama. This chapter ends with a discussion of unilinearity and multilinearity, and how multilinear forms such as the interactive film allow for a different kind of narrative complexity which is impossible to replicate without a multilinear disruption like the introduction of interactivity. *Chapter 2: The Betweenity of the Interactive Film* elaborates what an interactive film is by examining examples of the form and then using them to describe a taxonomy of different interactive structures available to the interactive writer-director. This chapter then more concretely describes the interactive structure, which became the focus of this research: the *tree structure*.

The next three chapters focus more on my creative practice and the story development of *The Limits of Consent* across different stages of the film's production. *Chapter 3: All Roads Must Lead to Drama* details the writing of the various step outlines and my first attempts to make a film story interactive; this chapter also focuses on the effects that interactivity brought about from a structural perspective as the film idea was first elaborated on in a structural way. *Chapter 4: The Disappearing Protagonist* moves to the various drafts of the screenplay and the continuing strategies I employed to harness interactivity within a traditionally unilinear form; the focus here is on the protagonist and a seemingly irreconcilable problem of how a well-rounded protagonist could have more than one viable choice in a film which fragments its narrative trajectory. *Chapter 5: The Inessential Film* examines how the story development process extended into the editing of the final film and how my approach to the film's story changed in post-production because of deficiencies in the screenplay and mistakes made in production and how I addressed these problems: reducing the unilinear portion of the film and complexifying the film's interactivity by adding an achronological and multi-directional dimension to the narrative. The through-line of these chapters is how interactivity generated disruptions in the creative process and how those disruptions then invited compensatory moves to make the film work.

Finally, *Chapter 6: Proceeding Towards Difference* re-excavates the story development process with the benefit of time and highlights the tension which emerges from the compensatory moves I undertook throughout the process: the mutual push and pull of drama and anti-drama. Here I reflect on why anti-drama emerged in the process and reflect on what it means for my practice as a writer-director.

1. THE ENTERTAINER AND THE EXPERIMENTER

Aristotle tells us that a story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end,[36] displaying a unified whole with incidents arranged in such a manner that their wholeness would be jeopardised were it otherwise.[37] Literary structuralist, Tzvetan Todorov observes that the story moves from an initial state of equilibrium to disruption, to an attempt to fix this disruption, to a reinstatement of the equilibrium we found at the outset.[38] Modern screenwriting and storytelling experts have enhanced these thoughts: according to Linda Aronson, the story cannot begin until the protagonist's 'normal life' has been depicted and then disturbed enough to create momentum.[39] Will Storr writes of 'ignition points' as the first event in a chain of cause and effect which causes the protagonist to question their deepest beliefs held in that initial equilibrium.[40] Frank Daniel formulates that this protagonist must then want something badly and have difficulty obtaining it,[41] thus generating the core of dramatic narratives. Drama is the art of the showdown as generated by conflict as the characters try to overcome obstacles, reversals of fortune, and complications,[42] in order to reach their objective or resolve their emotional need. The stronger and clearer the protagonist's will, the stronger and clearer the drama will be.[43] There is a large consensus that the protagonist of this story must also learn something and change or transform,[44] or refuse to learn and change and suffer as a consequence,[45] in a manner within which meaning and morality might be explicated and illustrated as the story draws to an end.

What I am describing here is the basis for the Western tradition of *dramatic* storytelling as I have come to understand it from reading screenwriting guides and

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[36] Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," in *Aristotle Horace Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T.S. Dorsch, (London: Penguin Classic, 1965), 41.

[37] Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," 43.

[38] Tzvetan Todorov, "The 2 Principles of Narrative" *Diacritics* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 39.

[39] Linda Aronson, *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 78.

[40] Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling: Why Stories Make Us Human and How to Tell Them Better*
(London: William Collins, 2019), 90.

[41] David Howard and Edward Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1993), 23.

[42] Louis E. Catron, *The Elements of Playwriting* (New York: Macmillan General Reference, 1993), 24.

[43] Saara Cantell, *Cinematic Diamonds: Narrative Storytelling Strategies in Short Fiction Film,* trans. Fleur Jeremiah (Helsinki: Aalto University, 2012), 168.

[44] Soni Jorgensen, "Character, plot and the human condition," *Journal of Screenwriting* 8, no. 2 (2017): 120; Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997), 104; Dara Marks, *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc* (London: A&C Black, 2009), 29; John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (Penguin Random House UK, 2013), 46; Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 47.

[45] Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 79; Storr, *The Science of Storytelling,* 202.

academic texts on narrative and storytelling, as well as watching thousands of films. It is the basis I was taught in masterclasses with professional screenwriters and filmmakers and the basis I pass down to my students taking my undergraduate and postgraduate courses on storytelling or screenwriting. It is the basis I most often consider when I first put pen to paper and attempt to craft my own stories.

This basis has been formed by a series of narrative techniques which over time have been repeated so often that they have become playwriting and later screenwriting traditions. How one writes a screenplay today is often informed by the vast history of dramatic storytelling which has come before this moment. When one presses an immaculate idea onto parchment it is transformed, for it finds on the parchment an almost irresistible shape and memory informed by unshakeable histories. It finds *narrative conventions* and a strong gravity pulling the writer-director towards their way of conceiving and elaborating stories dramatically.

All gravities are linked to a mass of some kind. What then is the mass which causes this gravitational pull in screenwriting and more broadly filmmaking practice? Put simply, the mass is the collective body of previously effective narratives which employ narrative conventions. Narrative conventions are writerly acts which have been proven to be effective over time and in a variety of ways, such as by assisting in the formation of an active central character,[46] one who can open up the story space,[47] connect with an audience emotionally, and thus sustain interest through the film's runtime. Similarly, they are effective in linking plot points to keep the narrative coherent and comprehensible to mitigate confusion and maximise engagement.[48]

In mainstream filmmaking, these conventions have become entrenched, and have led to equally entrenched conceptions of a dramatic story (as opposed to a novelistic or episodic one). Writer-director Gus Van Sant notes that commercial filmmaking is tethered to a machine which makes stories that resemble other stories in order to fit the expectations of the audience.[49] The eventual consequence of this is that it becomes more and more difficult to defy conventions not only because of an expectant audience who wishes to experience the emotions these conventions often facilitate,[50] *but because they are so efficacious at moulding and shaping a narrative idea into a dramatic narrative*. Of course, these conventions do not constitute a magical formula for writing a great film and their champions do not directly claim

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[46] Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* (New York and London: Focal Press, 2013), 216.

[47] Storr, *The Science of Storytelling,* 76

[48] Erik Knudsen, "Zen and the Art of Film Narrative: Towards a Transcendental Realism in Film" *Journal of Screenwriting* 1 no. 2 (2010): 349.

[49] Gus Van Sant in Mario Falsetto, *Conversations with Gus Van Sant* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 87.

[50] Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay,* 45.

such an ability,[51] but they certainly provide tools to keep screenwriters on track.[52] But which track precisely?

In this chapter, I examine the conventional dramatic narrative film with three special focuses: the protagonist, the structure, and the ending. I draw on screenwriting handbooks as well as theoretical texts to situate this discussion in screenwriting education because it informs what professional writer-directors do or are encouraged to do by the gravity of narrative conventions. Screenwriting experts often champion dramatic conventions over and above rarer and more novel approaches; I address how they either portend, minimise or ignore anti-dramatic techniques. Lastly, I discuss the concept of multilinearity and how it unfixes the nearly ubiquitously fixed sequence of scenes which is a dramatic or anti-dramatic film, thereby moving us beyond the conceptualisation of the two being irreconcilable.

FORECLOSING CONVENTIONALITY

Screenwriting ethics expert Steven Maras worries that widespread claims of universalism in screenwriting handbooks, for example, risk making it difficult to recognise alternative structures from other cultures.[53] Maras cites critics of these claims such as Australian writer-director Warwick Thornton who encourages his peers to keep an open mind and not be shut into one formula or structure;[54] similarly, Chilean writer-director Raúl Ruiz argues that the dominance of certain storytelling guidelines offer normative criteria and shape screenplays accordingly.[55] Maras cites the universalising claims of well-known authors of screenwriting handbooks, Syd Field, Christopher Vogler, and Robert Mckee, whose claims of universal archetypal story structure[56] privilege it and risk dampening screenwriters' ambitions to tell screen stories in a different way because, according to film producer Glenda Hambly, it teaches writer-directors to believe they are tapping into the ancient building blocks of humanity's storytelling,[57] rather than just one of many possible approaches. Maras and Hambly are both concerned with not privileging a broadly Western concept of crafting dramatic stories at the expense of those from other cultures.

My concern with these conventions emerges more from a belief that they stifle my creativity in pernicious ways. Stories are thus buffeted and shaped and partially foreclosed in a process which encourages the use of certain devices and conventions. For instance, the convention that a protagonist must change in a singular way across

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[51] McKee, *Story*, 218; Yorke, *Into the Woods,* 231.

[52] Jorgensen, "Character," 120.

[53] Steven Maras, "Towards a Critique of Universalism in Screenwriting Criticism," *Journal of Screenwriting* 8 no. 2 (2017): 179.

[54] Maras, "Towards a Critique of Universalism," 178.

[55] Maras, "Towards a Critique of Universalism," 183.

[56] Maras, "Towards a Critique of Universalism," 179-81.

[57] Glenda Hambly, "The Not So Universal Hero's Journey," *Journal of Screenwriting* 12 no. 2 (2021): 147.

the film's runtime when, in actuality, I have found that certain individuals I know do not change at all, or sometimes a series of changes come for myself or individuals I know in a short spell of time or simultaneously or temporarily or reversibly or hesitatingly or so incrementally as to be virtually imperceptible. When I insist that my protagonist must change somehow, and in a singular, visible, meaningful and permanent fashion, I am *foreclosing the possibilities of my story and being* less *creative in order to render it more dramatically effective.* And this is where I take issue with claims that narrative conventions are universals.

Conforming to these conventions and writing a dramatic narrative is no guarantee of success, and screenwriting experts such as Christina Kallas tend to agree and even argue that inspiration can be lost in the fog of so much know-how.[58] There is therefore a reciprocal desire in many writer-directors to diverge from what has come before and hold on to their inspiration. For hidden in the conventions which create *drama* is an invitation to dissent and create, instead, *anti-drama*. It is the desire to experiment and push boundaries and challenge these dramatic conventions—to escape this gravity in ways big or small. Gus Van Sant perceives, from an American perspective, that a writer-director has a choice: either perfect the dramatic model or try to discover ways to subvert, change, or deconstruct the model.[59] Anti-drama, as I conceive it, is any choice which does just that by moving the writer-director away from the dramatic model or even the idea of a model at all.

The tension is clear: the convention offers the chance to craft a *dramatic* narrative which broadly follows well-worn forms which are effective for couriering certain emotions and ideas to the audience and leaving them satisfied when the end credits roll. However, following these conventions runs the risk of narrative foreclosure curtailing other possibilities and reinforcing one way of telling stories. Experimentation offers a chance to move away from the convention; to open up the narrative and the protagonist or protagonists within it to other possibilities which could be considered *anti-dramatic*. However, in doing so, the writer-director who crafts their story from the initial idea to the final edit of the finished film runs the risk of alienating their audience with an unfamiliar approach. I feel this tension acutely. I set out to write and then direct a dramatic film which follows the conventions and satisfies my audience, but there is part of me who would rather craft an anti-dramatic film which effaces conventions and tells a story on its own terms without any predetermination or attempts to please. I wish to do both.

THE DRAMATIC PROTAGONIST

When we watch a film, we bring with us certain expectations. Chief amongst these is that we will follow a *protagonist* as they develop the story through actions they take or actions which are taken upon them. The protagonist is essential for dramatic

[58] Kallas, *Creative Screenwriting,* 3.

[59] Gus Van Sant in Scott Macaulay, "Sands of Time," *Filmmaker Magazine* (Winter 2002): 89.

storytelling, making the connection between the writer-director and the audience,[60] in solitude,[61] or in coupledom,[62] or in multitudes,[63] but usually, the first variant is enough to ensure a unity of action.[64] The protagonist drives the story forward, uniting events around one character and one dominant perspective from which we take these events. This solitude makes her the object of focus and endows her with significance; it is her story we follow, and for a reason. She is our agent of causation; she is the one leading events and making things happen with her passion—not others.[65] She must have a strong goal or need, and may spare no effort to obtain it.

Frank Daniel's mantra—*someone wants something badly and has difficulty getting it*—seems to encapsulate these conventions very well.[66] First, 'someone:' the protagonist, a single protagonist driving the story forward. Second, 'wants something badly:' has a goal and must progress towards that goal. In this, we find a beginning, a middle, and, implicitly, an end. Third, 'has difficulty getting it', there are obstacles and conflict in this protagonist's way. The story is then a logical progression of incidents that occur while the hero is in pursuit of a goal;[67] this protagonist may not simply walk up and take the object of this goal, it must be fought for (figuratively or literally or both), usually against an antagonist or antagonists or antagonistic forces of some kind. Playwright and writer-director David Mamet boils all this down to some very basic questions which need answering: 'What does the hero want? What hinders him from getting it? What happens if he does not get it?'[68] If we cannot answer these questions clearly, we do not have a clear drama.

Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush in *Alternative Screenwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* offer the films of Steven Spielberg such as *Jaws*,[69] *Saving Private Ryan*,[70] and *Schindler's List,*[71] as examples of dramatic narratives. In their analysis, they describe the protagonists of his films as compassionate and reluctant but ultimately goal-oriented and able to manifest tremendous effort in the completion of their goal.[72] Sherif Brody in *Jaws* will do whatever it takes to rid his seaside town of the menacing great white shark, for example.[73] In the films of Spielberg, they write,

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60 Marks, *Inside Story,* 21.

61 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay,* 55.

62 Yves Lavandier, *Writing Drama: A Comprehensive Guide for Playwrights and Scriptwriters,* trans. Bernard Besserglik (Cergy: Le Clown & l'Enfant, 1994), 55.

63 McKee, *Story*,136.

64 Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 4.

65 David Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay: A Master Class in Storytelling for Film* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 122.

66 Howard and Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting*, 23.

67 David Mamet, *On Directing Film* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), xv.

68 Mamet, *On Directing Film*, xv.

69 *Jaws* directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1975).

70 *Saving Private Ryan* directed by Steven Spielberg (Dreamworks, 1998).

71 *Schindler's List* directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1993).

72 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 62.

73 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 62.

the protagonist is a secondary consideration to add an emotional layer to what is more important in his films—the plot.[74] They then compare these protagonists to the protagonists of what they term 'anti-dramatic' narratives, for which they use the films of Steven Soderbergh to illustrate their points. In Soderbergh's films, such as *The Limey*;[75] *Out of Sight*;[76] and *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*,[77] the protagonists are more steeped in their vulnerabilities and the narrative becomes a way for the screenwriter to spotlight certain behaviours.[78] Ann, the protagonist of *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, for example, is depressed, not consciously aware of it, and does not seem to want anything very strongly but she needs to wake up to her husband's infidelities; she slowly does this and sheds the shackles of her life as a result.[79]

However, Dancyger and Rush's conception of dramatic and anti-dramatic narratives is misleading and not contrastive enough. Steven Spielberg as an exemplar of dramatic narratives is a fair choice, but Steven Soderbergh is not always sufficiently experimental for the comparison to be meaningful. Rather, it seems as though Dancyger and Rush are comparing two species from the same genus. The protagonists from *The Limey* and *Out of Sight* still have strong goals (revenge and a successful robbery, respectively), and both films are filled with causation and dramatic moments. What Dancyger and Rush are referring to is the screenwriter's ability to turn their protagonist's goals on their heads—both of these protagonists fail in their endeavours but still learn and change in the pursuit (by letting go of the vendetta in the case of *The Limey* and falling in love in *Out of Sight*). They certainly do not go far enough to justify the negative prefix in the anti-drama label assigned to them. Another way of conceiving of the differences in these approaches is to consider that the screenplays Spielberg chooses to direct are often more plot-driven, while the screenplays that Soderbergh chooses to direct (and sometimes write) are often more character-driven, but they are usually still examples of dramatic narratives with dramatic protagonists.

DRAMATIC STRUCTURES

The most dominant way to arrange the events, enacted by and happening to a dramatic protagonist, into a story is through the three-act structure. The modern conception of the three-act structure was introduced by Constance Nash and Virgina Oakey in 1978.[80] Linda Aronson proposes that the conventional narrative structure in screenwriting requires a three-act, unilinear and sequential story which focuses on

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74 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 66.

75 *The Limey* directed by Steven Soderbergh (Artisan Productions, 1999).

76 *Out of Sight* directed by Steven Soderbergh (Universal Pictures, 1998).

77 *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* directed by Steven Soderbergh (Miramax Films, 1989).

78 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 70.

79 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 83.

80 Matthias Brütsch, "The Three-act Structure: Myth or Magical Formula?" *Journal of Screenwriting* 6 no. 3 (2015): 302-4.

a single protagonist moving towards a definite goal and very often a redemption of some sort.[81] It is the most prevalent of the structures available because it renders the task of creating a suspenseful story that builds at a fast pace relatively easily.[82] And while alternative structures are emerging, Aronson describes them as being based on the 'conventional structure', often formed by cleaving, rearranging, shortening, or duplicating it.[83] Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction,*[84] for example, has a very unconventional structure with three protagonists and a series of interwoven plots, yet it is also easy to see it as three conventional structures with three protagonists entangled in unexpected ways.

Many writers offer different means to structure the story according to these conventions, but taking into account small differences or emphases, they are still usually quite similar. Aronson offers three ways to visualise this structure: the mountain based on Linda Seger's model which emphasises struggle; the circle based on Vogler's Hero's Journey (itself based on Joseph Campbell's monomyth) which emphasises renewal and return; and the road which emphasises a sense of a journey.[85] The last of these most clearly resembles Syd Field's paradigm,[86] and is arguably the best-known way to structure a dramatic narrative.

Field's paradigm, first introduced in 1979, takes us on a straight line through the three acts with turning points at the ends of Acts 1 and 2, just as with Aronson's, Seger's, and Vogler's versions of the three-act structure. To illustrate this paradigm, I analyse the main plot line of David Lean and Nöel Coward's classic film, *Brief Encounter*,[87] which depicts a doomed love affair in 1940s England. I chose this film because it was one of the points of departure for this PhD (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) and because it does not totally conform to the structure indicating that, finally, creativity matters more than a pre-determined pathway to drama.

Field's paradigm lays out a beginning, middle, and end (or Act I, Act II, and Act III) and states that they are 'the set-up,' 'the confrontation,' and 'the resolution.'[88] Field's 'set-up' establishes the *who* and the *what* of the story leading to a disturbance which pushes the protagonist out of normality.[89] Seger states that the purpose of the set-up is to give us all the information we need to start the story.[90] Vogler emphasises that the ordinary world must be established in order to set a baseline for the special

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81 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 45.
82 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 47.
83 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 48.
84 *Pulp Fiction* directed by Quentin Tarantino (Miramax Films, 1994).
85 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 53-55.
86 Syd Field, *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1998), 26.
87 *Brief Encounter* directed by David Lean (Cineguild, 1945).
88 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 26.
89 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 51.
90 Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great* (Hollywood: Samuel French Trade, 1987), 21.

world our protagonist will enter.[91] In *Brief Encounter,* we witness our protagonist, Laura Jesson, saying goodbye to an acquaintance and then retelling the story of how she met him. The set-up details Laura's family life and introduces her husband and children, and in so doing also sets the stakes;[92] in this case, these children, their father, and the sympathetic protagonist will suffer if their family is destroyed by the protagonist's clandestine affair. As Field describes, the set-up defines the characters, their needs, and their relationships to one another;[93] it normalises the ordinary world of our protagonist.

Laura's need becomes clear after the aforementioned disturbance: Laura meets her future lover Alec for the first time, innocently at first, and agrees to meet him again. This moment is an incident which moves the story onward and is the true beginning of the story which brings the set-up to a close.[94] Seger describes the moment as the 'catalyst' where someone makes a decision or something happens to push the story into action.[95] Vogler describes this part of the story as the 'Call to Adventure'; he offers a number of possible options for why the protagonist embarks on their journey, but for Laura, it is her attraction to Alec and her need for more excitement in her life.[96]

From there, we proceed to the confrontation, which comprises the bulk of the film.[97] The protagonist meets and confronts many obstacles on the path to reaching their goal. In *Brief Encounter,* Laura meets Alec repeatedly but tries to resist the draw of him until events come to a head at the 'mid-point' which according to Field links the two halves of the confrontation together but changes the nature of the conflict even if the goal for the protagonist remains the same.[98] In the case of *Brief Encounter,* Laura and Alec confess their love for one another and share a kiss. Laura still craves the excitement of a love affair but now she has crossed the line into adultery and whatever happens after this moment, the gaiety of their love affair will be overshadowed by a looming decision: to end their marriages or not.

The conflict builds until it reaches the second turning point when the protagonist achieves or abandons her goal.[99] Two events often occur here: 'a dark moment' and 'a new stimulus,' according to Seger.[100] In the case of *Brief Encounter*, Laura joins Alec at his friend's flat and the two are about to spend the night together for the first time when Alec's friend returns unexpectedly and Laura flees into the night (dark

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91 Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Michael Wiese Productions, 1998), 85.
92 Vogler, *Writer's Journey*, 94.
93 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 27.
94 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 30-31.
95 Seger, *Making a Good Script Great,* 25.
96 Vogler, *Writer's Journey*, 104.
97 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 27.
98 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 27.
99 Field, *Screenwriter's Problem Solver*, 31.
100 Seger, *Making a Good Script Great*, 31.

moment) but finally decides that she must end her affair with Alec (new stimulus). Aronson notes that the end of the confrontation is often when the protagonist is closest to death either metaphorically or literally;[101] and must be resurrected to cleanse them of the smell of death, according to Vogler.[102] And here is where *Brief Encounter* departs most notably from this structure because Laura's darkest moment, her split-second decision to throw herself under an oncoming train (a decision she flinches from, ultimately) comes mere minutes from the end of the film deep into the film's resolution denying the audience an extended epilogue or rising action to retrieve Laura from the agony of loving and losing.

All of this is merely my structural interpretation of *Brief Encounter* based on Syd Field's paradigm. Matthias Brütsch, in a highly critical article about the three-act structure, convincingly presents evidence that screenwriting experts only agree 22% of the time about how to divide a film into three acts.[103] Arguably this highly variable interpretive dimension negates the paradigm altogether because thresholds between the various acts are rarely clearly sign-posted and *Brief Encounter*'s low point late in the third act would seem to demonstrate the limits of the model. If an undisputed classic of British cinema does not match the paradigm exactly, then how good a paradigm is it? Brütsch advocates a more nuanced concept of structure with flexible phases blending into one another rather than the more catchy three-act structure as it stands today.[104] I agree with this assertion, but still, it stands that the films discussed in Brütsch's article can be divided broadly into set-up, confrontation, and resolution and that an aspiring writer-director will often turn to or be pointed at the three-act structure as an essential tool for crafting their dramatic stories.

In the general embrace of the three-act structure, writer-directors are encouraged to see their film a certain way and to tell a story which is in some way resolved in one fashion. Experimental writer-director Sean Baker regrets this reality, and argues that we have been 'brainwashed into thinking that we all need a story, that we need a beginning, middle, and end, and everything that goes along with that.'[105] With the introduction of interactivity, however, this sort of thinking is immediately challenged and with the interactive structure I adopted for this research, it is most clearly challenged at the end.

THE DRAMATIC END

Many films can be interpreted as following an active protagonist through a three-act structure. Indeed, even slow and laconic European films in the art house

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101 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 52.
102 Vogler, *Writer's Journey*, 204.
103 Brütsch, "Three-act Structure," 315.
104 Brütsch, "Three-act Structure," 321.
105 Sean Baker in J.J Murphy, *Rewriting Indie Cinema: Improvisation, Psychodrama, and the Screenplay* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2019) 231.

tradition can be mapped out in such a fashion. Radu Muntean's low-key infidelity drama *Tuesday, After Christmas*, can easily be interpreted through this prism in a very similar fashion to *Brief Encounter,* with a couple of major differences.[106] The protagonist, Paul, is already in the midst of a six-month affair with his daughter's dentist when the film begins (set-up); their relationship is thrown into crisis when his wife and lover accidentally meet (beginning of the confrontation), prompting the lover to back away from the affair and thus causing the protagonist to struggle with his conscience. Eventually, the protagonist decides to confess his affair to his wife ending his marriage in the process (dark moment and new stimulus). The resolution then briefly deals with the fallout as Paul moves into his lover's flat establishing a new normality, and he and his wife decide when to break the news to their daughter at the titular date. The protagonist has changed, and this is where the dramatic protagonist and the dramatic structure meet the dramatic end.

Events culminate and plot threads converge in the conventional film's resolution. Questions are answered and the tension is released.[107] According to John Yorke, author of *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them*, change is indissoluble from a dramatic need: if a protagonist wants something, a change is necessary for them to acquire it;[108] and this change is usually finalised at the end of the story.[109] Yorke offers a five-act structure with an emphasis on character change, but many of the key points in his structure can easily be mapped onto the dramatic structures outlined in the previous section. For Yorke, interestingly, the midpoint is a breakthrough moment when key knowledge is introduced to the protagonist but they do not know yet how to use it;[110] for Paul in *Tuesday, After Christmas,* it is when his lover retreats from him and he becomes more keenly aware of his need to commit to her, leading to his final change into her full-time partner from a part-time lover. Paul, like Laura Jesson in *Brief Encounter*, realises he must choose between his lover and his spouse—he cannot have it all. Change comes in the end when he makes his decision.

Between *Brief Encounter* and *Tuesday, After Christmas*, very similar stories are told very differently. Paul is already embroiled in his affair at the outset of the film, while we witness Laura fall into her affair at the start of her narrative. Paul pursues a retreating lover while Laura is herself the one retreating in her story. In both films, all parties are played sympathetically; there are no villains in either film which makes the final decisions both protagonists must make all the more heartfelt. The differences between the films are most keenly visible in their endings. Paul's decision to leave his wife contrasts with Laura's decision to stay with her husband. Both are painful, but Laura regresses in a tragic fashion, while Paul pushes through

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106 *Tuesday, After Christmas* directed by Radu Muntean (HBO Romania, 2010).
107 Seger, *Making a Good Script Great,* 32.
108 Yorke, *Into the Woods*, 46.
109 Yorke, *Into the Woods*, 51.
110 Yorke, *Into the Woods*, 59.

his moral dilemma and enacts a change. Both films refrain from explicit judgment about the relative merits of either decision; instead, the audience must bring their thoughts to bear on these outcomes at the end of each protagonist's arc.

Dara Marks, in her screenwriting guide, *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc*, gives special focus to the protagonist's arc and proposes that the protagonist first resists the necessary change, thus generating conflict within the story; later she is released from this resistance, change can happen, and the conflict is resolved at its climax.[111] Change, then, is critical. Even the tragic hero must change to reach the point of rejecting a possible transformation at the narrative's end.[112] Such is the case for Laura Jesson, who learns what it is to love and to be loved, only to give it up. With that final transformation or lack thereof, the major dilemma is resolved at a critical moment in a 'do-or-die' battle which is the result of the struggles of the third act;[113] the protagonist makes a choice which results in the film's consummate event leading to a positive, negative, or ironic climax according to Robert McKee;[114] a result which is both inevitable and unpredictable—the logical yet surprising resolution for the story.[115]

In *Tuesday, After Christmas,* Paul confessing to his wife bluntly that he loves someone else is a surprise. The audience might have been forgiven for thinking that Paul would be caught in the act as is often the case in dramas about infidelity, but ultimately it is more logical that he confesses as he has not been caught in six months and must therefore be a discreet adulterer. In *Brief Encounter*, Laura also remains uncaught; however, she is cruelly denied a final farewell with her lover when their last meeting is interrupted by an acquaintance of Laura's at a railway station coffee shop. Laura's fears began earlier in the film through a chance encounter with another pair of gossiping ladies while having lunch with Alec; it is ultimately fitting that another such encounter should paralyse her with the same fear and thwart her once more. Her inability to act because of what it might look like to others is ultimately her undoing.

But what if Laura and Alec had been offered other resolutions to their stories? Other chances to resolve their dilemmas (or not) in ways which are not both inevitable and unpredictable? Or are still unpredictable but undermine a sense of inevitability with a plurality? This is the sort of plurality which interactivity not only offers but rather encourages in its application.

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111 Marks, *Inside Story*, 148.
112 Jorgensen, "Character," 120.
113 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 113.
114 McKee, *Story*, 304.
115 Karl Iglesias, *Writing for Emotional Impact* (Livermore: Wingspan Press, 2005), 120-21.

TESTING THE LIMITS OF DRAMA

Brief Encounter and *Tuesday, After Christmas* fulfil the dramatic conventions which I have laid out above. They arguably both feature a single protagonist with a deep emotional need which generates conflict in their life and leads them to a surprising but inevitable conclusion. The concept of a physical goal is somewhat more elliptical in these films because they are focused on matters of the heart and therefore the character transformation is not as clearly encouraged to take place within the frame of the plot's physical action.[116] However, both films begin by setting up the world of the story, establishing a Todorov-style equilibrium for their protagonists and then disrupting this equilibrium, forcing each protagonist to change and then accept or reject a transformation at the narrative's end after passing through several turning points along the way.

Will Storr argues that the three-act structure's success is because it is the tidiest method of depicting deep changes in the protagonist.[117] The protagonist we encounter at the start of the story is in a delusion about their reality, caught in a functional but partial and warped hallucination of what their reality has become.[118] The story then proceeds to tell them how wrong they are so that they may find the answer to what Storr describes as the *fundamental question that drives all drama*: 'Who am I?'[119] These films can be interpreted as answering this question in relation to their protagonist: I am a faithful wife; I am a committed man to the woman I love. However, with this thought, Storr is positing a universal which I endeavour to challenge.

In life, such moments of disruption certainly come for us and force a change of some kind. Very often they do answer the 'who am I' question by shaking us out of whatever defunct survival system we are struggling to maintain.[120] Soni Jorgensen appears to agree; the protagonist of a great screenplay, she writes, must let go of their ego to release their fear or restrictive belief system.[121] In life, a disruption very often tests our resolve, morality, and sense of self in ways they have hitherto not been tested and we are forced out of whatever stupor we found ourselves in. However, *it is not the only type of story in our lives*. If I look at major changes in my life, I do not see that I always had to let go of what came before; or if I did, it was not because what came before was defunct. To adopt the 'who am I' question as a universal truth of drama is to severely delimit the possibilities of storytelling.

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116 Craig Batty, "The Physical and Emotional Threads of the Archetypal Hero's Journey: Proposing Common Terminology and Re-examining the Narrative Model," *Journal of Screenwriting* 1 no. 2 (2010): 292.

117 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 5.

118 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 64.

119 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 103.

120 Marks, *Inside Story*, 114.

121 Jorgensen, "Character," 121.

There are other ways that the conventional approaches to dramatic storytelling delimit the kinds of stories we can tell. For instance, does the protagonist always have to be an agent of causation at the exclusion of random chance? Do outside factors not interrupt our trajectory and transform our stories in ways which do not maintain the unity of action or the beginning, middle, and end? Do people not sometimes fail at something and never try again? Do people not work in harmony with others for something greater than themselves without interpersonal conflicts? All these possibilities would seem to directly contradict dramatic considerations. As a script editor, I would probably make a certain set of suggestions as correctives to any of these possibilities in line with this internalised form: the gravity of narrative conventions pulling me back to the standardised approach.

Another author of a pair of popular screenwriting guides, David Howard, writes that there is only one unbreakable rule in filmmaking, '[y]ou can't be boring too long.'[122] It is his prelude to a chapter in which he cautiously advocates breaking the rules so long as *form follows function* (i.e. any breach in conventions is justified somehow) and the risk/loss ratio is carefully balanced.[123] It is a disappointing chapter in a systematic book which takes the reader carefully and thoroughly through Howard's thoughts on screenwriting and then promises methods to unpick and play with these systems. The rush of blood to the mind from the freedom which might come with such methods, that it is not all just join-the-dots, is then immediately chilled by Howard as he advocates sticking to the rules closely and emphasises the risks of not doing so.[124] To be fair to Howard, there are many other authors of screenwriting guides who do the same in their books; even Dancyger and Rush, in their otherwise much more open-minded text, begin by offering to explain the dramatic conventions followed by practical ways to undermine these conventions, then on the very next page they announce that storytelling without conflicts, discoveries, reversals, or turning points is basically impossible.[125] What most screenwriting guides have in common is the promotion of techniques which are known to work and will make the screenplay more effective; what I argue here is that being effective is a much stronger consideration for writer-directors making narrative films than it is for other artists.

Filmmaking is an expensive enterprise which frequently requires large budgets and offers few opportunities to practice or freely experiment. It is also an art form which very seldom allows for second chances if a previous film project has been rejected by audiences. This limit in filmmaking practice encourages the writer-director to keep the audience in mind in an anticipatory sense, because if an audience loves the film, then the chances are higher that someone will give the writer-director the opportunity to make another film. Screenwriting, like any kind of writing, might be

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122 Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay,* 343.
123 Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay,* 350.
124 Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay,* 353.
125 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Scriptwriting*, 1-2.

democratically available, as Margaret Atwood notes about writing prose;[126] however, it takes much more than a pen and paper to make a film from that screenplay: budgets, casts, crews, locations, special effects, equipment, rights, etc. Even with the partial democratisation of filmmaking through the advent of cheaper cameras and editing equipment,[127] filmmaking is still a costly and most often logistically complex enterprise that needs to maximise its chances of success because it is inherently a high-risk venture; one approach that mitigates its risks is conformity to established narrative conventions which facilitate dramatic stories.

To illustrate this gravity of narrative conventions, I provide two examples of conventions in dramatic storytelling and the risks related to breaking with them: film narratives with just one protagonist and film narratives which are conflict-driven. If I conceive of a film narrative which has multiple protagonists, when I write I find the convention that there is *only one protagonist*,[128] adds pressure to focus on a particular protagonist with other supporting characters in tow. If I conceive of film narrative which will be expressed through the use of juxtaposition, contrast, and poetic imagery—as Marja-Riita Koivumäki describes in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, for example—[129]when I write I find the convention for conflict-driven storytelling adds pressure to focus on a protagonist with a definite goal and a need to overcome obstacles and antagonistic forces to reach that goal. The gravity of these conventions then risks overriding my lyrical or multi-protagonist aspirations. With these narrative conventions comes their iterative power to transform the *narrative idea* into a *dramatic narrative.* At the moment that this occurs the narrative no longer wholly belongs to the mind from which it sprung or the germinal from which it originated—it now also belongs to the history of dramatic narrative practice; a history at once prefatory and coextensive.

It is not that multiple-protagonist or transcendental narratives are impossible. Far from it. Stephen Gaghan's global critiques of the oil industry in *Syriana*,[130] or the war on drugs in *Traffic*,[131] split their narratives among multiple protagonists to illustrate a variety of positions on multi-faceted issues. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films such as *Tropical Malady,*[132] and *Syndromes and a Century*,[133] use juxtaposition, extended time, and hallucinatory imagery to explore romantic and parental relationships and

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126 Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, (Cambridge: Virago, 2003), 22.

127 Monica Mak, "Digital Cinematic Technology and the Democratization of Independent Cinema," (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2007), 3-4.

128 McKee, *Story*, 49.

129 Marja-Riita Koivumäki, "Poetic Dramaturgy in Andrey Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962): Conflict and Contrast, Two Types of Narrative Principle," *Journal of Screenwriting* 3 no. 1 (2012): 37.

130 *Syriana* directed by Steven Gaghan (Warner Brother's Pictures, 2005).

131 *Traffic* directed by Steven Soderbergh (Initial Entertainment Group, 2000).

132 *Tropical Malady* directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Downtown Pictures, 2004).

133 *Syndromes and a Century* directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (New Crowned Hope, 2006).

capture a lyrical transcendence which a conventional narrative would struggle to achieve. Such transcendental films involve protagonists who do not try to achieve anything in the traditional dramatic sense.[134] The transcendental narrative is commonly a series of events and a reflection upon an ontological state that begins in one place, changes, and then returns to where it began again.[135]

The difficulty is that these films remain exceptions for film narratives rather than the rule. Thus, the gravity of narrative conventions is constantly pulling the writer-director away from alternative forms because of the inherent risks which come with them. In our repetition of conventions, we are tethered to the conventional and the tried and tested.[136] We are somewhat safeguarded by this tethering. It is the umbilical cord of dramatic storytelling; it means the story is never truly born; it is always attached to the stories which came before it. It means that the changes in these conventions are always cautious and evolutionary. Thus, even a small change can disrupt these endless repetitions enough to broaden the field of imaginative possibilities or at least discombobulate the convention.[137] But David Howard and others are correct—such efforts come with risks.

Even something as simple as having multiple protagonists has risks. In *Happy Hour*,[138] co-writer/director Ryûsuke Hamaguchi explores different unhappy relationships from the perspective of four different women; as a result, *Happy Hour* is over 5 hours long and therefore has a lower chance of commercial success because it becomes more difficult to fit into an exhibitor's timetable and the extended length might be off-putting for potential audiences. The alternative is to spend less time with these protagonists, as was the strategy for *Traffic* and *Syriana,* and risk undermining the audience's emotional connection with them.

The conventional approach demands that Hamaguchi pare back his film until it is focused on only one protagonist, thus maintaining the emotional impact at a reduced runtime. As screenwriting expert and story consultant Robert Mckee puts it, multiple-protagonist films 'soften the telling' because they tear the audience's emotions in too many directions.[139] These risks must be taken seriously because film is such a high-stakes art form from which failure is difficult to recover. Hamaguchi either did not feel this gravity or was strong enough to resist it.

ANTI-DRAMA

If Dancyger and Rush's definition of anti-drama is too close to drama to be useful in this discussion, then that of Robert McKee, set out in his seminal book *Story:*

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134 Knudsen, "Zen and the Art of Film Narrative," 347.
135 Knudsen, "Zen and the Art of Film Narrative," 348.
136 Arlander, "How Should I Write about my Work?"
137 Arlander, "How Should I Write about my Work?"
138 *Happy Hour* directed by Ryûsuke Hamaguchi (Fictive, 2015).
139 McKee, *Story*, 49.

Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting, is much more distinct. McKee separates the approaches into Archplot, Miniplot, and Antiplot, and places them at the three corners of what he terms 'The Story Triangle.'[140] McKee advises screenwriters to look at the examples of each and be guided by the works of writers who have come before and have worked in particular veins.[141] Tellingly, he places the Archplot at the top of the triangle and lists the features as follows: causality, closed ending, chronological time, external conflict, single protagonist, consistent reality, and active protagonist;[142] he also describes the Archplot as one which is effectively eternal.[143] The Archplot is then closest to what I described using *Brief Encounter* as an example: a dramatic film narrative as explicated by the dramatic protagonist with a clear goal (though in this case Laura is driven by an emotional need more than a goal, and the film employs an achronological structure which tells the story in flashback). Steven Spielberg's aforementioned films are probably a closer fit.

Meanwhile, the Miniplot emphasises open endings, internal conflict, multiple protagonists or passive protagonists, and effectively trims and reduces the Archplot through the guise of minimalism but still strives to entertain the audience with enough features of the Archplot.[144] What drives the protagonist or protagonists is often more oblique than in an Archplot, and ultimately the resolution of the story is not as clear. *Tuesday, After Christmas* is certainly an example of a Miniplot: sparse in terms of events, loose in terms of causation, with an internally conflicted and largely passive protagonist. *Tuesday, After Christmas,* with its much longer and understated scenes, is further into the Miniplot corner of the triangle. Koivumäki's analysis of Andrei Tarkovsky's films, for example, would also place them closer to Miniplots, where the strong goal is taken up by supporting characters so that the protagonist can be more internal and listless.[145]

Lastly, the Antiplot goes against structure and embraces coincidence, achronology and inconsistent realities while contradicting or even insulting the traditional Archplot.[146] This description encompasses a variety of films including the transcendental narrative and to a lesser extent the puzzle film which I describe later in this chapter. The only rule for an Antiplot, according to McKee, is to break rules,[147] and his key example, Jean Luc Godard's *Week End*,[148] which follows a bourgeois couple in a series of chaotic episodes and ends in anti-climaxes and cannibalism, epitomises the qualities of the Antiplot. Another example of McKee's Antiplot is

[140] McKee, *Story*, 43.
[141] McKee, *Story*, 44.
[142] McKee, *Story*, 46.
[143] McKee, *Story*, 45.
[144] McKee, *Story*, 45.
[145] Koivumäki "Poetic Dramaturgy," 152.
[146] McKee, *Story*, 46.
[147] McKee, *Story*, 54.
[148] *Week End* directed by Jean Luc Godard (Comacico, 1967).

Daisies,[149] Věra Chytilováta's surrealist feminist comedy which chaotically mocks the expectations society puts on women throughout and proceeds without a plot and deliberately harsh transitions between scenes and sequences which do not rationally connect to one another. This film finds its unity in a critique of patriarchy and its two central characters who are present in every scene, but certainly, it does not have a plot in any traditional sense. There are scant causative connections between any of the film's events; scenes just happen and what happens in them, cumulatively, is the point for Chytilováta.

Week End and *Daisies* seem positively coherent, logical and certainly eventful, however, when compared to a film like *Dog Star Man*.[150] Written and directed by Stan Brakhage, *Dog Star Man* replaces a plot with images, most of which are impressionistic without sound; scattered objects are shot so close as to be unrecognisable with film defects, scratches, and even burnouts highlighted and becoming part of the texture of the image. Multiple exposures of body parts blur into indeterminate patterns with only the occasional recognisable object emerging from the garbled mess before *eventually* a man is seen running with his dog through the snow. The film then returns to the visual chaos from which it emerged and then ends as abruptly as it began. Perhaps Brakhage's intent is to recreate the sort of things we see when we close our eyes, the impressions that light leaves on the back of our eyelids. Or perhaps he wants to capture the way a newborn baby might perceive the world (the presence of the baby occasionally through the film hinting at this). He seems intent on creating a moving abstract painting. He most certainly, however, is not interested in creating drama in the sense that I have described in this chapter.

McKee is sceptical about the Antiplot, describing it as solipsistic and leaning more towards didactic and ideational structures, but conceding that when done well it can allow the audience to gain a clear perception of the film's author as a subjective state of mind.[151] However, at the end of the relevant chapter McKee argues that writers should only write what they believe, and claims that most writers do not believe what the Antiplot promotes. Rather, most writers who embrace this form and abandon the classical Archplot are effectively angry, attention-seeking children in the midst of a temper tantrum in defiance of conventionality and Hollywood rules.[152] As with David Howard, McKee cannot bring himself to keep too much of an open mind when it comes to such forms, even while acknowledging their prevalence in European cinemas. Instead of analysing how one might succeed in such a fashion, he outright ridicules the temptation as unthinking adolescent rebellion.

McKee wrote a book and, naturally enough, he wanted that book to sell. It is aimed at a largely English-speaking readership who wish to write screenplays for a living. He thus, in that guise, articulates the tension many other writer-directors might feel:

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149 *Daisies* directed by Věra Chytilováta (Filmové studio Barrandov, 1966).
150 *Dog Star Man* directed by Stan Brakhage (1964).
151 McKee, *Story*, 55.
152 McKee, *Story*, 66.

the further the writer-director moves away from the Archplot towards the Miniplot or the Antiplot, the smaller the audience becomes; the smaller the audience becomes, the smaller the budget which can be pursued; the smaller the budget, the less likely anyone is to buy the screenplay or back the film to begin with.[153] If you want success on these terms, it is much safer to make a film with an Archplot, please the audience, make some money, and be hired again. McKee is by no means alone in issuing these kinds of warnings; Aronson, too, on the first page of her book similarly cautions that there is no point in writing a screenplay which will never be made and thus never make any money from the enterprise.[154] But I argue that the motive to make a dramatic story in the guise of an Archplot is more complex than this kind of financial consideration.

As a writer-director, I want to make my audience feel and think. I want to explore the potential for satisfying narratives in the Archplot, but I also want to be subtle and understand the texture of my protagonist's psychology as in a Miniplot, and push beyond this and explore other possibilities in an Antiplot, too. I am not drawn to the Archplot for financial gain; I am not naïve enough to believe that great wealth awaits me if I can only write the correct screenplay. I live in Harjumaa, not Hollywood. However, I understand that if the film I make has some success, whether financially or otherwise, I am more likely to be given another budget to make another film.

McKee implores screenwriters to write what they believe, but assumes that a screenwriter or writer-director only wants to make one kind of film; that there is not a temptation to do more than one thing. This seems to me a limiting thought. Part of me wants to entertain and part of me wants to experiment. But why? The currents of this desire run deep; it is the desire to tell a story which will please the audience, to make them laugh and to make them cry—to entertain them. And with this desire comes the accumulated knowledge that the safest way to achieve it is to embrace the active protagonist, a dramatic structure, and the surprising but inevitable ending. However, I am also drawn to the Miniplot and the Antiplot, not to rebel against established practices or be an *enfant terrible* as McKee would have it. The currents of this desire run deep, too; it is the desire to express a story in a different way, to study a human being intently, to tell of something unique in that human being, and if I cannot do that, to at least be unique in the telling. But again, why?

Perhaps McKee is right, and the writer-director's embrace of anti-drama is an act of solipsism. Perhaps it is my ego, in this sense, which draws me to the anti-drama and its ability to express my subjectivism through film. *But if this is* so *then it is only half the tale*, because it is also my ego, from a different angle, which draws me to drama. I want the audience to like my film because it entertains them and, by extension, like me because I am their entertainer. However, I also want the audience to respect the film because it makes them think and challenges them and, by extension, respect me because I experiment with the form in novel ways and confound expectations.

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153 McKee, *Story*, 62-63.

154 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 3.

DRAMA & ANTI-DRAMA IN ONE FILM

The puzzle film is a form which often demonstrates the contingency of our world and its malleability. Not to be mistaken for McKee's Antiplot which effaces all causation, but certainly similar in how it reduces causation and confuses the different levels of realities. If the likes of *Week End* and *Daisies* are in McKee's Antiplot corner of Story Triangle, then David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* is in the vicinity but much closer to the centre.[155]

Mulholland Drive is a prime example of a puzzle film which works with the logic of a dream in the way that many of Lynch's films do,[156] presenting fragmented spatiotemporal realities; overt coincidences which require decoding; time that loops back on itself and perhaps runs again differently; as well as characters whose stable core is undermined by holding two personalities or being subjected to multiple realities.[157] It is, however, also a film which begins as a drama and ends as an anti-drama in the sense that it deliberately undermines the logic of the story it sets up, loops back in time and overrides everything it began with including the protagonist and supporting characters.

The puzzle film is often unconcerned by notions of cohesion or making sense, as they move between different ontologies, disturbing the audience's ability to accurately say whether an event occurred or not thus enmeshing the different levels of the realities it presents;[158] however, unlike McKee's Antiplot, it does not necessarily have to embrace chaos nor rely solely on coincidence to do so; rather, the point of such films is to deliberately disorient or mislead the audience.[159] Will Storr offers that there are expert audience members who understand the pattern they encounter in such a film and enjoy revisiting such narratives and pondering their meaning.[160] Thus complexity becomes a desirable goal and when complexity is the goal, narrative logic, or at least the usual narrative logic is a detriment as it often reduces complexity.[161]

As the name suggests, these films invite the audience to solve a puzzle. Sometimes this puzzle is solvable; other times it is unsolvable. However, the invitation is the same. *Mulholland Drive* includes many traditional narrative strategies to engage its audience, holding many of the basic tenets of McKee's Archplot, but denies them any clear resolution to the problems the narrative frames.[162] *Mulholland Drive*

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155 *Mulholland Drive* directed by David Lynch (Universal Pictures, 2001).

156 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 54.

157 Warren Buckland, *Hollywood Puzzle Films*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 5.

158 Warren Buckland, *Hollywood Puzzle Films*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

159 Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film," in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 14.

160 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 55.

161 Jan Simons, "Complex Narratives," in *Hollywood Puzzle Films*, ed. Warren Buckland. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 31.

162 Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen, "Wallowing in Dissonance: The Attractiveness of Impossible Puzzle Films," in *Stories*, eds. Ian Christie and Annie van den Oever (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 57.

opens with tropes of the neo-Noir, with a botched assassination attempt, a brutal car accident, a grizzled detective on the case, and an amnesiac victim of the crash, Irene, wandering into an apartment which is not hers. After meeting an aspiring actress, Betty, by chance, the pair set about finding out who Irene really is and where she came from. Many of these elements are never revisited or are cut mercilessly short; the car crash, for instance, is utterly random, the detective never returns to the film and the answers to questions raised by Irene's amnesia victim such as who she is and why someone wanted to kill her are answered in ways we would never expect at the outset, involving a body swap for multiple characters in the second half of the film, effectively truncating the events which happened to all involved and recasting each character in the guise of another.

This represents a deliberate shift in the deictic centre of the film (that certain actors correspond to certain characters) radically undermining the notion that most expectations about the protagonist are set at the beginning and will be reinforced as the film progresses rather than undermined.[163] The deictic centre helps the audience member to position events and characters relative to the progression of the storyline through time and space; usually, it clearly communicates and provides a spine to which we can refer in order to situate ourselves in the narrative.[164] The shift in *Mulholland Drive* precludes the audience's ability to mark a deictic reference point and is crucial to how the film fosters a keen sense of disorientation as a consequence,[165] and has solicited any number of professional readings of the film from academics and critics alike.[166]

Mulholland Drive effectively mixes McKee's story triangle together. Beginning with an Archplot, truncating that plot and replacing it with a love triangle with the actors recast as completely different characters in a move closer to the illogicality of an Antiplot, and then finally playing out an intimate meditation on extreme jealousy which is more closely related to a Miniplot punctuated with flashes of Antiplot peppering both halves of the film. The disruption at the centre of the film is so profound that the Antiplot effectively melds the Archplot and Miniplot together. However, by the end of the *Mulholland Drive*, it is clear that we have been watching a narrative experiment and whatever partially surprising but inevitable conclusion there was to Betty's plot has been foregone in place of Diane's descent into madness. Drama has been overridden by anti-drama in this case.

But there is a way where the two could co-exist without one overriding the other in such a permanent fashion. There is a way for Betty's plot to continue and be overridden by Diane's descent into madness at the same time. For that to occur, the

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163 Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 125.

164 Kiss and Willemsen, "Wallowing in Dissonance," 63.

165 Kiss and Willemsen, "Wallowing in Dissonance," 63.

166 Zina Giannopoulou, "Introduction," in *Mulholland Drive*, ed. Zina Giannopoulou (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 1.

writer-director has to move away from the ubiquity of the fixed film narrative as an unchanging sequence and start seeing film narratives as something other than a single straight line of events.

SINGLE STRAIGHT LINES

Writer-directors usually have to choose drama or anti-drama, or alternate between them from project to project. However, film narratives in the 21st century are becoming increasingly complicated and offering greater challenges to writer-directors,[167] as well as a greater diversity of possibilities, especially with advances in multilinear forms of storytelling which throw many of the traditional approaches into disarray. With the advent of new technology and platforms, the unilinearity of the film form is becoming less and less essential.

By introducing interactivity, we very clearly hit the limit of Aristotelian thinking which may only illuminate minor aspects of multilinear drama and cannot be adapted wholesale to an interactive poetics.[168] Unilinearity, as I employ the term here, means that things start, progress, and close the same way every time a film is viewed; it seems to be what virtually all films have in common, whether they be Archplots, Miniplots, or Antiplots: the fixed beginning, middle, and end which tells of how one thing leads to another.[169] The final edit of *The Limits of Consent*, the major artistic output of this PhD, however, has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end, and an end. I write it out literally here not solely for amusement, but to demonstrate how far it is from conventional in this sense. It is also inaccurate to write it out this way, as it implies a sequence of endings which override one another until the last one in the list—actually, each of these endings exist adjacent to one another as possibilities on other narrative tracks which need not necessarily be explored.

What do I mean by multilinearity? In general, our experiences of beginnings and endings imply a unilinearity; expert on hypertext and hypermedia, George P. Landow, asks what happens to them in a form not governed by unilinearity where there are multiple beginnings and multiple endings.[170] This is not to be mistaken for films which play with the chronological sequence which are often also referred to as 'nonlinear'; for this PhD, I distinguish these films as *achronological* rather than nonlinear to avoid confusion. To illustrate, *Brief Encounter,* in which the film's narrative begins at the end of the series of events and circles back in time to tell the tale of how Laura Jesson reached this moment, is still unilinear in my sense—it is

[167] Paul Thompson, "Foreword," in Linda Aronson, *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010): xii.

[168] Jasmina Kallay, "Cyber-Aristotle: Towards a Poetics for Interactive Screenwriting," *Journal of Screenwriting* 1 no. 1 (2010): 110.

[169] Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 16.

[170] George P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 110.

still intended to be watched a certain way and the vast majority of the film's audience do so in that way. The first, second, and third scenes all the way to the end credits of the *Brief Encounter* are still in the same order, no matter when or where the film is screened making it achronological yet still unilinear. *Bandersnatch,*[171] by contrast, Netflix's interactive film where the audience decides which direction the plot takes, is *multilinear*. This is because the scenes and their order are changeable, as is the end of the various paths the film stakes out. (I return to *Bandersnatch* in greater detail in the next chapter). Multilinearity, to adapt ludology and electronic text expert Espen J. Aarseth's definition, is 'the ability to vary, to produce different courses.'[172]

Immediately, it is apparent that making any story multilinear has certain effects on how it might be taken. Landow has written a comprehensive text on hypertext fiction in which he discusses this notion at length and argues that the unilinearity of print media, in particular, created an illusory centre for the book and that the force of this centre is intensified by its selection.[173] Not everyone is a fan of the effect or even believes it to be so significant. Sceptics such as Nitzan S. Ben-Shaul are scathing about the topic, arguing that post-modern narrative strategies go against human nature,[174] that strategies such as 'de-centring' and 'non-closure' through non-cohering narrative threads simply distract the audience and do not deepen engagement, and advocates of such techniques wrongly presume that the audience is able to split their attention and still remain attentive.[175]

The argument goes on that popular narrative films are able to offer multi-threaded and yet coherent trajectories which arrive at a convergent closure; that simple or complex films play in a rewarding way with their audiences rather than frustrate them; they strive for coherence, goals, and finality from which the audience may construct a beginning, a middle, and an end.[176] The audience is engaged in rewarding trajectories in narrative cinema because of the anticipation sparked in them about the possibilities and favoured outcomes which are in danger of not materialising; this anticipation would not be possible without the ability to trace forward and backward along causal chains.[177] Without the assurance their consistency brings, the audience will become disengaged. Ben-Shaul's more cautious way of conceiving of stories assumes that the audience is not capable of handling total multilinearity and that any writer-director who is employing it is overestimating the audience.[178] A series of

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171 *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* directed by David Slade (Netflix, 2018).

172 Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 41-42. [Aarseth uses the term 'nonlinear', but I found the term multilinear more precise in its implication of multitudes].

173 Landow, *Hypertext*, 132.

174 Nitzan Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema: Problems and Solutions* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 27.

175 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 21.

176 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 17-18.

177 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 18.

178 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 10-11.

cohering strategies for the narrative and the audience's cognition are necessary, or the film will fail.[179]

This is an old idea. In the mid-1630s, for example, French intellectuals were in the midst of the 'Quarrel over *Le Cid'* culminating in the agreement that the 'unity of action' adapted from Aristotle was essential; this meaning that a play should be built from a single unbroken plot thread, without diverting attention to subplots, tangents, or inessential characters; within ten years, the French tragedians were applying the unity of action to their plays as the ideal.[180] However, in the last four hundred years things have changed somewhat. While I agree that coherence is necessary to some degree (that the audience can pick up a thread or elements in the film and make something of them in some fashion) I also consider this sort of thinking to be neglectful of how much more complex the average film audience member has become. I contend that what was *unthinkable* in film a hundred years ago is eminently *thinkable* now.

Bandersnatch, indeed, highlighted how an interactive film could become popularised and distributed with relative ease on modern streaming platforms. The interactive film (which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter) need not be relegated to awkward cinema screenings or clunky CD-ROMs any longer even if certain orthodoxies about film distribution (such as the need for cinema exhibition) no longer remain prevalent. Films which would have been highly problematic or even untenable much further back than the turn of the century are no longer so and challenges to traditional storytelling are no longer only the purview of the experimenter writer-director. Mainstream cinema is increasingly trusting its audience to hold multiple threads in their minds; the trend tends towards increasing complexity moving from the art house to the multiplex,[181] as the rise of the puzzle film demonstrates. As narrative complexity becomes normalised, what is cognitively manageable becomes something for writer-directors to *expand* rather than something to which they must adhere.

It is hopefully clear that in unilinear storytelling even the most complex and puzzling examples can no longer accurately describe what interactivity encompasses.[182] Only that *interactivity offers a different kind of complexity, one that is impossible to replicate within the confines of unilinearity. While the puzzle film offers an opportunity to meld drama and anti-drama, the interactive film offers an opportunity to allow both drama and anti-drama in the same film without one necessarily overriding the other.* In other words, there is a chance for the writer-director to be both an entertainer and an experimenter in the same film, and for both roles to remain mutually exclusive *or not* when making an interactive film.

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179 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 32.

180 Altman, *Theory of Narrative*, 3.

181 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 167.

182 Gwendolyn Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums: Conceptualizing Visual Models for Interactive Storytelling," *Journal of Screenwriting* 10 no. 1 (2019): 5.

In the next chapter, I define an interactive film by using examples from the already long and variegated history of the form. From historical to more contemporary examples, I build on existing typologies of interactive structures to illustrate the possibilities available to writer-directors. These structures, at different degrees of significance, move the writer-director away from the traditional dramatic structure I described in this chapter. I then detail the interactive structure I embraced in this PhD, the *tree structure,* which most clearly emulates the trajectories found in unilinear films, but with the crucial difference that such structures can be immeasurably more complex than their unilinear equivalents.

2. THE BETWEENITY OF THE INTERACTIVE FILM

We take our seat in the cinema with the giant screen before us. We make ourselves comfortable on our sofa with the remote in our hand. We lie in bed with a tablet resting on our raised thighs. *We are about to watch a film.* We might have to pause to make a cup of tea or take a phone call, but we are expectant of an uninterrupted immersive experience which will signal its close with a fade to black followed by a scroll of credits. We can, of course, talk over the film with our friends, play with our phones, kiss our lovers, fall asleep, or simply turn the film off. However, by and large, audiences understand that this is not how we are supposed to watch a film. We are supposed to sit and watch and think and feel. But this is not the case for the interactive film. Not entirely.

Netflix put interactive films back on the map in 2018 with *Bandersnatch.* The film focuses on a computer game programmer who slowly loses his mind while designing the titular game based on his favourite choose-your-own-adventure novel. The film invites the audience to make a choice in the narrative space and sends audience members down different paths; sometimes the audience member reaches dead-ends, and sometimes real ends. *Bandersnatch* is a maze, and every layer of the maze amplifies the stakes resting on each choice the audience member must make.[183] I distinctly remember the moment when I had to move my hand to select an option. I felt physically and emotionally how disruptive interactivity was for a film. I had watched thousands of films but had never been so directly prompted by a film to move my body in such a conscious way before. *Bandersnatch* upended what it meant to 'watch' a film at all, what it meant to follow a film's plot, and crucially what it meant to reach a film's definite ending.

Interactivity offers something different to the world of film—it gives the audience a certain amount of power which changes the relationship between the creative force behind the narrative, the narrative itself, and the audience, by going beyond interpretive responses.[184] Interactivity is arguably different compared to technological improvements or developments which change the existing media ecology. When considering new media, Marie-Laure Ryan observes that interactivity is a factor which most often sets it apart from old media: films to console games, drama to internet chats, and paperback novels to hypertext fiction.[185] However, the interactive

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[183] Donovan Conley and Benjamin Burroughs, "Bandersnatched: Infrastructure and Acquiescence in *Black Mirror*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 37 no. 2 (2020): 120.

[184] Hartmut Koenitz, et al., "Introduction: Perspectives on Interactive Digital Narrative," in *Interactive Digital Narrative*, ed. Hartmut Koenitz, et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 1-2.

[185] Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Interactive Onion," in *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, eds. Ruth Page and Thomas Bronwen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 35.

film is different because it maintains old media (the film) and grafts something new upon it (interactivity) in a less-than-organic way. It would seem to be less about media evolution and more about deliberate cross-fertilisation.

In this chapter, I first attempt to define interactivity in relation to the kinds of media which employ it by examining and comparing the various definitions that have been already proposed. Then, I more specifically consider the history of the interactive film as a vanishingly rare form and try to determine what exactly is an interactive film. This leads to a run-through of the different interactive structures based on existing taxonomies and an elaboration on the structure I arrived at for the creative output of this PhD, which Marie-Laure Ryan described as the *tree structure*.[186] I then analyse why the *tree structure* is arguably a more natural extension of existing unilinear films, especially ones with branching narratives. Finally, I circle back to the question which runs through this chapter: what is the interactive film? The interactive film demands we attend to it a little bit more than a unilinear film and this is peculiar because, as I argue in this chapter, *it is a film first and foremost*.

A TROUBLESOME TERM

Interactivity has the potential to change old media in radical ways; however, it is also a troublesome factor to define.[187] The term has been used so frequently and in such a variegated fashion that it has little in the way of precise meaning anymore.[188] Some have argued that at the core, all works of fiction are interactive because they are designed for consumers to believe something which is invented which is itself a form of interaction.[189] Espen J. Aarseth proposed 'ergodic' as a more precise alternative but also conceded that the term 'interactive', while effectively meaningless in his view, would not go away for a while because of its popularity.[190] A quarter of a century later, he is still being proved correct.

If we keep the term 'interactive,' we must understand it differently to the kind of everyday interactions users undertake with unilinear media. Dominic Lopes, when discussing computer art, defines interactive works as ones where the structural properties are, in part, determined by the user's actions,[191] and that the user's actions also assist in generating their displays.[192] This seems to narrow interactivity in a way which helps distinguish it from unilinear media. However, the kind of interactivity

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[186] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 248.

[187] Ryan, "The Interactive Onion," 35.

[188] Landow, *Hypertext*, 41.

[189] Jon Robson and Aaron Meskin, "Video Games as Self-Involving Interactive Fictions," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74 no. 2 (Spring 2016): 167; Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 50.

[190] Aarseth, *Cybertext*, 51.

[191] Dominic Lopes, "The Ontology of Interactive Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35 (2001): 68.

[192] Dominic Lopes, *Philosophy of Computer Art,* (London: Routledge, 2010), 36.

which is typical for video games, for example, is also different to the kind of interactivity I employed for this PhD.

It is necessary to understand what an *interactive film* can be and what it is capable of in comparison to other media. Before discussing interactive films, however, I wish to outline my reasons for the general exclusion of the types of interactivity found within ludology which are most often not applicable to this research. The burgeoning theoretical field of ludology is of huge significance to ongoing debates and theorising of new media in the early 21st century. Its importance cannot be understated, particularly as computer games continue to spread across different platforms, gain complexity in both architecture and meaning, and become ever more dominant forms within our cultural lives, even influencing the structures of certain films, like *Edge of Tomorrow*,[193] which kills the protagonist and resurrects him again and again.[194] Video games and films share many common features: they are both screen-based, time-based, and primarily audiovisual media.[195] However, I see two reasons why interactivity within ludology is not wholly applicable here.

First, video games are a form where interactivity is, more often than not, wholly integrated, meaning that the interactivity in computer games most often requires the near-total active attendance of the player to function. Jon Robson and Aaron Meskin write that video games predominantly employ 'self-involving interactivity' where the player most often identifies with the character or actions taken within the game and that this is distinct compared to examples of interactivity often found in interactive films.[196] In a video game, the player will say things such as 'I won the race' or 'I found the map' when onscreen it is the game's characters who did both things.[197] For an interactive film, this is not the case; identification with the protagonist or other characters in an interactive film is limited to the kind of empathic mechanisms found in traditional film viewing. The interactive film certainly does not encourage the audience to believe that they have taken actions as the onscreen character to the same extent, or indeed at all. If anything, the interactivity could be seen as nudging a character or the story in a particular direction or *making a decision on the protagonist's behalf* but not *as* the protagonist. For an audience member to feel that they are acting as the protagonist, the interactivity has to be nearly continuously utilised. In an interactive film, attendance to the interactivity waxes and wanes, and the audience member is expected to be inactive, in a bodily sense, for stretches of the narrative before briefly attending to moments of interactivity.

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193 *Edge of Tomorrow* directed by Doug Liman (Warner Brothers Pictures, 2014).

194 Tanine Allison, "Losing Control: *Until Dawn* as Interactive Movie," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 18 no. 3 (2020): 275.

195 Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell, "Film and the Development of Interactive Narrative," *International Conference on Virtual Storytelling,* eds. Oliver Balet, Gérard Subsol, and Patrice Torguets (Berlin: Springer, 2001), 81.

196 Robson and Meskin, "Self-Involving Interactive Fictions," 167.

197 Robson and Meskin, "Self-Involving Interactive Fictions," 169.

Second, while the narratives and the artistry of games have become increasingly complex, as have their meaning and social significance, and while they are predominantly a visual medium, the verb we use for a game is necessarily still 'to play', and it is so for a good reason. The object of most games' interactivity is improving skills and game survival through *play*.[198] Meanwhile, the verb for films is 'to watch'; the focus is on the eyes and ears, and consumption rather than interaction. We are not passive during the viewing of films. We are actively predicting and forming hypotheses about what will occur next, for instance,[199] and this activity is part of the pleasure we take from screen stories.[200] However, interactivity on a very simple level courts a cognitive *and* bodily reaction to its stimuli: the audience has to move and/or touch in some way.

This brings me to another difficulty when describing the interactive film: which verb do we use? 'To play' is not accurate in the case of *The Limits of Consent* (the interactive film I wrote and directed for this PhD is not a game), and yet 'to watch' does not quite cover it either. Others have argued that if the interactivity is meaningful then the audience member must be transformed into a user;[201] however, 'user' also seems open to manifest interpretations and from the verb 'to use' which is definitionally broad and thus holds less specificity than 'to watch'. Perhaps 'to watch' is the best verb for interactive films as it is still the dominant mode of their consumption and other interactive parts which engender different verbs are to be taken implicitly. Indeed, if I want to know if someone has yet encountered my film I ask them, 'Have you *watched* it yet?' that is because I see it, predominantly, as a film.

For my purposes, 'interactivity' and 'interactive' are not 'self-involving' nor aiming to collapse the distance between the audience and the onscreen character. 'Interactivity' here can be used to indicate any action undertaken by the user within the story.[202] Alina Striner, Sasha Azad, and Chris Martens referred to this as 'influencing performers' and placed it directly in the middle of their spectrum of interactivity from entertainment domains.[203] To be precise, it is listed as number 4 on the spectrum which ranges from 1-8. 'Observe Passively' is at number 1 and 'Take over Performance' at number 8.[204] I am thereby not studying the sort of rich

198 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema,* 50.

199 Todd Berliner, "Expect the Expected: Aesthetics of Planting and Payoff," *Narrative* 28 no. 2 (2020): 177.

200 Berliner, "Expect the Expected," 182.

201 Ruth Aylett and Sandy Louchart "Towards a Narrative Theory of Virtual Reality," *Virtual Reality* 7 no. 1 (2003): 8.

202 Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 6.

203 Alina Striner, Sasha Azad, and Chris Martens, "A Spectrum of Audience Interactivity for Entertainment Domains," in *Interactive Storytelling: 12th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling ICIDS 2019 Little Cottonwood Canyon, UT, USA, November 19–22, 2019 Proceedings*, eds. Rogelio E. Cardona-Rivera, Anne Sullivan, and R. Michael Young (Springer 2019): 223

204 Striner, et al., "A Spectrum of Audience Interactivity," 221

interactions or participations which allow the user to leave their mark on the text or freely explore the story space which would be possible with virtual reality, for instance.[205] Nor am I exploring the relative merits of unconsciously interactive films such as *Many Worlds*,[206] where decisions are made on behalf of the audience using their bio-signals such as heart rate and galvanic skin response to determine which of the film's four endings are reached.[207] I am exploring something in between.

'Interactivity' in this PhD means any *conscious* action taken either collectively by an audience or individually by a single audience member which causes the film to be, in some way, multilinear. In other words, different audience members may select which scene or sequence of the film comes next. Different audience members, therefore, potentially see different sections of the film in different orders depending on the choices they make. On the experiential level, it does not necessitate an embodied experience beyond clicking on a particular option,[208] conferring with a viewing partner regarding a choice, or raising an arm to vote for which direction the story will take. The sort of creative energy this might release in the audience is less about the physicality of the experience and more about the sort of operations the audience member's mind must enact to make sense of the experience:[209] be that, for example, construing or imagining afterwards what might have been disnarrated in the omitted section ('disnarration' being that which explicitly points to what did not take place but might have).[210] In the broadest sense, what it means is that the film I watch is not necessarily the same film you watch and it is so because we made different conscious choices at key intervals.

An interaction may be used to reveal portions of the story and at these moments the interactor takes and then loses control.[211] Ryan describes the effect of the audience's actions on the film's story as an 'element of randomness' which is potentially a threat to the artistic value of the film as a whole.[212] Indeed, one criticism levelled at *The Limits of Consent* by screenwriter Dan Weldon is that the interactivity is equivalent to spinning a roulette wheel and seeing what comes up.[213] The audience is only influencing the story events insomuch as they are interacting with highly designed and relatively pre-determined pathways, the content of which is both difficult to

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[205] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Interactive Drama: Narrativity in a Highly Interactive Environment," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43 no. 3 Technocriticism and Hypernarrative Special Issue (Autumn 1997): 677.

[206] *Many Worlds* directed by Alexis Kirke (2013).

[207] Alexis Kirke, et al., "Unconsciously Interactive Film in a Cinema Environment—A Demonstrative Case Study," *Digital Creativity* 29 nos. 2-3 (2018): 167.

[208] Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 677.

[209] Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 703.

[210] Gerald Prince, "Disnarrated, the" in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory,* ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 118.

[211] Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 6.

[212] Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 683.

[213] *International Network of Experimental Filmmaking Festival* screening 12 July, 2023: Salford University, United Kingdom.

predict and beyond the audience's control after the initial selection. However, their ability to select a particular pathway over another, even with such limitations, connotes the sort of randomness Ryan describes. As a writer-director, I offer my audience various paths and while I have designed them very carefully, I cannot control which path the audience selects.

The concept of an interactive film seems oxymoronic given what we generally know about films.[214] It is neither one thing nor the other in a world where we still consider strict definitional limits and draw new ones continually. But from where did the interactive film emerge and what possibilities are still before it?

THE ORIGINS OF THE INTERACTIVE FILM

Interactivity in film is so seldom used that each time it is experimented with it can appear slightly differently as you will see from my examples. However, broadly, there are arguably two types of media which label themselves interactive films: *games with filmic elements* and *films with interactive elements*. I am interested here in the latter, but the former is much more commonplace and therefore must be discussed as well. In the gaming industry, a game with filmic elements was also often referred to as an interactive film, especially in the 1990s. Games with filmic elements are quite common and have been with us for some time; there are examples from as far back as the early 1980s where the player was given control over the filmic elements. *Dragons' Lair* is a seminal example of this;[215] yet this is still a game and not a film in the sense that I mean it.

When I refer to an interactive film, I mean a film with interactive elements. A somewhat faulty test of whether a title is an interactive film (in my meaning) or an interactive film (in the gaming industry's meaning), is to ask where it is consumed: a computer, cinema hall, television, phone, etc. One does not play games in a cinema and one does not watch films on a Nintendo. However, *where* we consume different media is no longer a monolithic geography either (perhaps it never was); it is constantly shifting with the advent of new technologies. Indeed, there is no reason why you cannot play a video game in the cinema, and over a hundred years ago, 'cinematic shooting galleries' emerged in Europe and North America and were briefly popular in the United Kingdom, where clients could pretend to shoot, with live ammunition, safari animals projected onto a cinema screen.[216] Meanwhile, watching a film on a PlayStation or any modern game console has been possible for decades.

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[214] Bernard Perron, "From Gamers to Players to Gameplayers: The Example of Interactive Movies," in *The Video Game Theory Reader,* eds. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (London: Routledge, 2003), 239.

[215] *Dragons' Lair* directed by Don Bluth (Cinematronics, 1983).

[216] Michael Cowan, "Interactive Media and Imperial Subjects: Excavating the Cinematic Shooting Gallery," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 7 (2018): 18. 17–44.

Historian of interactive cinema, Chris Hales, sets a definitional limit for an interactive film as 'a representation of primarily prerecorded moving-image sequences, the display of which can be affected by the audience or a performer.'[217] He goes on to state that interactive films need moving image content in the form of prerecorded scenes or sequences rather than real-time manipulation of video content.[218] Grzegorz Maziarczyk similarly writes that on a technical level, the difference between an interactive film and a video game is in the use of pre-recorded video rather than real-time computer graphics.[219] These definitions of interactive films have the strength of clearly demarcating it from video games but do not preclude the inclusion of *games with filmic elements,* which were often marketed as interactive movies in the 1990s. A certain aspect which might be included to improve these definitions is about the intent of the film's authors, specifically regarding where a film *is* screened and where it would *ideally* be screened. Personally, as a writer-director, the answer to the second question is the cinema.

So, this test can be formulated thusly for the interactive film: can a crowd in a cinema interact with it as a group? Can it be turned into a collective experience, for example, where the crowd contribute together to determine what happens next? We can certainly sit in a cinema and watch the live stream of someone playing a computer game, but we would not be in control of what this player does and the moves they make would be too quick and continuous to influence them beyond shouting instructions en masse. This is a broadly accurate test; however, what I describe in this PhD are interactive films not specifically interactive cinema (the latter of which would imply a definite first exhibition site). Additionally, is it fair to say that all practitioners wish their films to be screened in the cinema hall as an ideal, or is this just my ideal? The modern reality of where and how we watch films has changed greatly; the collapse of the gap between release dates for big-budget feature films in the cinema and on streaming platforms (particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic) makes this argument less tenable.

Possibilia,[220] an interactive short film, problematises this notion because its interactivity allows the audience to switch between parallel realities rather than changing the direction of the narrative. *Possibilia* is a rather awkward example for this discussion because it outright contradicts my collective experience qualification. The film does not pause at any point for the audience to decide when to make the switch between these realities—there is no opportunity to vote, and the experience of viewing the film is more continuous. Also, it does not quite fit my working meaning of interactivity within a film, to indicate any action undertaken by the audience within the story. For *Possibilia,* we are not undertaking an action within the

[217] Chris Hales, "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," in *Interactive Digital Narrative*, ed. Hartmut Koenitz, et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 37.

[218] Hales "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 37.

[219] Grzegorz Maziarczyk, "'The Road Not Taken': An Interactive Film Between Narrative and Database," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 29 no.1 (2023): 57.

[220] *Possibilia* directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (Prettybird, 2014).

story; we are blindly acting as the film's editor and choosing when to make the cut. And yet, *Possibilia* is undeniably an interactive short film, and it would be churlish to describe it as anything other than that. In which case, we need another way to describe this form.

Interactive films can feel like a throwback to a previous evolutionary era.[221] Interactivity has been a reoccurring experiment in cinema for decades; first attempted by Czech screenwriter and director Radúz Činčera, who in 1967 conceived of and created the world's first interactive film, *Kinoautomat: One Man and His House*,[222] a satire on democracy,[223] bringing the democratic experience into cinema for the first time.[224] In the pre-digital age, the interactive film began as a way to make the cinema experience novel again.[225] The story of *Kinoautomat* ends the same way no matter which option the audience votes for—the destruction of the protagonist's house. When screened in a cinema, the film would pause at key intervals; the audience had buttons to push on their armrests and a facilitator would tell them when to press,[226] guiding them through what appeared to be a branching narrative. However, what was really happening was rather different; the film was employing a *directed network or flow chart* structure (which I will elaborate on later in this chapter) where the two plot lines of the film were actually alternating. At each opportunity to vote, the two possibilities recombined and formed the exact same situation; from this, an additional two options were presented to the audience.[227] This process would reoccur five times during the film and finally only twelve segments needed to be written and filmed to complete the story.[228] It was a clever way to offer the illusion of a continuously bifurcating narrative which would save costs and logistics but still provide the same impression to a cinema audience who could only watch the film once—to watch it twice would be to immediately render the trick transparent.

Kinoautomat can easily be categorised as a more modern equivalent of *cinema of attraction* (named as such because of its resemblance to cabinets of curiosity or

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221 Tyson Kubota, "Choose Wisely: Interactive Narrative Films Express the Possibilities and Limitations of Cinema Itself" *Film Comment* 52 no. 6 (November-December 2016): 21.

222 *Kinoautomat: One Man and His House* directed by Radúz Cincera, Ján Roháč, and Vladimír Svitácek. (*Bozar Cinema,* 1967). *1 hr., 3 min. Clovek a jeho dum*

223 Chris Hales, "Cinematic interaction: From *Kinoautomat* to *Cause and Effect*," *Digital Creativity* 16 no. 1 (2005): 56.

224 Chris Hales, "Spatial and Narrative Constructions for Interactive Cinema, with Particular Reference to the Work of Raduz Cincera," in *Expanding Practices in Audiovisual Narrative*, eds. Chris Hales and Raivo Kelomees. (Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2014), 143.

225 Hales "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 37.

226 Hales "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 38.

227 Hales "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 38.

228 Hales, "Cinematic interaction," 57.

fairground attractions in the early years of film before cinema was industrialised).[229] Rebecca Rouse more recently elaborated the concept of *media of attraction*: an experiment with media featuring four common threads: *unassimilated*, *interdisciplinary*, *seamed*, and *participatory*.[230] *Unassimilated* means that media of attraction are not yet part of the everyday media consumption, have not been codified for training purposes, and are not the exclusive focus of any critics.[231] *Interdisciplinary* means that other skilled professionals are needed to bring them to life,[232] so in the case of *Kinoautomat* there was a live theatre dimension with actors and audience interacting. *Seamed* means that the edges between a media of attraction experience are visible to the audience;[233] for example, it is hard not to notice when an interactive film asks you to interact (be that voting in a cinema hall, picking up a remote control, or pressing a button on your hand rest) because the media is unassimilated and therefore the seams are transparent in the moment of transition. Finally, *participatory* remains synonymously adjacent to interactivity. Its relevance here is obvious: all media of attraction offer the viewer an invitation to engage with the content in some way.[234]

Interactive films in the *Kinoautomat* vein (of which I also count *The Limits of Consent*) are media of attraction precisely because they are rare and therefore unassimilated. Because they are unassimilated and therefore not yet codified, they are experienced as interdisciplinary and seamed (something which can only be so until they have become sedimented enough in the media sphere to be considered a discipline or that the seams become less visible through familiarity). Such films remain rare. An interactive film like *Kinoautomat*, where the film was conceived with interactive elements would not appear again for decades. What happened next was the introduction of filmic elements to games which began in the early 80s with the advent of laserdisc technology. This change allowed for video segments to be played between sections of the game. The line between arcade game and film began to blur with the introduction of *Dragons' Lair*, which thanks to the Disney animators who worked on the game, looked like the sort of animated films which were being released in cinemas at the time. The game was built around laserdisc technology but required the player to move the protagonist through the game space. The connection between the actions of the player and the avatar was less continuous than in previous arcade games, but the notion was still to create the illusion of total control of a much

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229 Rebecca Rouse, "Media of Attraction: A Media Archeology Approach to Panoramas, Kinematography, Mixed Reality and Beyond," in *Interactive Storytelling: 9th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*, *ICIDS 2016 Los Angeles, CA, USA*, eds. Frank Nack and Andrew S. Gordon (Springer: November 2016): 99.

230 Rouse, "Media of Attraction," 101.

231 Rouse, "Media of Attraction," 101.

232 Rouse, "Media of Attraction," 102.

233 Rouse, "Media of Attraction," 102.

234 Rouse, "Media of Attraction," 103.

more detailed and beautifully drawn avatar.[235] *Dragons' Lair* also used the sort of self-involving interactivity for which video games are better known. The real-time gameplay for such avatars would improve with the technology, moving what began with *Dragons' Lair* closer to games and further from film.

GAMES WITH FILMIC ELEMENTS

In the 1990s, with the proliferation of VHS and the introduction of CD-ROM, and later DVD technologies, a slew of games with live-action video called Full Motion Video-based computer games (FMV games) became so popular that they started to feature professional actors and were directed by well-known Hollywood filmmakers.[236] When they entered the market (often as tie-ins to existing films and television shows of the time) they were sold alongside video games and also consumed as games. None of them followed the template of the interactive film screened in a cinema the way *Kinoautomat* had. FMV games interspersed gameplay with passive live-action prerecorded sequences and were also described as interactive films.[237] They had been intended for play, but they were also not quite games either. The limits on interactivity, real-time actions, and quick decisions for the player diminished their replayability. In a game, if we are given quasi-choices then it becomes a quasi-game;[238] thus one can see how ludologists might argue that they are closer to interactive films.

An exception to the trend towards games with filmic elements is *I'm Your Man,*[239] which is an interactive film in the same vein as *Kinoautomat.* It was devised and filmed with the intention of being screened in a special cinema with controllers for the audience to vote so the experience would be as seamless as possible.[240] The plot of *I'm Your Man* branches off into different directions; however, no matter which decision the audience has made earlier in the story, the same range of options is available at the next decision point.[241] The film was critically lambasted, and audiences did not take to it either; the special theatre where it was screened was

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[235] Sean O'Neal, "Come on, *Stranger Things*, No One Ever Got that Far in *Dragons' Lair*," *AV Club,* October 30, 2017.
https://www.avclub.com/come-on-stranger-things-no-one-ever-got-that-far-in-d-1819983547

[236] Timothy Garrand, "Narrative for Interactive Multimedia," *Journal of Film and Video* 49 nos. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1997): 66.

[237] Hales "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 43.

[238] Allison, "Losing Control," 278.

[239] *I'm Your Man* directed by Bob Bejan (ChoicePoint Films, 1992).

[240] William Grimes, "When the Film Audience Controls the Plot," *The New York Times,* January 13, 1993.
https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/13/movies/when-the-film-audience-controls-the-plot.html

[241] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 277.

dismantled and future proposed interactive film projects were abandoned.[242] The cost of retrofitting cinemas was too great and the interactivity was dismissed as a gimmicky marketing device.

FMV titles meanwhile became increasingly sophisticated. *Tender Loving Care,*[243] released in the late 90s, further broke down the boundaries between video games and films and is a good example of a hybrid. This interactive film/game featured high-calibre actors such as John Hurt and a plot concerned with the theme of psychological disorder, not a typical subject matter for games at that time; it also contained mature elements such as nudity. It could be watched as a unilinear film if the player preferred to be an audience member;[244] in this sense, the game/film is an example of one of the more ambivalent entries at the time. However, the gamified elements in *Tender Loving Care* would not work as a collective cinema experience; they include taking a personality test to determine parts of the plot and moving through a 3D rendition of the main location as if part of a first-person shooter game. The audience member/player switches between roles for different parts of the film/game.

Later, computer game developers generally stopped using live-action film for these sorts of games and moved more towards computer-generated imagery to allow greater freedom, reduce costs, and increase interactivity. Film and media researcher Tanine Allison examines what is nominally a video game called *Until Dawn,*[245] available for PlayStation 4, which she convincingly argues is another hybrid which blurs the lines between game and film. In *Until Dawn,* mistakes do not require you to replay (they simply alter the plot), and the game includes chance decisions which do not give agency to the player in reality. Finally, she concludes that the game challenges the sort of rigid definitional limits held by critics because it is a game that invites the audience member to reflect and interpret without necessarily directly altering the story.[246]

Rigid definitional limits are unhelpful when we are dealing with hybrid media. However, in *Until Dawn*, the player is often in continuous control of the POV character, moving through different spaces, grabbing tools, and using them correctly to survive or move to the next interactive element, etc. The interactivity is always of the conscious variety but moves from self-involving to the sort of occasional attendance to specific narrative choices found in *Kinoautomat* or *I'm Your Man*. In short, *Until Dawn* is still too interactive to be an interactive film and is, I argue, a narrative-heavy game. Such games are moving the dial on what a game is in the

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242 Lisa Napoli, "Interactive Writer-directors Hope to Make a Comeback," *The New York Times*, August 17, 1998.
https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/tech/98/08/cyber/articles/17dvd.html

243 *Tender Loving Care* directed by David Wheeler (Trilobyte, 1996).

244 Bret Atwood "*Aftermath*, Brilliant Digital debut DVD interactive videos," *Billboard,* August 30, 1997.

245 *Until Dawn* directed by Will Byles. (Sony Computer Entertainment America, 2015).

246 Allison, "Losing control," 294-5.

same way as films like *Kinoautomat* are moving the dial on what a film is. However, it is clear that *the dial is being moved from different sides*.

BANDERSNATCH

Streaming service Netflix put interactive films of the *Kinoautomat* or *I'm Your Man* variety back in the spotlight by releasing a number of interactive titles in the late 2010s and early 2020s; the most notable of which was *Bandersnatch,* an interactive film where the audience effects the outcome of the story by making decisions on the protagonist's behalf but finding that these decisions are not really decisions at all as screenwriter Charlie Brooker redirects the audience to take another path if they make the wrong decision.[247]

This interactive film is actually a feature-length episode of the *Black Mirror* anthology series which examines the force of technology on our lives. *Bandersnatch*, tacitly, presented itself as a one-off, as it is the only interactive episode of the series; the story follows a game designer as he grows increasingly paranoid, making a computer game based on the choose-your-own-adventure novel of the same name. This context foregrounds interactivity as a theme, thus the interactive factor does not appear randomly but emerges from and is justified by the story. The labyrinth narrative offers many pathways for the audience to pursue, sometimes revealing 'dead ends' which force a rewind so the audience can make another decision. This pre-determined structure highlights for the audience that the illusion of perpetual choice is actually filled with false promises, repetitions, and blocked paths.[248] It is never a game, but it highlights gaming in its structures, and breaks down the walls between the story world and our world as the protagonist becomes increasingly aware that there is another agency dictating his actions. With this move, the filmmakers highlight the illusion of choice for the audience and the system which contains them;[249] by doing this the film effectively seeks a meta-level awareness in the audience that they are part of a pre-determined system and have no real agency.[250]

Bandersnatch is a good example of why FMV games and games like *Until Dawn* are not films first and foremost. The fact that the writers of *Bandersnatch* felt the need to tie its interactivity to the theme of the film, demonstrates its novelty. It is not merely a film with choices; it is a film about the illusion of choice, and that illusion is highlighted by the interactivity. A video game meanwhile has no such insecurity. Interactivity is expected in a computer game as much as story is expected in a film, there is no need to justify, narratively, the inclusion of interactivity in a game, in the same way there is no need to justify, narratively, storytelling in a film.

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247 Conley and Burroughs, "Bandersnatched," 122.
248 Conley and Burroughs, "Bandersnatched," 128.
249 Conley and Burroughs, "Bandersnatched," 129.
250 Maziarczyk, "'The Road Not Taken'," 62.

The Limits of Consent also has the same insecurity though it manifested in an entirely unconscious way. I embarked on the writing process determined not to take this insecurity into my film as a thematic limit, but that is precisely what happened, just in a less foregrounded way. Manipulation, human puppets, and control; themes and images from the film emerged during the writing process and only later once the film was in the editing stage would I recognise that they were signposting for the audience a thematic justification for the ensuing interactivity. The protagonist is controlling her client and trying to control the situation and then at some definite moment the audience is offered a chance to control her. This insecurity, whether it manifests consciously or unconsciously is understandable. *Bandersnatch* was by no means the first of its kind, but it was the first high-profile interactive film for decades. This tying of the interactivity to the themes of the film, along with the post-modern self-awareness of the protagonist, and the use of 'practice choices' at the start of the film serve to demonstrate what the writers knew: this would be the first time for the vast majority of audiences that they would *watch and interact with a film*.

Bandersnatch also was not made to be screened in the cinema and premiered on Netflix directly. It is technically, an episode of television rather than a film, but this is splitting hairs as the experience of watching *Bandersnatch* is, broadly, no different to watching *Kinoautomat*, *I'm Your Man*, or *The Limits of Consent* on a streaming platform. However, it is clear that *Bandersnatch* was never intended to be screened as a collective cinema experience; the modern smart television set was its intended destination with the incumbent limits on individual audience sizes which accompany that intention. Indeed, I must also confess that when quizzed about my ideal viewing experience for *The Limits of Consent* while the film was being made, I also offered that it should be viewed on a high-quality smart TV by an individual or small group.

The proposed addition to Hale and Maziarczyk's definitions of interactive film that the film needs to be transferable to a cinema hall is deficient. However, Hale and Maziarczyk's definitions lack a concrete way to distinguish films with interactive elements from games with filmic elements, so there is a need for another modification of their definitions. To parse this out, I now examine a variety of interactive structures available and use further examples of interactive films (films with interactive elements) which illustrate them and consider what they have in common despite their structural differences.

INTERACTIVE STRUCTURES

One useful concept when considering the majority of interactive films is what Marsha Kinder described as the *database narrative* which takes the basic process of selection and combination at the heart of all storytelling and thematises and illustrates that process.[251] Arguably, all interactive films are also database narratives

[251] Marsha Kinder, "Hot spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever: Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative," *Film Quarterly* 55 no. 4 (Spring 2002): 6.

with their pre-set number of segments which can be accessed at intervals (*Possibilia* is only different in that the audience can choose when to select a segment and for how long they will remain with it). The database narrative is not attempting to replace causation with the logic of a database but instead aims to make the relationship between the database and the narrative accessible and exploitable by giving partial control of the arrangement of segments to the audience.[252] The database for *The Limits of Consent,* finally, has 18 segments to select from and, if a different number of endings are selected, in all different possible orders, there are 986,409 possible permutations of the film. This is a lot. However, what is important here is that the system within which these possible permutations are presented as options for the audience to select from *generates the interactive structure of the film*.

Christopher Bode and Rainer Dietrich created a related definition for what they termed *future narratives*, as being based on the capacity of the narrative to produce at least one nodal situation (nodes), as in moments of decision which change the direction of the story depending on their selection.[253] This node must offer at least two possible continuations of the narrative; in other words, bifurcation is the minimal requirement.[254] It is not necessary for there to be a database for such a system to work (improvised narratives in a theatre production may never create the other narrative trajectory, for instance); however, usually for a database to operate it must have a node. For Bode and Dietrich, *future narratives 'preserve and contain* what can be regarded as defining features of future time, namely that it is yet undecided, open, and multiple … [preserving] the future *as future*.'[255] The critical difference for Bode and Dietrich's definition of a *future narrative*, when compared with an interactive film, is that choice remains an inessential factor.[256] This means that a unilinear film such as *Blind Chance*,[257] offering of three trajectories for its protagonist, is a *future narrative* despite the viewer never having a choice in the order of these trajectories. Arguably, all interactive narratives employing different interactive structures fall into the category of future narrative, but not all future narratives are interactive.

Marie-Laure Ryan, in her important text on the future of storytelling, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, classified the different interactive narrative structures which are possible, ranging from a fully networked story to a braided one, and described their various qualities and utilities as well as their advantages and disadvantages with an eye on story coherence. Ryan was writing primarily with literature in mind, but I adapt her language to film as in most cases it makes little difference as to how the narrative structures are conceived and described. More recently, Gwendolyn Ogle created a related taxonomy of interactive narrative structures more specifically for film (also, updated for the latest virtual reality technology, artificial intelligence,

252 Maziarczyk, "'The Road Not Taken'," 59.
253 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 1-2.
254 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 48.
255 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 1.
256 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 30.
257 *Blind Chance* directed by Krzysztof Kieslowski (Zespol Filmowy "Tor", 1989).

and participatory storytelling, all of which I exclude for reasons of space and relevance and focus solely on the more specifically consciously interactive structures applicable to narrative films).

These taxonomies are potentially useful for screenwriters and writer-directors of interactive films because they crystallise a certain set the possibilities for such films through diagrammatical explanation, and readily offer an escape from the sort of unilinear trajectories into which a traditional film is locked. Admittedly, I did not consult these taxonomies until after the plot of *The Limits of Consent* had already taken shape; if I had consulted them first, the film's structure might have been conceived very differently. I now briefly draw on both taxonomies to illustrate different potential structures before elaborating on the one I unconsciously selected for *The Limits of Consent.*

Before each of these structures are presented as discreet entities, it is worth noting that they could very easily be combined to create hybrids. *Bandersnatch*, for instance, combines elements from at least three of these structures. Additionally, the fact that Ogle is able to offer some substantial variations on Ryan's initial taxonomy sixteen years later demonstrates why examination of such taxonomies should be the part of the process of structuring an interactive narrative rather than the end of the process—there may yet be unnoticed potential interactive structures, and to take these taxonomies as exhaustive might be to foreclose narrative possibilities.

The first structure is what Ryan described as *the complete graph;* in this structure, every decision point is connected to every other node. The audience here has complete freedom of navigation between the different segments.[258] Ryan described this structure as very rare and one where being able to generate a coherent story would be a truly impressive feat of mathematics.[259] Next, Ryan described *the network*, which is closest to a classical hypertext, in that there are multiple connections between lexia (or for a film, a scene or a sequence) and the audience can move in multiple directions at the end of each scene or sequence. This ability also makes creating a coherent narrative more difficult and generally sacrifices this coherence for a wider range of possible decisions.[260] But coherence here is not as difficult as in *the complete graph,* as the connections between the nodes are more limited.[261] This structure is closely related to Ogle's *single-story or multi-story* interactive film models where from a single introductory scene the audience can then leap to a myriad of different potential interconnected plot lines; the audience determines when they wish to leave the story and end the experience.[262]

Ryan's *the vector with side branches* involves a story which is pre-determined and in chronological order but offers links so that the audience can take short side trips

[258] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 246.
[259] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 246.
[260] Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 687.
[261] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 247.
[262] Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 17.

to other points of interest before returning to the main narrative line; this is most commonly found in children's books where the reader moves through the book in an ordinary fashion but can stop and, for example, pull up paper lids to find surprises beneath them.[263] This structure is analogous to what Ogle named the *intersections model,* where there is a main storyline with possibilities to depart (or not) from the story, explore a subplot and then return to the mainline.[264] The difference between the two seems to be an emphasis on different storylines in the case of Ogle's classification and background information or added details in the case of Ryan's. Both structures offer only one ending.

The *maze structure,* from Ryan's taxonomy, offers the audience multiple paths through the story but often one (or potentially more than one) correct ending; this structure offers dead ends which usually contain a way for the audience to backtrack and select the correct path instead of their original choice;[265] the objective then is to find a path from the starting point to an end point.[266] This structure is the one *Bandersnatch* most clearly resembles, although that film merges elements from this and other structures and offers more than one viable end point.

The short film, *Chatterbox: Escape the Asylum*,[267] more precisely belongs to the category of *maze*. The outcomes of the film are rather changeable, but it is the difference between whether a patient in an asylum escapes or not. The audience must make a choice straight away and make different choices at different nodes which either help or hinder his escape. If the escape becomes impossible, the film loops back to the first decision and the audience has another chance to take a different path. The titular goal in the film is simple and only one outcome is the true correct one; all others force the audience back to earlier in the story (like a gaming avatar that has died but has another life). These loops potentially become frustrating because it is necessary to rewatch a great deal of material to choose a different path for the mentally ill protagonist. *Chatterbox* is an example of how a writer-director might fall into the trap of mapping out its story as if it were a game and not a film. This *maze* structure of interactivity has a drawback in that it forces the interactor to find a single solution to the narrative problem, thus limiting our options and potentially providing a breeding ground for impatience,[268] particularly because the interactivity in an interactive film is neither self-involving nor continuous.

Ryan's *directed network, or flow chart* allows for a dramatic narrative and a certain amount of interactivity and is almost identical to what Ogle describes as a *limited*

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263 Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 249.
264 Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 16.
265 Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 251.
266 Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 688.
267 *Chatterbox: Escape the Asylum* directed by Mercedes Bryce Morgan (Adaptive Studios, 2017).
268 Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 132.

branching model.[269] This is perhaps the most commonly found interactive structure in existing interactive films; the audience chooses the next scenes but the chosen and discarded paths recombine at the next node; this prevents diversity of outcomes and renders the nodes trivial as they do not affect the eventual outcome of the story. The interactive films which employ this structure tend to daisy-chain nodes together rather than infinitely diverge.[270] The user can go from point A to point B through a variety of paths and then move on to point C through another variety of paths.[271] Finally, this is interactivity with an impact on the path but without any impact on the narrative's result as points A, B, and C must be passed one way or another. This means that it is certainly less effective as a structure if the audience chooses to rewatch the film as it immediately exposes the lack of free choice in directing the story which might not have been apparent on first viewing (I argue in Chapter 6 that re-watchability should be a strong consideration for interactive films as they invite the audience with their disnarrated material to explore other options). Interactive films employing this structure are still interactive; the node does produce different continuations whether it is unilinearly directing the viewer to one outcome or not.[272]

An example of a *directed network* is the short film *A Week in the Life of Milly.*[273] Milly has three self-help books with three different attitudes; aggressive, passive, or excessively honest. The audience chooses the attitude Milly will take into the next scene, but the outcome is the same no matter what the audience chooses because the film is alternating rather than bifurcating. No matter which option is selected the protagonist continues to the next exact same node and is again presented with three further options. It means that there are effectively three versions of the same film and the audience's choices determine which one, or which combination is watched. This is not to be dismissed. The innovation of having the interactivity built around self-help book attitudes works as a critique of self-help books; it is assisted by the interactivity which posits personality as an overriding factor when it comes to choice.

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269 Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 19.
270 Kubota, "Choose Wisely," 21.
271 Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual* Reality, 252.
272 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 20.
273 *A Week in the Life of Milly* directed by David Marmor (Virgin Produced, 2018).

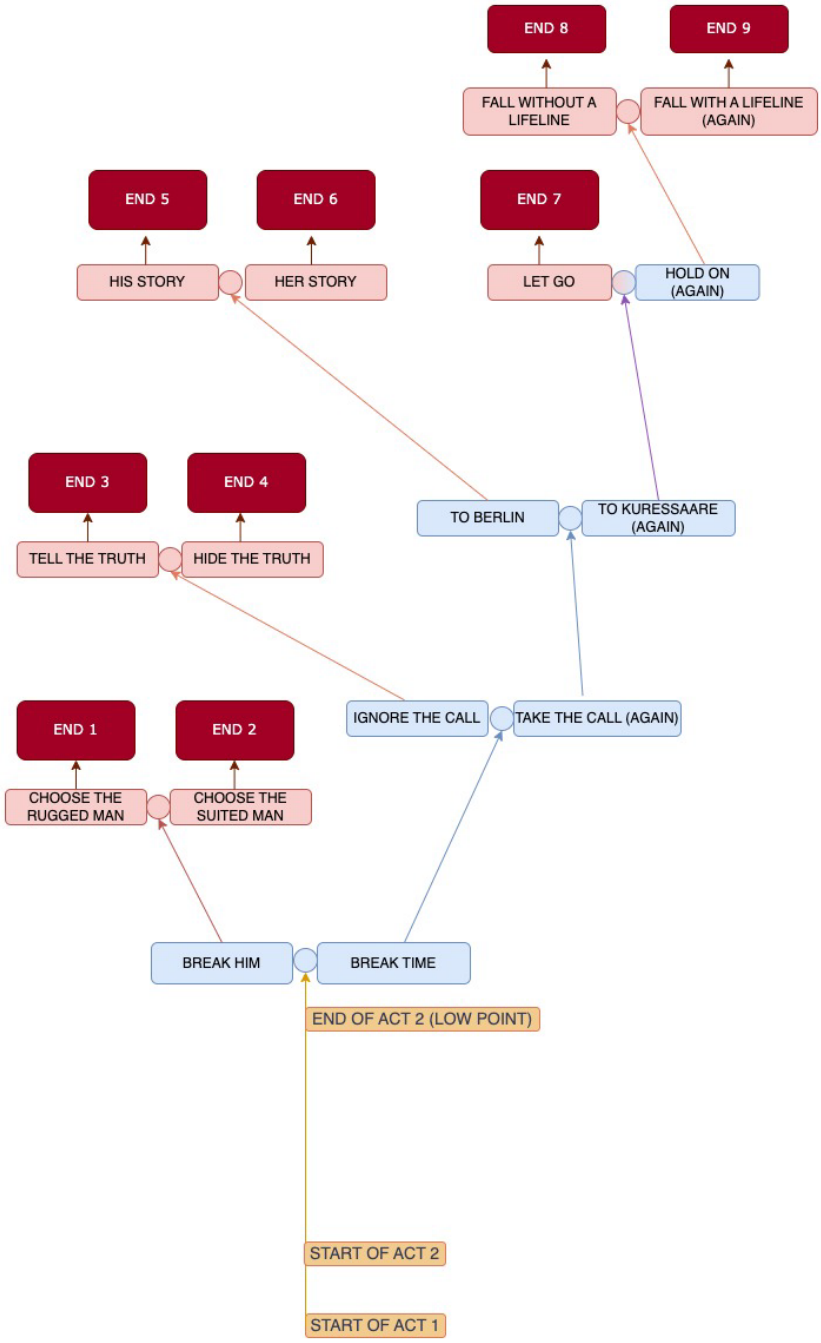

Figure 1. Structure of the final edit of *The Limits of Consent* (tree structure).

Ryan's *braided plot* allows for multiple lines of story or perspectival material running in parallel.[274] Imagine two or more lines of story and the ability to jump between them at any point. The outcome of these lines of story are the same but the audience is granted the ability to switch between them if they choose or stick with the one with which they began the story. *Possibilia* allows the audience to switch between sixteen different interpretations of the same breakup scene. The screenplay remains the same, but the dissolving couple speaks with different subtexts (sometimes combative, sometimes sensual, sometimes mournful) in different parts of the same house. When the switch is made between these interpretations is up to the individual audience member. Interacting with the film is like blindly skipping between the directors' rehearsal experiments onscreen without a spatial anchor. The experience is similar to Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Murderous Decisions*,[275] which had two versions of the same crime story broadcast on two different TV channels at the same time; presenting different perspectives of different characters on the two channels and allowing the audience to interact by switching channels with their remote control.[276]

The *braided plot* allows for the audience to switch angles on the events but not affect them, and this switching is dampened because there is no way of knowing which version of the scene you are moving to next. It seems completely random but as has already been discussed—randomness is a key factor for the interactive film where outcomes of choices are generally not predictable and if they were predictable it would negate making the choice at all. *Possibilia* closes all the alternative reality threads one by one (mirroring the reciprocal movement at the beginning of the film) and leaves the audience with only one outcome, but this was a choice on the part of the writer-directors as there is no reason for the *braided plot* to end on a definite line.

One interactive structure for which Ryan did not elucidate a directly comparable variant is Ogle's *choose-your-own-ending model,* which is virtually a unilinear film until one choice is made to select from a potentially unlimited number of endings.[277] I raise it here because, while it is not directly applicable to *The Limits of Consent,* the emphasis is likewise on the climatic and there are two endings for *The Limits of Consent* where only two decisions need to be made (which certainly feels closer to the audience choosing the ending rather than exploring an interactive story-world). However, finally, given that a number of choices have to be made to reach an ending (a minimum of two; a maximum of five); another structure is needed to discuss the *The Limits of Consent*; the structure Ryan described as the *tree structure.*[278]

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274 Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 254.
275 *Murderous Decisions* directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel (Das Erste, 1991).
276 Koenitz, et al. "Introduction," 4.
277 Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 19.
278 Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality,* 248.

THE TREE STRUCTURE

Named thus because of its arboreous diagrammatic resemblance, the *tree structure* is a description I adopt and elaborate on for this research because it is the most closely aligned to the structure I employed for the majority of drafts and edits of *The Limits of Consent* and has the benefit of being a rich and easy comparison to make which affords a clear visualisation of the film's structure. Bode and Dietrich also describe this structure as an arborescence, and distinguish it as a *third-degree future narrative* because the nodal depth extends at least three times.[279] Ogle refers to a comparable structure as the *exponential branching model*, but it appears in Ogle's diagram that branches can diverge and reconnect depending on the decision made.[280] Ryan, meanwhile, describes the *tree structure* as allowing for no circuits or returns to nodes; once the audience has progressed past a node there is no way to go back within the story to the outcome of the disnarrated choice nor return to the node again (unlike the *maze structure*, for example) giving it the forward momentum of a traditional unilinear story; therefore, narrative coherence can most easily be satisfied within this structure with its alternating but unbroken trajectories.[281] It offers, on the surface, a unidirectional multilinear narrative, but as I elaborate in Chapter 5, it is by no means necessary for it to remain unidirectional and can accommodate bidirectional possibilities.[282] As with real trees, the branches never reconnect to other branches. The *exponential branching model*, meanwhile, allows for more connections between the different sections; thus, when rewatching a film following this model, it is possible to combine pathways and watch certain segments again after selecting different options (this is not possible with the *tree structure*).

To deepen Ryan's comparison with a tree, I elaborate its different parts here. *The trunk* is that part of the tree which comes before the first bough or branch (represented in Figure 1 in dark yellow). When we imagine a typical tree there is usually one trunk and that trunk is usually differentiated by its girth and length and is usually the most robust part of the tree. Translated to this interactive film structure, the trunk is whatever occurs from the start of the film until the first node. This part of the film *is* the same for every audience member who watches it. However, this changes when the audience meets the first node which leads from the trunk to the *boughs* (represented in Figure 1 in light blue). A bough is a section of the story which begins after a decision is taken at a node and continues to another node; it always begins and ends with a node. This second node might lead to another bough, or it might lead to *a branch* (represented in the diagram in peach). A branch is a section of the story which begins with a node and ends with a gesture which closes the film (represented in Figure 1 in red). In the final edit of *The Limits of Consent*, there is one trunk, six boughs, eight nodes, and nine branches (and therefore nine endings).

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279 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives,* 57.
280 Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 20.
281 Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 686.
282 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives,* 61.

Within the nodes, I can differentiate four varieties if we consider them for structural purposes: the *trunk node* (of which there is only ever one), *bough nodes, branch nodes*, and *hybrid nodes*. The bough nodes (represented in Figure 1 by the light blue circles; there are three in the film) lead to further boughs; the branch nodes (represented by the peach circles in Figure 1; there are four in the film) lead to branches; and the hybrid nodes (represented by the blue to peach gradient circle in Figure 1; only one in the film) lead to both a branch and a bough.

As with a tree, there is no need for perfect symmetry; it is not necessary that both continuations at the nodes lead to further nodes.[283] The hybrid node does not irk because it is the only one in the film—most audiences would not notice its unique status while watching the film. Likewise, the nodal depth may be different depending on which route the audience takes through the *tree structure*. Just like the tree, some boughs only have two branches while some have further boughs and reach more branches. The length of the branches and boughs may be similar or different.

Arguably, the *tree structure* is one step away from the branching narratives which have been presented in unilinear films for decades. Films such as *Blind Chance*, *Sliding Doors*,[284] or *Run Lola Run*,[285] offer counterfactual narratives with different branches of causation explored. In *Blind Chance,* the protagonist either misses his train, catches his train, or is arrested by the police. The story unfolds one branch at a time so that we can see how the protagonist's life continues (or not) depending on a particular contingency. *Sliding Doors,* meanwhile, also takes the moment a protagonist misses the train as its point of divergence. If the protagonist catches her train she discovers her husband in bed with another woman, leaves him, and starts on a romantic quest to reinvent herself. If she misses the train, she does not discover her husband's infidelity and thus stays with him. The main structural difference between *Sliding Doors* and *Blind Chance* is that the former alternates between these branches (a change of haircut for the protagonist helping the audience to keep track of which reality is onscreen and is thus arguably closer to the *braided plot* outlined above). *Run Lola Run* is closer to a computer game in its devices, but also effectively has the same structure as *Blind Chance.* Our titular hero has to save her boyfriend's life—on the first attempt she is killed; the film then rewinds and lets her try again resulting in her survival but the death of her boyfriend; finally, on the third attempt, both live happily ever after.

Film theorist David Bordwell describes these films as conventional narratives disguised as something more complex;[286] they offer us alternative worlds, but only two or three, and hold basic characters, situations, and locations consistently across their branches.[287] Branching narratives like *Run Lola Run, Blind Chance*, or *Sliding*

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283 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives,* 59.
284 *Sliding Doors* directed by Peter Howitt (Miramax Pictures, 1998).
285 *Run Lola Run* directed by Tom Tykwer (Arte, 1998).
286 Simons, "Complex Narratives," 18.
287 David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 172.

Doors curtail their potential complexity to something which can be more easily understood. They instead offer a more cognitively manageable vision of what a true branching narrative would be like; we can imagine one or two alternative paths, but it becomes much more difficult to imagine twenty let alone a hundred.[288] To use the tree metaphor here, these films (*Blind Chance*, *Sliding Doors*, *Run Lola Run*) offer a short trunk followed by one fork (which is a node in an interactive film's case) followed by two branches or three branches but no boughs.

When attempting a branching narrative in a unilinear film, the complexity is, indeed, limited by our *cognitive ability to follow the boughs and branches*. However, when the form becomes interactive, the chance for confusion is lessened because the audience *can control which sections of the narrative come next*. To use an analogy, it might be the difference between exploring an unfamiliar city alone with only your hippocampus to guide you, aware of every turn you make and carefully mentally noting each landmark; or exploring the same unfamiliar city with a local as a guide who is constantly steering you one way or another while reeling off historical and cultural information. At the end of the day, the former would probably be better able to retrace their steps. If an audience controls the path taken through a branching narrative, it might be easier to remember which path was taken.

David Bordwell argues that films such as *Blind Chance* and *Sliding Doors* do not offer real branching narratives, but rather multiple drafts,[289] whichever climax the film closes on being the one which overrides all the others. *Blind Chance* offers three climaxes: first, with the protagonist as a communist party member angry and unhappy with the extent he has sold his soul for his work; second, with the protagonist stifled and accused of betraying the cause of Polish independence despite him being an honest member of the movement; and third, with a plane exploding and our protagonist perishing on it after trying to stay neutral in politics. This third ending overrides the others because it comes before the end credits roll and indeed, the film starts with this image of the protagonist screaming as if in the moment of death on this plane, thus highlighting its significance and inevitability by looping back to it eventually as part of a larger cohering strategy.[290] It is writer-director Krzysztof Kieslowski's choices which determine the order these climaxes are played out; had the protagonist of *Blind Chance* died in the first ending rather than the third, then the meaning of the film and the emotion it evokes would be different.

Contrastingly, the interactive branching narrative allows the audience to follow the branches of these stories separately and *discriminately* and *inessentially*. If the audience decides to watch *The Limits of Consent*, they will have to make choices; but one choice I have not focused on yet, in particular, is where to end the experience. It would be dishonest to say that the film does not try to motivate audiences to return and watch another branch; yet whether the audience watches only one ending or all

[288] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 173-174.
[289] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 184.
[290] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 179.

of them, it does not matter because the story has aimed at narrative completion when a branch is fully explored and signals this completion with the end credits scroll. With this gesture, the intention is to indicate clearly that there is no need for more; it is a gesture which confirms that this is the end.[291] So to view another branch is a choice for the solitary audience member, and the ending which is explored next less determinedly overrides the one which came before because it was a *choice* to view it. And even if it does override it, it only does it this way for this one screening. For another audience member who watches in another order, it might be the other way around.

THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

To close this chapter, I return to the question of what an interactive film is exactly, with all of the examples I examined here in consideration. As *Possibilia* demonstrates, there are many ways conscious interactivity might be applied to film and these ways multiply with the creativity of different filmmakers (certainly, interactivity does not need to be limited to selecting possible paths for plots). However, the more intuitive, or at least the most established way in existing unilinear films is the employment of a branching narrative which gives rise to the *tree structure* when interactivity is applied. Upon closer examination, the likes of *Kinoautomat*, *I'm Your Man*, *Bandersnatch*, *Chatterbox* and *A Week in the Life of Milly* all pose as *tree-structured* films to a certain extent but are actually *flow chart* films, *mazes*, or hybrids. It is the illusion, or partial illusion, of an ever bivious narrative which follows a *tree structure* where every branch corresponds to different developments and events emerge from a common situation or trunk;[292] however, none of them can be entirely described as an exponentially branching narrative which continuously diverges from its opening scene and never loops back nor limits its endings.[293] All of them offer loopbacks, terminal nodes, false endings, or a singular fatalistic resolution to their interactivity and in each case are bound to the single trajectory unilinear narratives. I sympathise with the strategies of these screenwriters and directors. As I reflect in the following chapters, my own process was continually pulling me back to the features of unilinear storytelling and thus placing limitations on the audience's freedom.

Complete freedom to guide the narrative is, of course, not practical. Firstly, it would offer an unwieldy number of bifurcations which would be very expensive to produce on film (the reason FMV games of the 1990s were not as replayable as their more heavily coded counterparts and slowly disappeared from the market as computer graphics became more sophisticated). Secondly, and more crucially, it begins to undo the narrative because it turns the unexpected into merely an arbitrary

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[291] Francis M Dunn, *Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 13.

[292] Ryan, "The Interactive Onion," 44.

[293] Ogle, "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 20.

change.[294] This is what VR researchers Ruth Aylett and Sandy Louchart described as the *narrative paradox:* the screenwriter wants to control the trajectory of the narrative but the audience demands autonomy and wishes to make decisions without being constrained.[295] If we give the audience complete freedom to improvise, we lose control of the plot.[296] There is, therefore, a fundamental tension between a user's freedom to control and the author's ability to control, which directly impacts the internal consistency and narrative flow.[297] If we do not give the audience complete freedom then we face the difficulty which continually confronts the interactive film, that sense of betweenity.

Let us not shy away from this. The interactive film is an *in-between* medium—but it is not precisely in-between. It is not 50% film and 50% game. This lack of precision in its betweenity *gives us a sense of the interactive film*. If one looks to the grammar of the term, it becomes clear: we have an adjective modifying a noun and not a new noun because, ultimately, *it is a film* whether it be intended for the cinema or a streaming platform; whether it be a collective experience or an individual one. The interactive film might be a media of attraction, and some of my experiences writing and directing *The Limits of Consent* bear this out as it is *unassimilated*, *interdisciplinary*, *seamed*, and *participatory.* However, in any attempt to assimilate it, the attempt is made to assimilate it as a film (participating in film festivals and reviewed by film critics, etc.). It is interdisciplinary; however, the dominant discipline was film production with a small amount of attention paid to the live facilitator necessary for film's cinema exhibition.[298] It is seamed; however, those seams join up sections of a film and nothing else; there are no gamified elements or scripted theatre performances, etc. Finally, it is participatory and that, to switch back to the more appropriate term, interactive, is where we find the biggest difference.

For interactive films to be films, *to really be films*, the audience *cannot* have control; however, for them to be interactive films*, to really be interactive films*—writer-directors cannot have complete control either. The control writer-directors have is still near-absolute, but an audience member can select segments in any desired order within the parameters set by its creators. So finally, I propose to combine and modify Hale and Maziarczyk's definitions of an interactive film as fundamentally different to a computer game because it is constructed of pre-recorded moving-image sequences or segments, the display of which can be affected by the audience in their selection. The interactivity offered to the audience is most often conscious and not self-involving. Where said film is to be ideally viewed, is not as important as the fact that what we expect from a film in the 21st century, precisely, is an edited

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294 Ben-Shaul, *Hyper-Narrative Interactive Cinema*, 44.

295 Ryan, "The Interactive Onion", 48-49.

296 Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 191.

297 Jouni Smed, "Interactive Storytelling: Approaches, Applications, and Aspirations," *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* 6 no. 1 (2014): 26.

298 See Appendix E for longer descriptions of the facilitator's role in the cinema exhibition of *The Limits of Consent.*

and therefore pre-determined ordered series of shots, scenes, and sequences over which we have no control. The interactive film adds an element of randomness by facilitating the audience's constrained interjections which would not be possible for a unilinear film but would not be enough to justify the labelling of it as a game with filmic elements. *The interactive film is a film first and foremost*.

In the next chapter, I shift focus to the story development process for *The Limits of Consent.* To make a film interactive is to enact deliberate disruption upon the process of its creation. I was forced to make compensatory moves in the process to better integrate and manage this disruption. The next question is whether these moves were detrimental or generative when considering the story development process; did they limit or enhance that process? I begin by reflecting on the writing of the film's initial step outlines and how interactivity impacted the film's structure, in particular. A desire to make a film, first and foremost, naturally incentivised the unconscious adoption of the *tree structure* which then gave rise to opportunities to tell the story anti-dramatically.

3. ALL ROADS MUST LEAD TO DRAMA

Writing and directing a film often begins with a colony of ideas and images, the synthesis of which culminates with the putting of pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, and the transposition of these conscious hallucinations of the frontal cortex into the more worldly manifestations. Even with the mandatory inclusion of interactivity, as part of my PhD proposal, the initiation of this process remained as it has always been for me: an idea which captivates me is transferred to the page. In this case, there were two ideas which had previously remained separate but which I would synthesise as the process continued: a story about an illicit love affair continuing where one participant wants to bring it to an end, and the story of a high-tech pick-up artist who stumbles upon a conspiracy while helping a client to seduce a lonely woman. In this chapter, I begin to reflect on writing and directing an interactive film as an artistic researcher situating my perspective inside the process I undertook. I analyse how these two initial ideas began to synthesise as I set about writing the step outline for the film's scenes.

I began with the step outline because *my plan was to write a film which happened to be interactive* rather than an *interactive narrative which happened to be a film*. In other words, I began writing *The Limits of Consent* as I would any other film: plotting out a unilinear story rather than thinking about different possible approaches to interactivity in a deliberate sense. I did not consider whether the story was suitable for an interactive narrative, but rather proceeded from the assumption that any film could be made interactive and then render interesting results via the disruptions which interactivity enacts. I offer no comparative judgment about the relative merits of this approach; rather, I highlight it here to emphasise what I was doing first and foremost. I was making a film.

In hindsight, this unconscious decision could have been a much more conscious one but part of artistic research's special ability is to allow the researcher to reflect thoughtfully on the unthinking parts of the process.[299] The effect of deciding to approach the interactive film as a film was to *privilege the process of writing a film* above thinking through the interactive system and this meant that choices about interactivity predominantly came from the choices about the film's plot and then later its characters. That is not to say that interactivity was never deliberated on, only that it was considered in the process of screenwriting and not the other way around.

The gravity of narrative conventions continually anchors a writer-director in past examples from effective dramatic film narratives; I illustrate in detail in this chapter how I consciously applied dramatic devices such as a singular protagonist with an emotional need and later a physical goal. My approach meant extemporising the plot and then moving more concretely towards *dramatic structures* promoted by most screenwriting handbooks. However, almost immediately, *dramatic structures* would

[299] Batty,et al., "Rewriting, Remaking and Rediscovering Screenwriting Practice," 3.

collide with *interactive structures,* with the former informing the latter and the latter problematising the former.

To write an interactive film is to experiment in a very deliberate way with the form; *to disrupt the process of writing a film itself while still essentially writing a film* because interactivity is still something unnatural when grafted upon this now century-old medium. Here, I examine how I crafted early draft step outlines for *The Limits of Consent* through an extensive story-development process. Attempting to maintain certain dramatic conventions while minimising the disruption that interactivity caused rather funnelled my options in terms of interactive structures while paradoxically forcing me to embrace greater opportunities within pre-existing dramatic and later anti-dramatic structures. In other words, I began by writing around the interactivity rather than with it; however, as the drafting process continued this relationship began to reverse itself. The disruption I was causing to the film's story with the inclusion of interactivity was generating more anti-dramatic story possibilities within my compensatory moves—possibilities which would not have occurred to me while plotting a traditional unilinear film.

THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

A step outline is a common way for screenwriters to structure and re-structure their stories before they begin writing the screenplay.[300] It involves writing and rewriting the story scene-by-scene with only a few sentences to describe the events of the scene,[301] usually focusing only on the most important elements in order not to be distracted by the details or dialogue unless they are essential for telling the story. It is an effective way to shape and reshape the film's story, find what is important at the core, and keep the writing process dynamic for as long as possible.

It is worth noting here that this is the procedure I embrace in screenwriting most often. Other screenwriters may prefer to begin with a logline (a snappy one-sentence summation of the film's central proposition)[302] to first capture the core of the story before moving to an outline. I find it easier to form a logline once I actually have something written down, and usually only find the logline useful in quickly explaining what a film is about or pitching the film to potential financiers or collaborators. Additionally, some screenwriters move first to a treatment (typically a 20-or-so-page document which conveys all the necessary information about the film's content without dialogue).[303] I prefer the more flexible step-outline because it allows more easily for a global view of the film's story structure.

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300 Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay,* 413.

301 Karol Griffiths, *The Art of Script Editing: A Practical Guide* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2015), 202.

302 Griffiths, *The Art of Script Editing*, 194.

303 Griffiths, *The Art of Script Editing*, 205.

There are many modern software solutions for writing step outlines, but I have always preferred the low-tech option where possible. I usually write each scene on Post-it notes and place them on an A1 piece of paper which I pin to my office wall. It allows me to see the big picture and easily swap out or move around scenes as the story develops. For an interactive film like this, it also allows for the easy affixing of different labels to indicate directions or different story branches.

The first Post-it note I wrote read as follows:

> INT. AIRPORT. Anna (40 y.o.) receives a text message from Mart which says he's not coming with her. He doesn't have the strength to leave his wife. Anna blushes and begins to cry.

The plot of the first step outline was inevitably much simpler than what it would become. Anna, the protagonist, waits at the airport for her lover, Mart. Anna is jilted and her heart is broken. She returns home to her husband, pretends nothing is wrong, and tries to forget about Mart. The influence of *Brief Encounter* is perhaps a little opaque already; in that film a couple having an affair choose to return to their respective spouses and part company at railway station. The railway station becomes an airport; an interrupted farewell becomes a break-up via text message.

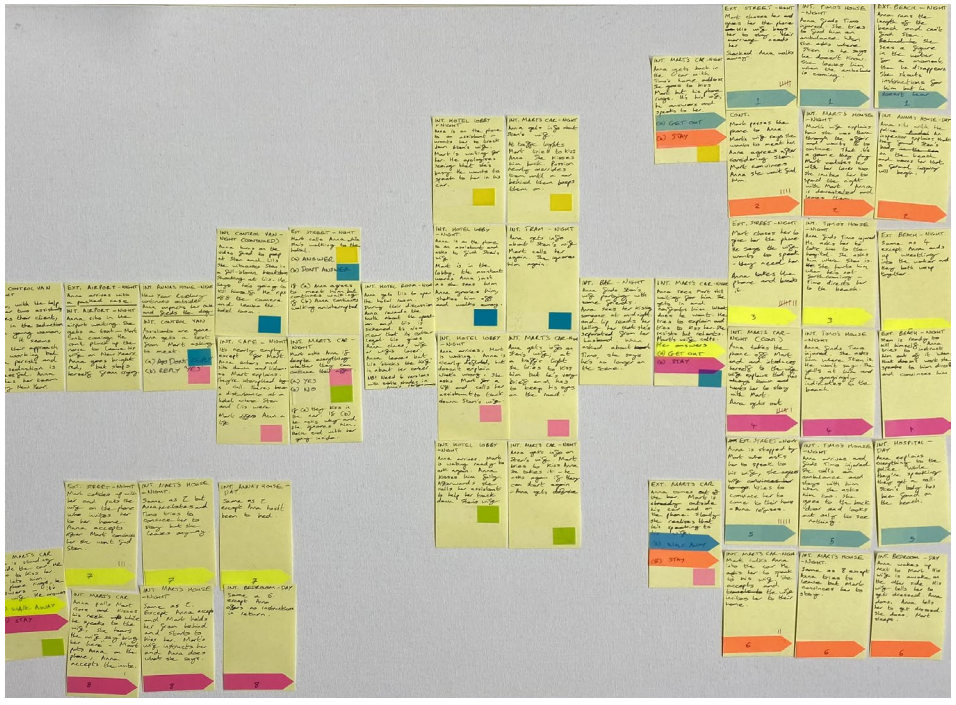

Figure 2. Second draft of the step outline for *The Limits of Consent.*

At the end of *Brief Encounter,* when Laura Jesson returns to her dull husband and accepts his tender kindness once more*,* there is little doubt that the nascent lovers, Laura and Alec, will never see each other again and Laura has recommitted to the father of her children. The end of Laura and Alec's romance is compounded by the image of a railway station, with trains moving in different directions just like the protagonist and her lover. The railway station helps to make this moment feel final. However, questions jumped to my mind while writing the first draft of the step outline: what if Alec had a change of heart and turned up the next day and tried to convince Laura to continue the affair? Would Laura allow the renewal of a potentially painful emotional journey which seemed to have ended?

Clearly, I had endings on my mind. But what was I really up to here? I was rewriting the ending of *Brief Encounter* and offering an alternative, not because the ending is deficient, but because such endings in life are rarely as definitive as they are in cinema. A conclusion is a necessary gesture to close a narrative, but in and of itself, it does not mean that the story has reached its essential terminus. There is nothing in *Brief Encounter* to say that the story cannot continue despite the fact it has found a sad resolution—that resolution can be permanent or temporary. Thus, in my step outline, the next day Mart contacts his lover Anna again and tries to convince her to meet him, knowing that this would lead to a rekindling of their affair. Anna is resistant but eventually succumbs to his charms and is hurt again. Anna later goes to a live jazz performance and realises something about herself while she is transfixed by the performance. What she realises and how jazz made her realise it I never quite figured out. Thankfully, even as I wrote the words, it was clear to me that this lazy climatic scene was a placeholder for meaningfulness.

This sort of material is emblematic of first drafts—mine was no different. It had all the usual pitfalls: an underdeveloped plot, simplified causation, broad-stroke characterisation leading to mere ciphers floating through the story, thematic scarcity or skimming, and an unclear voice. This step outline simply had underdeveloped interactivity resting on top. I can recount the plot of this first version of the story with relative ease and without referring to interactivity at all. This ability illustrates the first flaw with my nascent attempt to fashion a story from my points of departure: *interactivity had no effect on the eventual outcome of the story.* There was only one ending and the interactivity was there mostly as an elaborate practical joke on the audience. I was not offering alternatives to *Brief Encounter*'s ending but rather an extension with differing lengths to reach it. The design of the interactivity in this draft saw Anna resisting Mart; first, he would text her to convince her to meet and the audience would be offered a choice:

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(A) Accept
(B) Don't Accept
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If they opted to ignore the text, then the story would continue. Anna would go to the office and then Mart would call her and ask her to meet, and the audience would be offered another choice:

(A) Tell Him OK

(B) Tell Him No

(C) Don't Reply

If they opted for the second or third option, then Mart would call again, and this time Anna would have a chance to answer again with similar choices.

(A) Answer and Agree to Meet

(B) Answer and tell Him to Leave You Alone

(C) Don't Answer

If they opted for the second or third option then Mart would eventually be found waiting at Anna's car and, finally, Anna would surrender to his advances after refusing. They would then drive to the forest and a similar scenario would play out. Mart would try to seduce Anna and she could either yield to him or resist him; eventually if she continued to resist for too long, she would yield anyway. The only difference in scenarios was how long the audience could hold out. Anna's heart would be broken again no matter what.

The idea was that the film would offer the audience a choice which was not a choice at all. This concept would play with the very idea of agency within the story, offering the audience choices which control the character, but these choices would later be revealed to be merely delays. There were no different directions, only a longer path to the same destination; the joke being that the audience is offered an interactive experience which then proves to be the opposite, highlighting the lack of real agency for both the protagonist and the audience.

The problem, finally, is not the cynicism of employing interactivity, which is immediately negated, but that the film only worked if the audience chose, as I wanted them to choose—to resist. If the audience followed the path of least resistance at any point (*Accept*, *Tell Him OK*, or *Answer and Agree to Meet*), the film would be untenably short. To not resist Mart is to force the story to end almost immediately.

I had designed a story which had a *predetermined ideal pathway* to follow, the one which I felt would frustrate the audience in a positive way. However, it rendered the audience's choices trivial by granting some amount of interactivity in connecting sections of the narrative but ultimately only offering a single outcome (*flow chart* in Ryan's taxonomy of interactive structures). It was an interactive film, but the audience had to interact with it my way or they would be disappointed. Perhaps this is an inevitable problem for any writer transitioning from unilinear to interactive storytelling, or perhaps it was just my problem because I had set out to write a film and my first thought with interactivity was to use it as a trick for the audience to fool them into thinking they had any kind of control over the film's course. More fundamentally than this, I had sketched out a unilinear narrative with options for

short cuts. It was interactive but the interactivity worked around the *one story* I wanted to tell, rather than diversifying that story.

The fact that these choices are only offered on one side track rendered the narrative untenably lopsided. Once I realised this flaw with the narrative design, I wrote in my research journal a sentence which has stuck with me ever since: *All roads must lead to drama.* What I should have written is *All roads must lead to drama* or *anti-drama.* It would take another couple of years for me to reach that thought.

Narrative conventions often reduce the dramatic plot to a single straight line and transformation in an arrangement of lived and causally linked events,[304] and most often present the protagonist's position at the narrative's terminus as the consequence of *one immovable series of decisions.* These are immovable because the film form generally dictates that it remains the same every time we view it (except dubbing, director's cuts, picture resolution, censorship, etc.) Thus, the causal chain in film is fixed in place and, by extension, the result for the protagonist is as well. We are with the protagonist for some time; we see them enact events and events being enacted upon them; they progress through the narrative until events culminate and the narrative closes. Things end. This seems logical and it is logical. But why must stories be logical?

At this point, it is useful to look at Linda Aronson's adaptation of Edward de Bono's division between *vertical* and *lateral* thinking to the screenwriting process. Aronson argues that good writing emerges when the two are intermingled and provide a starkly original output, while weak writing happens when the two are out of balance.[305] *Vertical thinking* involves making sure the film is logical, makes sense, and is credible. It often, however, draws on what has come before, and an over-reliance on vertical thinking will thus inevitably lead to conventions or cliches. If a screenwriter is plotting their film, and thinking vertically, they are looking to films they have already seen to try and structure their ideas based on them. Meanwhile, *lateral thinking* for screenwriters is often personal and generative; it is what we refer to as inspiration and the most original part of the screen idea.[306] Aronson notes that the danger of too much lateral thinking is that the screenwriter becomes too visible and it tends towards mawkishness and smacks of the pulpit;[307] this is probably because the personal significance of the idea overcomes the requirements of the story.

I observe both these types of thinking in my creative process; sometimes I can even conceive of them as being at war with one another. The tendency I have is towards the lateral in that I most often have a personal connection to what I write but I often shape the material in a way that it is not merely observing my life in a literal way

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304 Dancyger and Rush, *Alternative Screenwriting*, 67.
305 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 5-6.
306 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 4-5.
307 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 8.

but has some distance. Vertical thinking in my process is evident with the choice to begin with a step outline instead of, for example, developing a character profile or simply improvising the screenplay from the first page. This approach privileges vertical thinking.

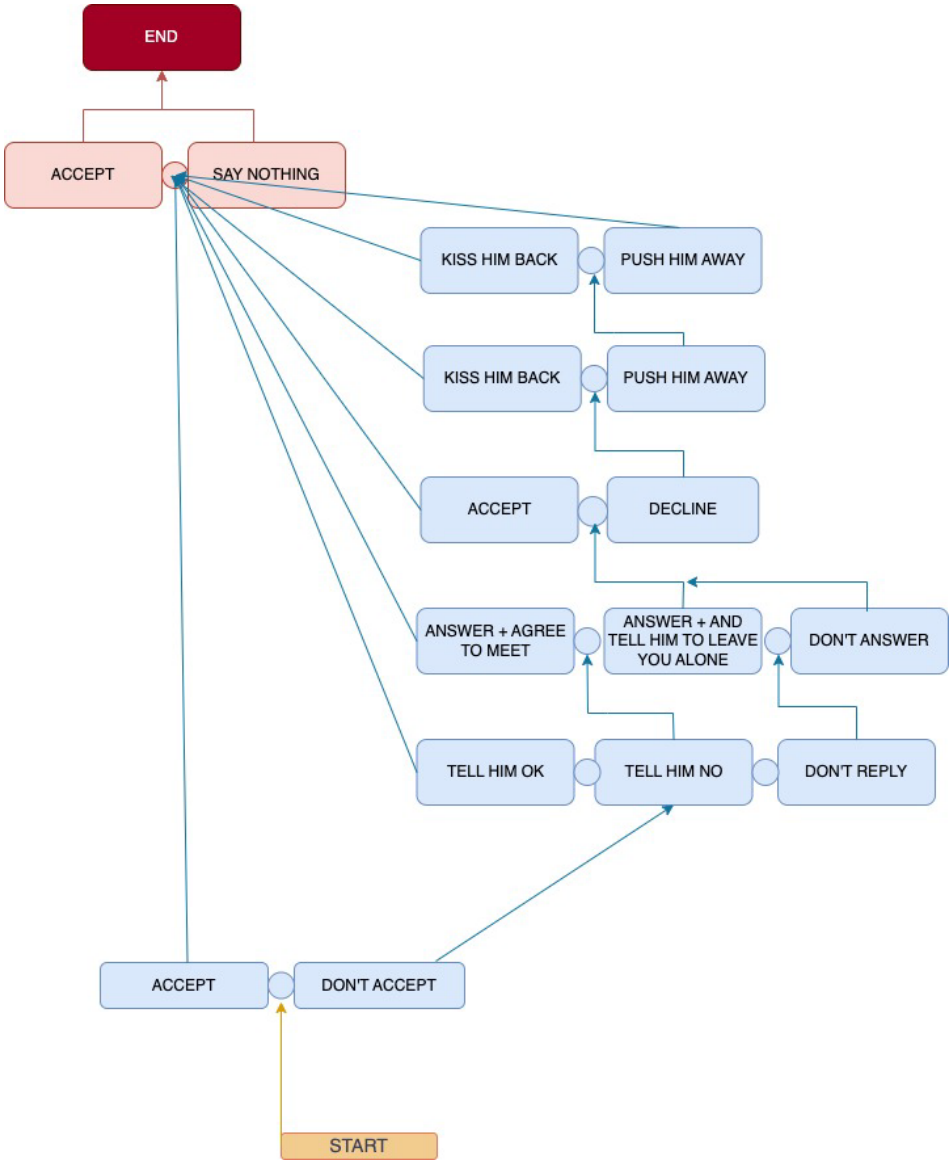

Figure 3. Structure of the first step outline of *The Limits of Consent.*

Always using a step outline to structure my story ideas is perhaps a compensatory move from the days when my adolescent screenplays were out of balance and untenably baggy. Turning to the step outline first would then seem to be an unconscious result of my screenwriting education: I honestly did not consider taking a different approach. This was a very limiting decision because step outlines ensure that the writer considers the plot first and foremost and the structure only allows for character considerations to emerge from the actions which necessitate certain plot developments. So, for example, if the plot dictates that a character must take a particular action, her choice informs her character first, not vice versa. Thinking about and structuring the plot ahead of developing the character means privileging the audience's arousal in plot-centric ways.

At one point, it was observed by the primary supervisor of this PhD, Associate Professor Dirk Hoyer, that I like giving the audience some candy. Perhaps it would be better to say I *struggle to resist* giving the audience some 'candy,' and this 'candy' is usually rooted in vertical thinking, where I take something which happened or that I imagine could have happened and shape it into something more entertaining based on my understanding of screenwriting forms and then structure it according to the sort of effective film narratives I have internalised and the dramatic structures I have been taught.

In hindsight, I see that I began the process of integrating interactivity into the film from a highly loaded initiative. I had decided to use self-negating interactivity in order to maintain the unity of the narrative. However, that was not my primary diagnosis of the problem at this point. While I had a protagonist and an antagonist and a conflict as is so often essential for dramatic films, I still had not considered dramatic structures at all and this is what I had determined was centrally lacking in the outline: the beginning and the end of the story were clear, but the middle was either repetitive in its cycles of resistance or dissatisfying in its singular truncated acquiescence. I threw out the self-negating interactivity without a second thought and began to structure a more concretely Syd Field-style three-act film. My choice to consider a dramatic three-act structure more consciously was a choice which changed the direction of the film as a whole. Arguably, one can redirect structure later or layer in character considerations which override the structural ones as the process continues; however, beginning with structure means that one thinks of the film first and foremost *structurally* rather than with any other lens.

With this move towards the three-act structure, I naturally moved towards the use of an interactive structure which would meaningfully impact the film's trajectory as informed by the branching narratives such as *Blind Chance* and *Sliding Doors* which I outlined in the previous chapter: the *tree structure.* In the first draft of the step outline, the middle of the story had become unstable and perhaps even untenable while the beginning and the ending remained fixed. With the adoption of the *tree structure*, the middle of the story would become more stable and the most meaningful step away from the traditional unilinear film would come with the film's endings. The focus shifted towards the unfixed climax.

THE PLOT THICKENS

In the second draft of the step outline, vertical thinking was in abundance. The first vertical move was that the protagonist, Anna, was given a profession and from this profession emerged a goal. Anna now worked as a high-tech pick-up artist. In this scenario, awkward men hire Anna to help them seduce the women of their dreams; Anna is an expert in seduction and tells them what to say and do with a small team from a control van parked nearby. Anna's profession remained background information which was only there in the first scene to spark the plot, a spark which knocked me right back into the arms of Frank Daniel, author of various screenwriting guides and the mantra: *someone who wants something badly and has difficulty getting it*.[308] Here, Daniel epitomises the essence of dramatic narratives in one sentence; there is a protagonist driving the story with their passionate need to achieve their goal and various forces and obstacles stand in their way.

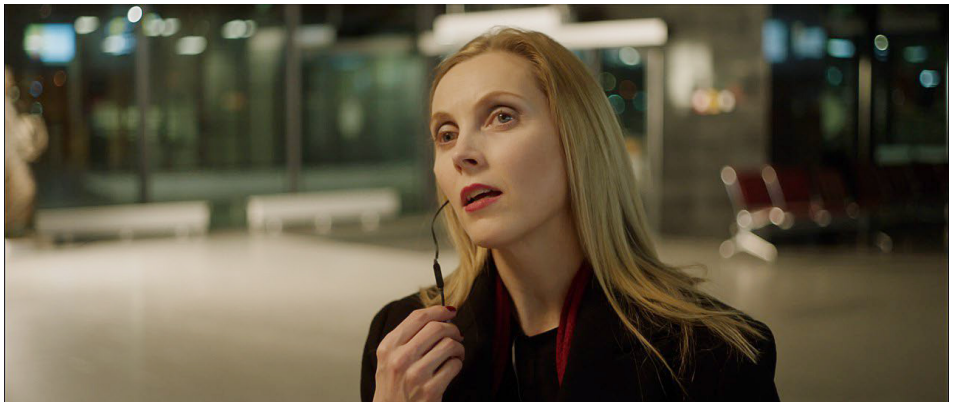

Figure 4. Anna (Karin Rask) the protagonist of *The Limits of Consent.*

I had traced the problem with the first draft primarily to the structure and the self-negating interactivity. There was no reason, in particular, not to keep the same plot and structure in the second act more concretely. However, I also had determined that the idea of the film was too thin; and while many films I admire also have Mini Plots, as Robert McKee puts it, and deal with similar topics (*Tuesday, After Christmas*, for example) I reached for extra narrative dimensions out of insecurity. The gravity of narrative conventions was pulling me back to the conventional elements of the Arch Plot and more vertical thinking. So instead of making the *protagonist more complex*, I made the *plot more complex* by fusing two initially separate story concepts. This move towards a more complex plot was most likely because I was working with a step outline at the outset. *Tuesday, After Christmas* survives as a film because it has a rich protagonist, and the story is based on his dilemma and explores this dilemma with authentic performances, minute detail, understatement, and rigorous austere aesthetics. It certainly is not a plot-based film. But in the first step outline for *The*

[308] Howard and Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting*, 23.

Limits of Consent, my protagonist was thin and an extension of myself; I did not take the time to envision a way she could develop beyond that within the confines of such a simple story, so I reached for another narrative dimension and used a more plot-centric approach which is more becoming for the writer-director who, when he first puts pen to paper, forms a structure.

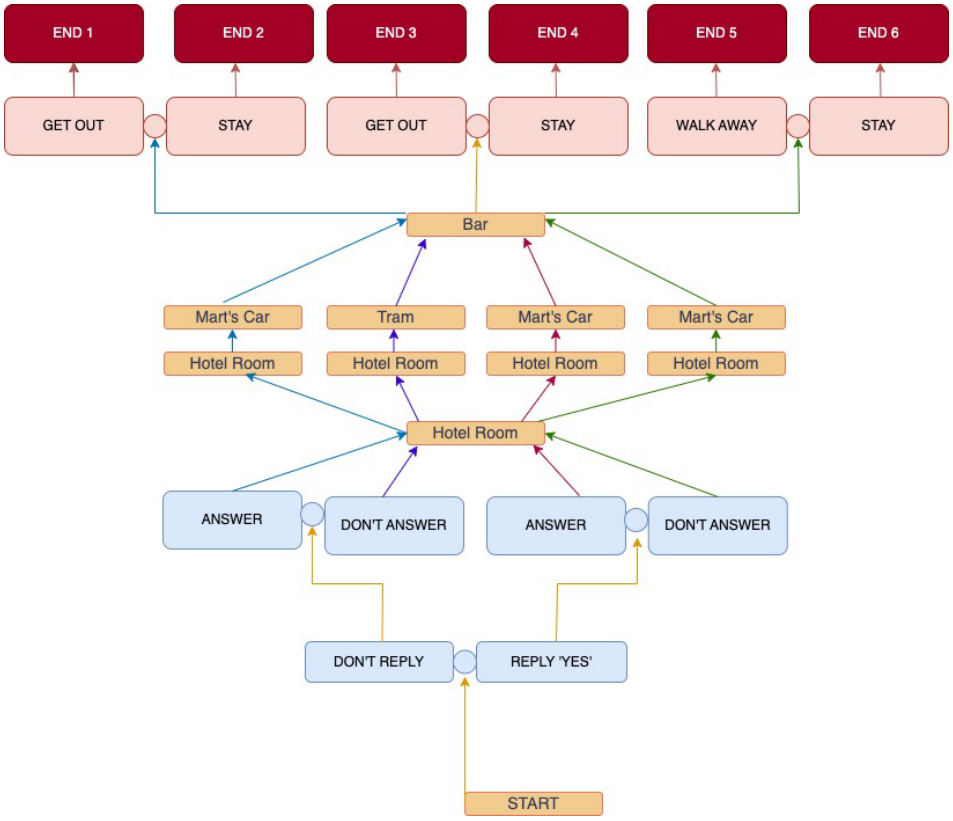

Figure 5. Structure of the second step outline of *The Limits of Consent.*

Using a structuring tool (the step outline) led to structural thinking and structural thinking led me to a plot-driven story. The ebb and flow between disrupting and adhering to narrative conventions had already begun in the first draft with the placement of a single protagonist and an antagonist caught in a conflict, but the dimensionality of this conflict was still singular. In the second draft, Anna received a concrete goal from her new profession: the pursuit of a suicidal client, Sten, before he exposes her extra-legal operation (Anna and her team are hacking private information and feeding it to her clients surreptitiously). Anna had already been cursed with an emotional need in the first draft, the *need to disconnect from an adulterous affair*. Now, in the second draft, these two elements would play out in simultaneity: the pursuit of Sten to save her business and the need to disconnect from Mart to save

her sanity. Aronson describes the same phenomena in more structural terms, in what she designates the 'action line' (the physical goal) and the 'relationship line' (the emotional need). Interestingly she argues that the relationship line cannot come into being before the action line because it is through the action line that the relationship line emerges;[309] events force the relationship to change.[310] (With this in mind, it makes sense that when I reworked the screenplay I intuitively added earlier scenes to the film to set up Anna's profession and goal first before introducing Mart and her central relationship.)

In this version of the step outline, the nodes offered only two choices instead of three. Without this reduction, there would be an unwieldy number of story trajectories; with the reduction to a simple binary I was able to offer the audience more nodes, but with strategically fewer options within that node to keep the story manageable.[311] With the same consideration in mind, the first node offered divergent tracks which would then re-converge a few scenes later (akin to the *flow chart* structure where segments alternate rather than bifurcate). My instinct here was more that of a producer than a writer; and the calculation is obvious: if a node is placed early in the film, then longer divergent tracks are required to fulfil the promise of that node. Thus, if the first node comes five minutes into the film and this choice will take the audience on one of at least two divergent storylines, it means that the writer-director needs to have *two films worth of material* to fulfil this promise. Ryan calculated that a narrative following this structure would require at least 64 plots to allow for only six nodes within a single narrative traversal.[312] Based on how difficult it is to receive funding for one film, this option would seem completely untenable.

The divergent/re-convergent tracks seemed like a good cost-saving measure but returned me somewhat to self-negating interactivity. It meant whatever occurred in the divergence would have no final bearing on the plot or protagonist as one way or another; events would re-converge a few scenes later and continue in the same manner. By extension, this meant that the re-watchability of the film would suffer because it would become clear on second viewing that certain choices had little bearing on future events, as is the case for other interactive films described in Chapter 2 such as *Kinoautomat* and *A Week in the Life of Milly.*

Re-watchability is a more definite consideration for the writer-director of an interactive film because interactivity, implicitly or explicitly, invites the audience to explore other possibilities. An irony of the tree structure with its multiple ends is

309 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay,* 59.

310 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 73.

311 Later in the editing process, it occurred to me that the nodes had habitually come to offer only two choices. The limitations of these binary choices were not lost on me and I considered offering a randomiser at a key junction in the film which would send the story into multiple directions without the intervention of the audience to offset this consideration. However, the idea was suspended when my primary supervisor commented that it would add an additional flank of complexity to the film (and consequently these reflections) which fell outside of the impact of interactivity.

312 Ryan, "Interactive Drama," 686.

that when an ending is reached, it is achieved at the exclusion of another possible end which potentially prompts rewatching. Thus, the *tree structure* potentially offers many total narrative trajectories (as in a narrative which stretches from one beginning to one end) but with any choice the audience makes comes disnarrated material which tempts the audience as an unexplored path to explore. Of course, any film can be rewatched, and I believe many writer-directors see it as the ultimate compliment if someone watches their film again and again. In a unilinear film, the audience member who decides to rewatch might be hoping to relive the experience, catch new details, subtleties, or different emotions knowing the narrative's result—this is only partially the case for the interactive film. The rewatched interactive film can literally be a different film from the first watch. It means delivering on the promise of a satisfying second watch is a *necessary consideration* for the interactive writer-director.

Thus, the divergent/re-convergent tracks were cut from the next draft. There might be pleasure in watching events briefly differ and then continue unchanged, but a dampening on the causative impact of the interactivity seems to steer the film towards superficiality and undermine its potential effects—that the choices made have a real impact on the plot and characters. When *Kinoautomat* employed the *flow chart s*tructure and built its story from eight segments, it was a choice of the film's creators based on the impossibility of the film projectors of the time working with an ever bivious narrative; the filmmaker's initial idea was to have 32 endings but this was untenable and so the story was reduced to only have one ending.[313] With the now virtually ubiquitous use of Digital Cinema Package (DCP) in cinemas, I had no such technical impediment and much greater freedom consequently.

The plot of the second draft was far more complex. Indeed, it was *overly* complex: Anna's client, Sten, was embroiled in an elaborate revenge plot on the man who cuckolded him; Sten sought vengeance by using Anna's services to seduce his wife's lover's wife (are you still with me?) using an unwitting Anna to help him on his dark quest. The details of this conspiracy would emerge bit by bit across the narrative and Anna became an almost Chandlerian protagonist embroiled in an impenetrable plot. The story was potentially exciting, but it certainly had no time to meaningfully study any of its characters as it careered through plot twists at break-neck speed.

Anna was still resisting Mart who was pursuing her, but this time if she succumbed to his charms, she ended up being a human puppet and the third in a threesome with Mart's wife. With the exception of this anomaly, the rest of the plot was fairly conventional in how it panned out. The emotional need/physical goal parameters meant that I built the endings around these considerations, too. So, in one ending Anna would achieve her physical goal but not her emotional need (a sort of materialist tragedy); in another, she would fulfil her emotional need but not the physical goal (emotional life is more important than materiality); in another she would achieve the

[313] Hales, "Cinematic interaction," 57.

goal and have the need fulfilled (a happy Hollywood-style ending) and in still another she would not achieve the goal or have the need fulfilled (a European-style downer).

Seeking a physical goal is a classical device from the times of ancient Greek tragedy[314] and is used to create tension. If the audience has empathy for the protagonist, the conflict between the goal and the need (the protagonist usually obtains one at the expense of the other) means that most often the audience is hoping that the protagonist is going to abandon their goal for their emotional need while afraid that the opposite may occur.[315] These endings were diverse enough to hold interest on second or third viewing; however, there were a further four endings which varied what had happened in these prime endings. On many of my Post-it notes I had written things like:

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The same as ending 5, except…
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And followed it up with a cosmetic change. This warning sign was immediately apparent: I could not even bring myself to waste time re-writing what I had already written elsewhere. What is really on offer for an audience member who rewatches and explores other branches which lead to only the slightest differences between the results? It was only a marginal improvement on having a pre-determined ending but still frustrating for any audience member who would expect diverse changes in the film's story. It was not eight endings—it was instead eight variations of two endings and just like the convergent/re-convergent tracks, it only really helped to create the illusion of plurality and keep the production manageable (if the eight endings are slight variations of one another, set in the same locations with the same casts, then production complexity is greatly reduced). During a story development meeting, my primary supervisor suggested that I keep the clearest resolutions and elaborate new ones in the next draft.[316]

A FILM WITH TWO STORIES

In hindsight, again, I see that I was trapped by the old mode of screenwriting; I was structuring a plot and allowing that plot to develop within the trajectories which

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[314] Patrick Cattrysse, "The Protagonist's Dramatic Goals, Wants and Needs," *Journal of Screenwriting* 1 no. 1 (2010): 92.

[315] Cattrysse, "Protagonist's Dramatic Goals," 92.

[316] This was the point in the process that story development began in collaboration with my primary supervisor, Associate Professor Dirk Hoyer. There is not enough space here to discuss the various ins and outs of all of our many conversations (and sometimes heated debates) about the story as it evolved through the writing and later editing processes but I shall attempt to highlight the most relevant of these through what follows. Suffice to say that developing a story and writing a screenplay is as collaborative an endeavour as the rest of filmmaking and I wish to briefly puncture the myth of the screenwriter who immaculately conceives of their finished screenplay in isolation. At each stage Associate Professor Hoyer offered invaluable notes on *The Limits of Consent,* highlighting what worked, what did not work, carefully nudging me to 'squeeze more juice out of the lemon,' as he put it.

conventions dictated. I had conceived of multiple endings which were variations of the trajectory I had set for my protagonist embroiled in this plot; these were, however, *alternative endings* rather than *diverse* endings.

Alternative endings go back hundreds of years. There is the very famous example of *Romeo and Juliet*,[317] which for centuries after Shakespeare's death was performed with a rewritten happy ending that effectively reversed the original tragic ending, where both protagonists survived.[318] There is also the example of the 1637 tragedy, *Aglaura,* by John Suckling, which has two endings: one for the royal court where an ahistorical King of Persia survives, and another for the popular audience where the same king is killed.[319] Whether a protagonist dies at the end of the story or not is no small matter, but it is perhaps the most obvious consideration for a narrative's climax and offers two essential alternatives rather than a plurality. What more can be offered to *Romeo and Juliet* within this parameter? An ending where Juliet lives but Romeo dies? Or vice versa? It is already sounding rather dull.

In recent years, DVDs searching for bonus features to help sell ageing films on a different format often offered alternative endings as part of a collection of deleted scenes. Frequently though, these alternative endings proved to be cosmetic and therefore trimmed for time; faulty somehow and therefore needing to be re-shot; or merely decided in the context of whether the film should end on an uplifting note or a downbeat one. These alternative endings remain curiosities for fans of the film but offer either deficient, cosmetic, or mood-change alternatives. I wanted the endings I offered to be none of these, thus I revised my mantra: all roads must lead to *distinct* drama.

I aimed to offer my audience a diversity of narrative possibilities with this multiple-ending format. Anna's trajectory would end up in potentially very different places because I began to shift away from the conventions of dramatic storytelling and offered the audience a story result which could not be traced so directly back to the start of the causal chain. It was not yet a conscious embrace of anti-drama but was already beginning the process of shifting away from the thought that any ending must be essentially dramatic.

By the third and fourth drafts of the step outline, the divergent/re-convergent lines were gone; in their place remained only a bifurcating structure continuing to eight separate endings. I completely committed to Ryan's *tree structure.* However, one difference with these versions compared to the others was that it was written with a grand split in the story. It effectively had a very short trunk and the first decision

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317 William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet," in *The Plays and Sonnets of William Shakespeare: Volume One*, eds. William George Clarke and William Aldis Wright (The University of Chicago, 1952): 285-319.

318 Jill Levenson, *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71.

319 Brian Richardson, "Endings in Drama and Performance: A Theoretical Model," in *Current Trends in Narratology,* ed. Greta Olson. (De Gruyter, 2011): 190.

the audience would make would send the film in distinctly different directions. Both followed Anna, but the plot, location, her goals, and the final endings were aeons apart—literally.

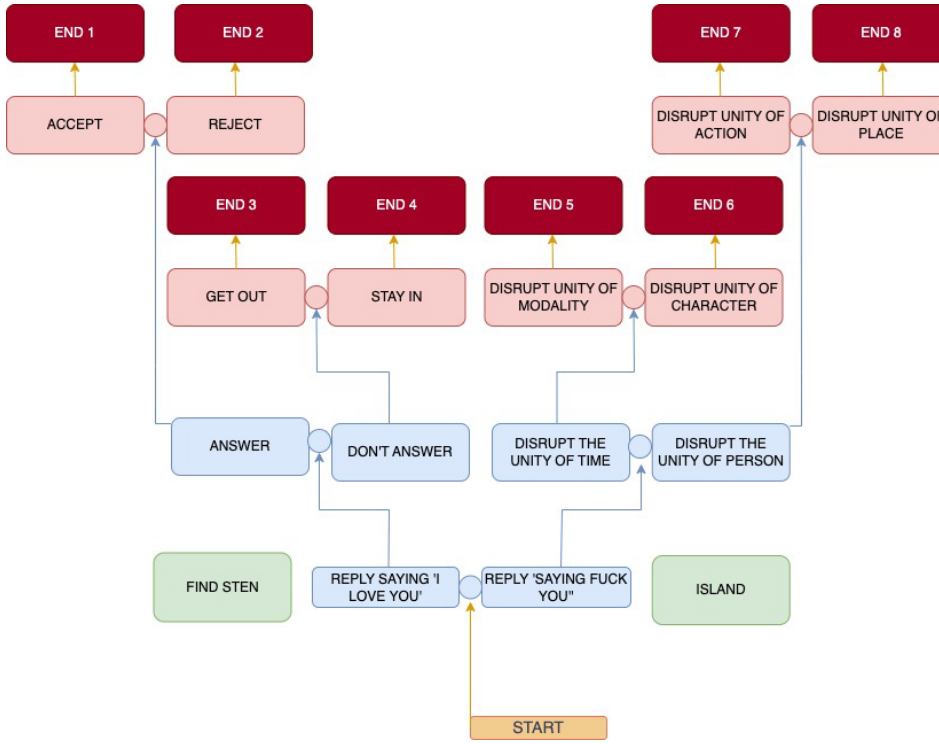

Figure 6. Structure of the fourth step outline of *The Limits of Consent.*

One story was a more developed version of the Find Sten/Resist Mart story which would lead finally to four variations on the ending instead of eight in the previous draft. Now each of the endings were markedly different from one another, choosing the most extreme or interesting variations and eliminating the shades—*all roads lead to distinct drama.* The other story would see Anna leave the airport after Mart's text saying he is not coming to meet her; instead of going home and discovering that Sten has had a meltdown, Anna spontaneously hijacks a woman's identity by impersonating her, takes a private taxi, and leaves the airport. From there she is taken to a creepy spa on a remote island. On one bough and later branch of this story, Anna is killed by the woman whose identity she stole and then that woman steals Anna's identity and seduces Mart when he comes to look for his missing lover. On another bough and later branch Anna survives but realises that time on the island is moving exponentially faster than on the mainland. When Anna returns to the mainland, she finds all the cities of Estonia overrun by nature and the human race gone. This version of the film took place in divergent temporal space in which

time moves at different speeds depending on where the characters are.[320] There need not be a unification of time in an unnatural narrative, so to speak, and thus I could embrace that unnaturalness. I could begin to employ anti-drama.

Anti-drama had become an active consideration in the writing process. Killing the protagonist in the middle of her story or making her fall into a time dilation trap which would not be hinted at in the first act shifted the diecetic centre in an unexpected way. When adopted by a writer-director, any dramatic trajectory is pregnant with a foreclosing dramatic end. Anti-dramatic considerations were allowing me to move away from that inevitability by forgoing the trajectory entirely at different intervals. This meant that I was able to write a high-tech thriller with a dramatic protagonist in a dramatic structure which co-existed with a creepy island-based chiller with a largely passive protagonist overwhelmed by mystical forces following Lynchian plot logic.

To relate this concept to *Mulholland Drive*, it would be as if I were to offer the audience a chance to see how Betty's story in that film would pan out in a more conventional way without the darkly magical recasting in the middle of the film and find more straightforward answers to the dramatic questions the film raises. But this new interactive *Mulholland Drive* could still diverge before that point and embrace the puzzling weirdness of a Lynchian narrative as it stands in the unilinear version. Both versions of the film could coexist.

This sort of structural diversity appealed to me more because it meant that *the interactivity held real narrative consequences rather than cosmetic differences.* My intention had been for the audience to make choices which would send the film on a definite trajectory which would lead them to a definite and diverse conclusion, still following the stages of set-up, confrontation, and resolution, but with twists and about-turns. There would be no need for the incurious audience to re-watch, but curious audience members still could and would receive a almost entirely different film experience as a consequence if they rewatched (especially if they changed their choice at the very first node—something I calculated would be very likely on second viewing).

THE ECHO OF A STRUCTURE

In summary, first and foremost, I was making a film which happened to be interactive rather than an interactive story which happened to be a film. In this sense, I had begun with a protagonist and her need; an antagonist and the conflict he generated; then added a physical goal and a three-act structure with all the ability it provides to regulate arousal. Structure, indeed, dominated my early concerns which meant that

[320] Brian Richardson, "Unnatural Stories and Sequences," in *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative,* eds. Jan Alber, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Brian Richardson (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 21.

the film began *from a structural perspective* rather than any other and the result was that I thought about the interactivity only in relation to the film's structure (rather than a character perspective, for example).

This is significant because it was not until later in the research process that I began to read about the other interactive structures I outlined in Chapter 2. I sensed the problem of predetermination and re-watchability with my initial *flow chart* structure and phased it out over the first three drafts and settled on the *tree structure*; but some of the other structures which Marie-Laure Ryan and Gwendolyn Ogle parsed out in their analysis of interactive narratives were never actively considered which in hindsight could have been useful or, at least, could have generated quite different outcomes. Because I was writing an interactive film as a film first and foremost, I had gravitated towards the *tree structure* with an ignorant mind because it seemed to readily allow for greater plot coherence, as had already been demonstrated by the branching narratives I was used to seeing in unilinear films. It also meant that the film, if re-watched, could be meaningfully different on second or even third viewings. But I embraced the *tree structure* at the unwitting exclusion of other possible structures. The plot was still being thought about in terms of dramatic structures in a way which would have been less likely with another interactive structure like the *network*, for example.

As I embraced the *tree structure*, I more actively considered interactivity and how to ensure that the choices were meaningful and that the film would be rewardingly re-watchable in its diversity. Interactivity disrupted the ordinary considerations of writing a film so that I effectively found myself writing two completely different stories with the same first sequence as a compensatory move. I still see this as a potentially very useful way to use interactivity in writing a film and the tantalising possibility of having two almost unique stories (one more dramatic and one more anti-dramatic) co-existing in one film is sadly one idea I was unable to bring to fruition due to concerns about production complexity and budgets. Still, making the *tree structure* work seemed to require a diversity to ensure meaningful choices; it was not only forcing me to create two stories for the film but also a diversity of endings within those two stories which would be carried over into the screenwriting phase.

In the next chapter, I examine how, as the screenwriting process began, a new problem emerged as I focused my attention on the characters and, in particular, the protagonist. As I diversified the different branches more and more and added greater and greater detail to the story, the protagonist and supporting characters began to gain complexity, too. With the emergence of Anna as a more viable protagonist a new problem took shape in my mind: how could more than one viable version of the protagonist exist in the same story? How could two radically different trajectories exist for one unified protagonist? The unity of the dramatic protagonist was coming undone, and my next compensatory move would attempt to forestall this problem with an embrace of meta nodes which gave the audience a chance to play with the mechanics of the story and allowed the protagonist to disappear.

4. THE DISAPPEARING PROTAGONIST

The protagonist of *The Limits of Consent*, Anna, emerged initially from the plot in which she was embroiled. The pliant cypher of the early drafts of the step outline was being slowly endowed with character traits based on how she reacted to circumstances in the story. As Walter Besant and Henry James famously put it, '[w]hat is character but the determination of incident? What is the incident, but the illustration of character?'[321] In this reciprocal movement, the protagonist had begun as a mechanism of the plot and that plot had shaped her with certain characteristics which were now taking on a life of their own and, in turn, shaping said plot.

Anna at this stage was a dramatic protagonist with a physical goal and an emotional need and a definite trajectory. She was formed of a dramatic three-act structure which had naturally merged with the bivious *tree structure*. Anna's definite trajectory was present in every draft of the film; I continuously intuited that there was one definite end which matched the trajectory I had set for her. But if that was so, then what were the other trajectories and the other endings which interactivity was continuously forcing me to consider? What was interactivity doing to my protagonist?

Anna's main character trait, her manipulative nature, was coming to the foreground, and I tried to write evidence of this into every scene of the third and fourth drafts of the step outlines. This version of Anna would consciously adapt to everyone she encountered to manipulate them and fulfil her goal, and only with Mart was she truly herself. The paradoxical allure and repellence of an adulterous relationship was still more than a mere part of her, it was and remains the core of Anna's character: Anna's need to couple with an unobtainable man was also generating the need to decouple from the same man which then regenerated the initial need. However, with the introduction of interactivity, playing out the options for this self-negating need highlighted a seemingly untenable duality within the protagonist.

This seeming untenability became clear when Anna in one branch was not the same Anna in the other branch. Exploring all the permutations of Anna obtaining or losing her goal/emotional need meant that in one branch Anna wholly rejected Mart and therefore concentrated on finding Sten (her suicidal client) and consequently saved his life; meanwhile, in another branch, Anna became a sex puppet for Mart's wife by surrendering to Mart completely (in this branch Sten was reported to have successfully killed himself offscreen). Nothing in either branch would justify such a drastic change in Anna's personality or that she could be so forthrightly determined and at the same time be cowardly in acquiescence depending on which branches of the story were explored. How could such different Annas coexist within the same film without a substantially differing parallel universe at play or the kind of black magical intervention David Lynch devised for *Mulholland Drive*?

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[321] Walter Besant and Henry James. *Art of Fiction* (Boston, MA: Cupples and Hurd and The Algonquin Press, 1884), 69.

This was a question I could not immediately answer, but it seemed odd that relatively small choices could lead to such drastically different results for the character, that part of the essence of the character—her inner strength and ability to manipulate others—could be forfeited so easily on a different branch. Did this not inherently mean that the audience was effectively lifting the bonnet of the character's engine and making major revisions along the way? Did this not effectively make the film a meta film? How else could two versions of the same character inhabit the same story? How could there be *two Annas*? There was a definite tension between a dual desire: on the one hand, I want a diverse and divergent set of possibilities and results for my interactivity to increase re-watchability and make the interactivity meaningful (because I am making an interactive film); on the other hand, I want a coherent character who makes sense and stands as an individual in her own right (because I am still making a film first and foremost).

In this chapter, I focus on how, as the writing process moved to the screenplay, the protagonist and other characters (most notably the antagonist and secondary protagonist) took on greater and greater shape and the problem of *two Annas* became more and more pronounced, leading me to increasingly and transparently play with anti-drama on other branches of the film in order to ensure that one particular branch and one particular ending would remain the *one true order of the film's events which would lead to the* one-true-ending *thus maintaining the unity of the protagonist and the film as a whole.* The other endings would effectively detour the audience away from this unified bough, branch, and ending and thus defend their privileged status within the interactive system I was devising. My primary anti-dramatic strategy to ensure this on the other branches and in other endings *was to make the protagonist disappear*.

THE CONTRADICTORY PROTAGONIST

As a writer-director, I most often begin the writing process with a focus on the plot. The pliant cyphers of the first drafts of the step-outline are endowed with a greater number of character traits, backstories, and definite motivations as the plot is shaped. As the process continues and moves from writing the step outline to writing the screenplay, the characters begin to speak and develop clearer habits, voices, and characteristics. If they are developed enough, then at some point they begin to shape the plot in the way that the plot first shaped them. This often occurs when the character is more definitely endowed with a character contradiction.

Character contradiction assists in audience recognition of a character as an analogue of a real person and not just a bundle of inert character traits;[322] it is something most of us can recognise in people we know well enough, that there is something within them and their behaviour which does *not quite make sense*; a contrast between what they say and what they do, what people say about them and how they are,

[322] Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 82.

or behaviours in one set of circumstances in contrast to very different behaviours in another set of circumstances. It is one of the methods for creating what E.M. Forster described as a round character,[323] a term he coined for novelists which still has its utility for writer-directors despite itself, ironically, being a simplification. Flat characters, in Forster's thinking, are still useful for most narratives as they are easily summarised and most often facilitate plot, remain simple, and do not develop—there is not space for every character to be deeply illustrated, after all. Round characters are the opposite and cannot be easily summarised or understood in their entirety—they defy easy categorisation and perpetually surprise.

For Richard Dyer, there is a similar division between the type and the novelistic character; the type is a character who is recognisable through some unchanging defining traits, which indicate the generalities of the human world; meanwhile, the novelistic character is defined by a multiplicity of traits which are slowly revealed as the narrative unfolds, a narrative built around the growth or development of said character.[324] In Western society, the novelistic character is privileged; thus if a film addresses social issues, it tends, nevertheless, to elaborate the story of a singular individual, short-circuiting back from social issues to personal ones,[325] illustrating broader points with ones applicable to the protagonist or other supporting characters.

The round or novelistic character who goes beyond the stereotype and surprises the audience does so because they contradict themselves. Murray Smith argues that some audience members find characters plausible because they maintain stereotypes they hold in their minds, while other audience members find characters plausible because they go beyond the familiar type.[326] As a writer-director who embraces liberality as a sentiment, I have always favoured the latter of these two strategies as I prefer to believe that human beings are *always* more complex than they first appear.

However, if managed incorrectly, the risk of this strategy is that the character becomes intolerably incoherent. The irreconcilable parts of the protagonist's self are untenably separate, and thus the character does not make *less sense* but seems to make *no sense*, in which case the film will no longer be effective in conveying its narrative because a diametrically and irreconcilably contradicted protagonist will prove a perpetual distraction. If the protagonist does something against what has been established as her nature without any hint that such an act is possible, it will at best only lead to questions about why the protagonist did such a thing, and at worst be thought of as poor and lazy writing where unmotivated acts are permitted because they are necessary for the development of the plot.

As I began to write the earliest drafts of the screenplay, large swathes of the story set out in the last draft of the step outline—which would have required a huge cast and

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323 E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 81.

324 Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes," in *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 208.

325 Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes," 208.

326 Smith, *Engaging Characters,* 116-117.

had unworkable logistical challenges baked into them—were cut. Shrinkage of the story's scope was inevitable as a film developed primarily for a PhD; the film was limited from a financial perspective which naturally had repercussions for the whole production. *The Limits of Consent* is ultimately a micro-budget film and, as such, it was immediately apparent that the canvas I had set out in my later step outlines were too grand. Things needed to be scaled back.

I set to work on writing out the first portion of the step outline as a screenplay with the intention of filming a proof-of-concept short film with two endings. The plan was to use this short film to raise more funds for the film proper. This plan was abandoned as the screenwriting process continued and I intuitively continued to write the screenplay until a much more intimate version of the story emerged as a medium-length film. This version of the film no longer focused on a strong physical goal for the protagonist, but was more interested in observing a woman in the midst of simultaneous professional success and personal failure.

The plots of step outlines had been focused on something going wrong with Anna's work rather than examining the nature of her work itself. I felt that Anna's work itself was also fascinating enough to sustain more of the story; the psychology of a person who would act as a purveyor of sexual fantasies, who customises the seduction process so that all sides are satisfied, was a rich vein into which I could tap. So what had only been a single Post-it note on my drafts of the step outline—a scene where Anna from a control van told Sten what to say and do in a bar to seduce a beautiful woman—became the longest single scene in the film; and even by the final edit, if watched from the beginning to an ending, almost a third of the runtime is spent in the bar as Anna manipulates a stranger into sleeping with her client.[327]

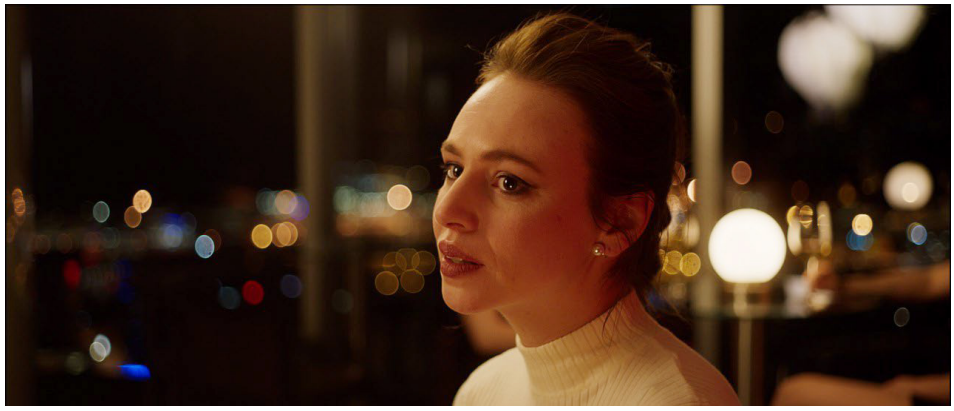

Figure 7. Liis (Jaanika Arum) makes her speech about lifelines.

[327] Appendix A *Start* 00:00:51-10:00; Appendix D: scenes 6-8 pages 3-15.

The scene developed over eleven drafts of the screenplay, but the essence remained the same: Anna is helping Sten to seduce Liis (an off-duty police officer), and to achieve this goal, Anna (through Sten) begins to speak of the death of Liis's father. The gap between Anna and Liis collapses and it is as though they are speaking directly to one another. Liis discusses the danger of a lifeline when sailing alone (Anna has manipulated the conversation so that it has been dominated by the topic of sailing because Liis's father was a sailor); Liis points out that if you are sailing alone then a lifeline can have the opposite effect to its design function:

> If you're sailing alone the lifeline can be deadly. If you fall off the boat in the middle of the sea and land in the water someone might find you. If you fall off attached to the lifeline then you just hang there, tethered to the boat, exposed to the elements while your boat sails onward with no-one at the helm. With no-one to pull you back on board.[328]

This moment was inspired by conversations I had had with a consummate sailor who noted the irony about the deadly lifeline for a solitary sailor (a fact which I understand to be well-known in sailing circles). It leaped into the screenplay as I improvised an early draft of the seduction in the bar, and then this story found its way to being woven into the fabric of the story itself as an image which would recur throughout the screenplay which would be elaborated on differently across the different endings.

In the screenplay, Sten (the client) turned from a predatory figure seeking revenge to an awkward and nervous man who cannot speak to a woman he's attracted to without help, while Liis (the target of the seduction) took increasing shape and was turned into a police officer at the suggestion of my primary supervisor in order to raise the stakes. Liis was wrestling with grief over the death of her father. This fact became the reason she is seeking a thrill in this high-class bar on New Year's Eve (her presence there previously had never been explained). It is that very same grief which Anna sets out to exploit in a sort of quasi-Freudian move; positioning Sten as the replacement father to better seduce this grieving woman. But what kind of woman would think to do such a thing?

For the screenwriter, there is the question of whether Anna's motivations need to be parsed out at all or whether that is something for the director to consider when working with the actors. Certainly, as a writer-director, I considered her motivations but perhaps did not linger on any of the answers because behavioural consistency is more important to me during the screenwriting stage. I wanted to ensure the plausibility of Anna behaving one way in one situation and the same way in another similar situation. If something in her behaviour seems fallacious or seems to be

[328] Appendix A *Start* 00:09:12-10:00; Appendix D Scene 8 page 15.

included solely for the machinations of the plot rather than the protagonist's nascent psychology, that is one of the points where the screenplay is floundering and needs some kind of corrective. As the screenwriting process continued, the character began determining the incidents more than the incidents were determining the character.

By the final draft of the screenplay, Anna had become a much richer character. Anna needs money; she mentions this repeatedly and precursory scenes show her attempting to sell her ex-husband's boat.[329] Anna leaves the bar and goes to meet her secret lover, Mart, at the airport. In an early draft, Mart was texting Anna and telling her what to do as she moved through the airport (the same way she was telling Sten what to do); in later drafts, these roles were reversed; Anna continues to guide Sten remotely from the airport while texting Mart and playing a game of cat and mouse with him simultaneously.[330] The scenario is taken to an extreme as Anna guides Sten in an extended act of cunnilingus while she simultaneously moves through the various sections of the airport: check-in, security, finding your gate, etc. Finally, Anna meets Mart and has sex with him in a public toilet;[331] it is clear that Anna is being used. Afterwards, Anna laughs it off and is happy to see her man. But the following questions are raised: what kind of woman is she, and what kind of man is he?

FROM FUNCTIONARIES OF THE PLOT TO CHARACTERS

Anna is abandoned by Mart at the airport gate.[332] What happens next went through numerous revisions as I attempted to find Mart's character, perhaps the most elusive of the main cast. All through the step outlines, Mart remained a man drawn to Anna who did not have her best intentions at heart. He was using her for his gratification. But he could not stop himself from using her either. He was being destructive towards another human being but could not control himself. Why? Where did this behaviour come from? My primary supervisor noted in a development session that Mart was merely a shadow and encouraged my idea to make Mart a more of sadistic player of games who is manipulating Anna for his amusement; however, when I tried this in a draft, it weakened Anna to an extent I was not comfortable with and so I took another direction with his character. I turned Mart into Anna's therapist.

Anna is drawn to an unobtainable man, but Mart is also drawn to an unobtainable woman. Mart went from being a married man having an affair with a married woman (the *Brief Encounter* genesis) to being a married therapist having a relationship with his single client, but its essence remained the same: both characters enjoy playing with fire and both characters understand that they might get burnt. In discussions about the backstories with the actors who ultimately played these roles (Karin

329 Appendix D: scene 4 pages 2-3.
330 Appendix D: scenes 10-14 page 17-23. Anna's texting of Mart was filmed but cut for pace.
331 Appendix A: *Start* 00:13:46-16:00:01; Appendix D: scene 15 Pages 23-4.
332 Appendix A: *Start* 00:17:03; Appendix D: scene 16 pages 24-6.

Rask and Rain Tolk),[333] the motivations were clear. Anna is having an affair with Mart because she can keep the relationship contained to their once-a-week therapy sessions and in her mind resists the emotional entanglements which hurt her during her divorce; meanwhile, Mart is desperately unhappy in a dull marriage and has given into temptation with Anna, and must continue to escalate their relationship because to de-escalate it is to risk his career. But it is indeed more complex than this even as both sides spill across into the other: Anna seeks Mart out at the airport for the very emotional complication which she tries to avoid after Mart calls her to confess his love, seeking a greater connection with the woman he is terrified of wounding.

In this scenario, Mart had become trapped in the relationship because he was both drawn to Anna and was worried that she would expose his malpractice should something go awry. It loaded Mart further as a figure of trust for Anna and highlighted the contradiction between Anna as a woman who understands the game of love and plays it precisely in the professional sphere but is a total disaster in the private sphere; it did so without crushing Anna into someone weak, into a woman who can be humiliated by her man. Instead, Anna here became someone who can pick herself up when she is knocked down, still a hard-nosed professional with minimal scruples, but one as vulnerable to manipulation and a prick to the heart as anyone else.

In the final draft of the screenplay, Anna finds herself on a plane to Berlin, waiting for Mart to join her, when she receives an SMS from him informing her that he is not coming; she rushes off the plane just in time and into the airport only to discover him with his arms around another woman. She collapses onto a nearby airport bench and begins to cry.[334] Her lover is not joining her on the trip after all and has chosen to humiliate her instead.

Naturally enough, the characters transform, develop, and are generally fleshed out as they move from step outline to screenplay. This was not only true for Anna and Mart, but for Liis as well. The secondary protagonist was also becoming rounded and novelistic rather than a functionary of the plot; it also necessitated long discussions with the actor who played her (Jaanika Arum) to understand her motivations and the source of her unhappiness. As the protagonist of the subplot, Liis is a complimentary figure to Anna while being the object of Anna's instrumentalising goal; in this sense, Liis is useful for illustrating many of the film's themes through a contrastive position.

As the screenplay developed, it involved Anna finding out more about Liis, which, naturally enough, involved the screenwriter finding out more about her, too. Liis is a subplot protagonist; her story mirrors and compliments Anna's story and becomes enmeshed with Anna's story in (hopefully) unpredictable ways. Liis is in a relationship with a lawyer, she's a police officer, and volunteered for national service; her father was a sailor and died of cancer the previous year; through her

[333] See Appendix C for the full cast and crew list.

[334] Appendix D: scene 17-18A pages 26-28.

actions in the story, the audience understands that she is an unfaithful person who has sex with another man while her partner is absent. Like Anna, she cannot leave a relationship which makes her unhappy. Unlike Anna, she is a professional who helps people and is the person who cheats rather than the person cheated on. Finally, both Anna and Liis are trying to overcome events in their past (ex-husband leaving her for a younger woman and father dying, respectively) and both are trying to do this by replacing these men of the past with other men in the present.

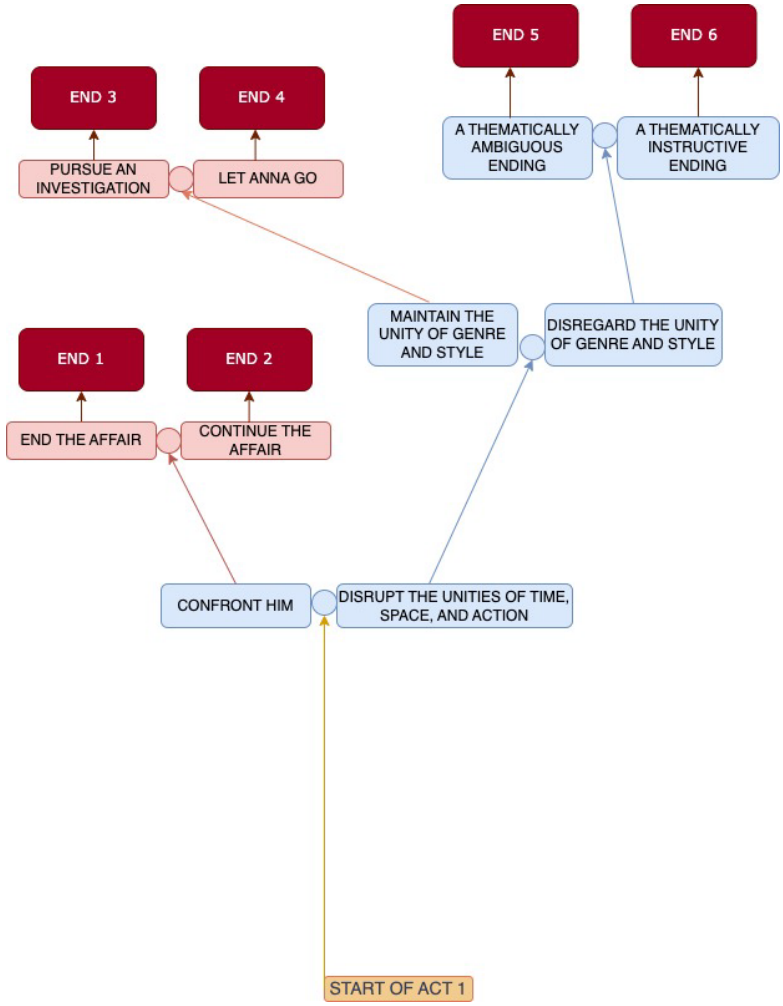

Figure 8. Structure of the final draft of the screenplay of *The Limits of Consent.*

At a certain point in the process, I reached a cognitive impasse which I was unable to push beyond immediately. Both of these characters had become more and more complete in my mind, containing contradictions, surprising me with their choices, and seeming to act autonomously of the plot. With each successive draft, the problem became more and more pronounced as the characters took on greater and greater qualities, the problem I can now articulate is this: *if the character is as close to a real human being as I can possibly make them, if they are an accurate representation of a human being, making choices because they have been crafted to a level of detail where these choices are natural, then the moment that they reach a node there should be only one viable choice which can be made.*

ONE VIABLE CHOICE

There were *two Annas* in the final drafts of the step outline. They were starting to make less sense as a unified person already. Anna had many possibilities before her and what she did after receiving that fateful text message informing her she had been abandoned by her lover would lead her to vastly disparate outcomes; this divergence made less and less sense to me during the screenwriting stage. Despite having embarked upon writing an inherently irrational narrative with multiple forking realities, my instinct was to make it make sense within parameters I understood already within screenwriting practice; my instinct was to write vertically more than laterally, logically rather than irrationally because it felt safer to do so. My instinct, which I was blind to at the time, was to *make Anna make more sense*; to make her cohere; to make her a dramatic protagonist for a unilinear film with one true trajectory and one true ending.

The problem is obvious: how can there be two viable choices for a well-written character? To clarify with an example: if Anna has been established as a no-nonsense manipulator who does not suffer fools gladly, then how, when she discovers her lover with another woman, is it possible that she will continue her affair with him? The version of Anna who has been detailed during the screenwriting process would not tolerate anyone humiliating her in such a fashion, and thus in one draft of the screenplay when Anna either exposes Mart's adulterous affair to his wife or walks away from the scene crying, an uncomfortable feeling rose within me that the latter choice was not viable for her character. It was a contradiction of action rather than a contradiction of traits and thus a risk that Anna would fall into inconsistency.

Liis provides an example of how this problem could be avoided. Anna is seducing Liis with information gleaned from her social media accounts and manufacturing a connection between her and Sten by hijacking Liis's grief at the death of her father. Liis will take Sten to bed and have sex with him to feel this connection again. As one version of events runs its course, Sten is convinced to continue with Liis and they have sex.[335] In another version of events, Sten confesses before they have sex,

[335] Appendix A: *Take the Call (again)*; Appendix D: scene 11 page 19.

Figure 9. Sten (Jaanus Tepomees) confesses to Liis.

and Liis, affronted by the move and the instrumentalisation of her grief, calls in a prosecutor to see if Anna can be brought to justice for this perceived crime.[336] Both of these branches of the film's narrative are viable because Liis is at once a woman in grief and a woman confronted by someone trying to use that grief against her; because she is vulnerable but also because she is a police officer and former military officer with a heightened sense of justice and a diminished sense of passivity. Liis is a contradictory character who can exist on both these branches. However, the viable choice problem is circumvented for Liis not because of the details of her character but because it is *not her choice* which leads to the divergence. It is Sten's choice to confess or not and Sten is a much slimmer character who we barely know anything about and thus does not provoke the problem of viability. Liis is merely reacting to different stimuli but her reactions still make sense.

At a later branch node of the film, when Liis is asked whether she wishes to pursue a prosecution of Anna and risk her career and her love life, it is her choice and only one choice is truly viable—the one where she decides to take the risk because of her highly attuned sense of justice and her sense of effrontery at being used. If Liis had been less developed, if Liis had been a cipher without any real sense of agency, backstory, or repeated behaviour tied to the development of the plot, then certainly either decision could be viable because we would know so little about her. In other words, it seemed to me at the time of writing, that to make both of these choices viable for Liis, I would need to strip her of everything that makes her her. A blank canvas can become anything, a half-painted canvas has fewer options. Thus, *the more I developed the characters and gave them context, the greater the difficulties became in presenting more than one viable choice to any one of those characters.*

This perceived screenwriting difficulty, that there is only one viable choice for a well-drawn character, was pondered and overcome in several successive ways. Handing

[336] Appendix A: *Ignore the Call;* Appendix D: scene 31-32 page 42-4.

the choice to the less developed character was one option; another was to have the character break the fourth wall and confront the audience if the wrong decision is made as is the case when the audience decides that Liis should hide the truth.[337] But the progenitor of both of these strategies was the strategy to make the protagonist *disappear from the story*.

ANNA DISAPPEARS VIA THE META-NODES

Anna had to decide to proceed in *one* direction because to make her proceed in the other direction was to strip her of her very nature. That one direction, by the final draft of the screenplay, saw Anna destroying her relationship with Mart by seducing Mart's wife in an act of revenge which utilised all her skills as a master manipulator. This is more or less the same ending which developed through production and changed in no significant manner in post-production either. In the screenplay, it was the first ending the reader came to; in the editing process, we listed it as 'Ending 1' in a non-hierarchical numbering system to ease logistical and organisational problems; but in my mind, it remained the *one-true-ending*. To borrow from Linda Aronson again, it is the ending which resolved her relationship line satisfactorily; the story's major dilemma was concluded in a make-or-break instance, a 'do-or-die' culmination of the third act.[338] The solution to the narrative's problem came from the protagonist herself: Anna reclaims the mantle of master in the game of sex by manipulating Mart off his plane and then manipulating a stranger into a passionate night with Mart's wife.[339] By doing so, Anna breaks with her toxic need. What this meant was that in all other cases, the audience had somehow broken the film and the logic of the film began to fail. Anna remains in the story if the audience chooses with Anna and fulfils her destiny; Anna exits the story if the audience chooses against her.

The *disappearing protagonist* strategy was facilitated via *meta* nodes rather than *agentic* ones. A node itself does not require an agentic dimension to be a node;[340] they are far more flexible even if the agentic node was the most intuitive approach for me. *Agentic nodes* put the audience in the position of making a decision for the perspective character; meanwhile, *meta nodes* offer a chance to explore, to an even greater extent, what interactivity might mean on the surface of such a story. This had already come about in the final draft of the step outline where I began to change the nature of the nodes themselves and broke with one assumption that I had made until then—that the nodes were based on the character's behaviour and their actions. Because, as a media of attraction, the interactive film is seamed very clearly by the node, my thought was to embrace the seam through the transparent acknowledgement that *The Limits of Consent* is a work of fiction within the nodes themselves. In other words, the nodes were already disrupting the narrative flow,

337 Appendix A: *Hide the Truth*; Appendix D: scene 38: Page 46-7.
338 Aronson, *21st Century Screenplay*, 114.
339 Appendix A *Choose the Rugged Man;* Appendix D: scenes 20-4A pages 31-6.
340 Bode and Dietrich, *Future Narratives*, 17

so why not foreground that disruption? Thus, in the final draft of the step-outline I began to formulate nodes with choices such as:

(A) Disrupt unity of modality

(B) Disrupt unity of time

My primary supervisor had enjoyed my first attempt at meta-nodes and encouraged me to explore them more; we had both agreed at the time that interactivity which reflected on the nature of story itself was a potentially fruitful development. Meta nodes lift the bonnet on the story engine and begin to tamper with the mechanics of the narrative. So, on the now abandoned island plot of the story, the audience would be invited to select various meta-level incursions into the story space. For example, if audience selects (B), the style of the film would change into a mockumentary about the events on the island (something completely out of place with the rest of the film).

The concept of the meta node would eventually prove problematic in post-production and both my primary supervisor and I would recant our enthusiasm for such nodes (see the next chapter); but at this point in the screenwriting process, it seemed entirely natural that if something as alien as interactivity is introduced to what would otherwise be a unilinear dramatic film, it would, effectively, break the mechanics of the film. Thus, the choices in the screenplay moved and developed. I trace these movements and changes in detail here to show just how much the nature of the node itself affected the plot and the characters and was affected by the plot and the characters over successive drafts:

In the first draft, Anna is waiting at the gate for Mart; he writes to her:

> Anna, I can't come with you. It's not the right time for me to leave my wife. Go to Germany. The hotel is paid for in full. Have fun and a happy new year.

Anna then puts her phone into her pocket. She blushes to the roots and looks around, breathing deeply as she tries to control her emotions. Anna takes a seat and the node appears on the screen:

(A) REPLY 'Where are you? I love you. Come back. Don't do this.'

(B) REPLY 'Coward. Go fuck yourself'

Between (A) and (B) we see instantly an extreme difference. Anyone who has ever been hurt by someone they love might have felt this duality; anyone who has been in a toxic relationship almost certainly has. This is the sort of unity in opposition I wanted to capture in this moment, where one can just as easily feel contempt and hatred as love and care. Yet I still could not escape the nagging feeling that the extremities were untenable. My experience told me that even if one selects (B) then (A) will usually follow and circumvent (B) shortly thereafter because that is

the nature of a toxic relationship; the duality I was highlighting is precisely one which cannot be separated thusly, it must exist together, it is that togetherness of the extreme positions which feeds it and keeps it alive.

In the second draft, the opposition of actions remained but became more visually interesting than someone texting, because while we increasingly live on our phones in real life, in a film it remains rather dull to watch. I also began to consider how much time the audience member would have to read the choices and tried to simplify them as a consequence:

(A) Look for him in the Airport

(B) Go home

Here (A) had the possibility of extending the drama while (B) worryingly had the potential to abbreviate it. In life, many of us will contort ourselves and our values to avoid a conflict, but in drama the opposite tendency is often necessary to further the story. This choice was the difference between confrontation and surrender but the confrontation was not clear at this point and was an unnecessary truncation as was noted at the time in a development session.

By Draft 3 of the screenplay, Anna would either leave the airport disappointed and meet Sten to talk about money the next day, or go to a taxi marked for Liis Lepik and effectively become the character of Liis; she and Sten would then have sex but through Sten's eyes Anna still looked like Liis. In Draft 4, this had extended one step further so that in one ending Anna became Liis and in another ending Anna became Sten. In these endings, Anna would either have sex with Liis or Sten, and then break the fourth wall and tell the audience that this woman looks like her but it is not really her or not. The concept was that Anna was controlling Sten or Liis from a distance and now that distance had manifestly collapsed as the film became more irrational and started to employ anti-dramatic techniques. It was an external contradiction being applied to the character from beyond the story space; unfortunately, its progenitor was all too clear.

When the logic of a story breaks down and becomes increasingly strange, it seems I have a tendency to turn to David Lynch and his puzzle films. Ultimately, these endings resembled the body swaps of *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*[341] too much. I needed to step away from Lynchian moves and find some of my own. Thus, by Draft 5 the interactivity was in place and the story moved into a refinement stage until Draft 11. By Draft 5B, the first node had changed more radically as I resurrected the meta nodes from the later drafts of the step outline:

(A) Confront him.

(B) Disrupt the Unity of Time and Place

[341] *Lost Highway* directed by David Lynch (Asymmetrical Productions, 1997).

Here the invitation was explicit: Anna wants to confront Mart (by this draft she was more dramatically catching him with another woman at another gate rather than receiving a text message. Everything that we have witnessed about Anna so far—her confidence in work and sex and her disregard for speaking about private matters in public spaces—tells the audience that (A) is the choice Anna would make and thus (B) became explicitly a meta-level choice which would explicitly take the audience on the irrational anti-dramatic branch of the story.

In interactive narratives, the form draws attention to itself and therefore its artificiality,[342] so why not highlight this seam (a key feature of what Rebecca Rouse referred to as *media of attraction,* a term which it could be argued encompasses *The Limits of Consent*). However, whereas previously the meta choice had emerged as an explicit acknowledgment of the seam, it held no narrative justification; here, at least in my mind, it was tied more concretely to an inaction within the story. *Go against my carefully crafted protagonist and receive anti-drama. Or, in other words, refuse Anna's agency and break the film.*

This would not be the end of the reformulating process for this node. Reformulations continued through the remaining drafts of the screenplay and well into post-production. This particular node was still being changed mere hours before the film was finalised for its first submission to a film festival. But as the screenplay drafting process ended and the film moved forward into production, Anna stepped out of the film for the different endings of the final draft of the screenplay. She disappeared, bit by bit.

Ending 1 of the final draft of the screenplay (as detailed above) sees Anna triumphantly walking away from the man who scorned her.[343] It is the only ending of the film where Anna is directly present. Ending 2 is more comedic, despite its tragic outcome; this ending sees Anna speaking to Mart via a different proxy but this time the real Anna is never seen; this proxy is more mischievous and independent of Anna than the proxy in Ending 1, and even interjects and makes comments directly to Anna, who is offscreen for the entire sequence. Mart and Anna eventually agree to continue their affair, but Anna effectively has a different face, voice, and gender to the Anna we have followed throughout the rest of the film. Mart and the proxy briefly continue to speak after Anna has signed off.[344]

Endings 3 and 4 shift the focus to Liis and Sten. Here, the development of Liis as a secondary protagonist allowed me to write endings centred on her and the subplot. In Ending 3 she pursues a prosecution of Anna (offscreen)[345] and in Ending 4 does the

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[342] Alice Bell, "Ontological Boundaries and Methodological Leaps: The Importance of Possible Worlds Theory for Hypertext Fiction (and Beyond)," in *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age,* eds. Ruth Page and Thomas Bronwen (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 67.

[343] Appendix A: *Choose the Rugged Man* 00:04:41; Appendix D: scene 23: page 34.

[344] Appendix A: *Choose the Suited Man*; Appendix D: scene 26: pages 37-41.

[345] Appendix A: *Tell the Truth*; Appendix D: scene 37: page 46.

opposite but chastises the audience directly for their cowardliness.[346] In both endings, Anna is only mentioned by Liis, who effectively hijacks the role of protagonist.

Ending 5 has no protagonist at all as it moves to different peripheral characters from the film.[347] In the trunk, as Anna passes through the high-class bar and the airport she briefly encounters different people (a couple bickering behind her in the check-in line, for example);[348] in Ending 5 we see them all lying in their beds and switch between them one by one while, as a daisy-chain, they narrate one another and explain each character's current circumstances and past traumas. At the end of these branches, the audience has a further choice:

(A) A thematically ambiguous ending

(B) A thematically instructive ending

If the audience opts for the ambiguous ending, then the film screenplay ends with one of the bedroom characters making the bed carefully and leaving the room. The perspective then returns to Dmitri, who began the daisy chain, now fast asleep;[349] if the audience opts for the instructive ending they receive a long dialogue scene between two other supporting characters (Anna's assistant and another young man she met in the bar). In this scene, the point is made very clearly that one should be honest first and foremost in a seduction. The dialogue trails off into randomness about a video game that the two characters are playing and ends anti-dramatically.[350]

Across the six endings of the final draft of the screenplay, the story moves further and further away from the protagonist and the initial mode of storytelling. Drama shifts to anti-drama across these branches and resultant climaxes (in the arbitrary numbering system) become progressively stranger and further divorced from the trunk. Only Ending 1 was a viable choice for Anna, but once the audience moves away from that choice, the cohesion and internal logic of the film itself begins to crumble (I was already planning strong ruptures in locations, lighting, and visual styles for these endings as we moved into production); but crumbling only occurred because I could not entertain the possibility of two viable choices for my protagonist because I was still encumbered the logic of a unilinear film but ironically enough that encumberment was pushing me to make far more interesting choices with the story and character perspective than I had previously.

This is a key thought on the impact of interactivity on the story development process of a narrative film. Dramatic films are buffeted and shaped by narrative conventions in terms of their protagonists and their structure. When interactivity is grafted upon a film with its genesis in unilinear storytelling (i.e. when one is making a film first and

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[346] Appendix A: *Hide the Truth*; Appendix D: scene 38: page 46-7.

[347] Appendix D: scene 39-44A pages 47-54. This sequence was filmed but the narration was changed and only some of the characters were included in the re-written version.

[348] Appendix A: *Break Time* 00:00:00-12; Appendix D: scene 11 page 18.

[349] Appendix D: scene 44-5 page 54. This scene was filmed but omitted from the final edit.

[350] Appendix D: scene 45 pages 54-7. This scene was filmed but omitted from the final edit.

foremost), it enacts disruptions and distortions. The writer-director then compensates for this problematising phenomena and in so doing generates further disruptions and distortions which in themselves need further compensation. In other words, in the application of interactivity to unilinear storytelling, one is continually attempting to fix certain problems and generating further problems in said attempts.

In summary, through the drafting process of the screenplay, the story of the film had shrunk and the plot had simplified, but the characters were growing in complexity and were increasingly endowed with contradictions as they began to drive events rather than being driven by events. This was nowhere more evident than with Anna, the antihero protagonist who is an expert in the game of sex and seduction but cannot perceive the danger in which she has placed her heart by having an affair with her therapist. The complexity of the dramatic protagonist, however, appeared to be at odds with the kind of agentic interactivity I was employing (where all the choices were centred on the protagonist's decisions). Making the consequences of choices diverse was threatening the coherence of the protagonist and in order to preserve the coherence of the protagonist I removed any potential plurality of outcomes for her and instead jeopardised the coherence of the film itself.

In this solution, *to make the protagonist disappear*, the film would still follow the *tree* structure but it had also somewhat taken on the quality (without the mechanics) of a *maze structure*, too—that there was only one correct branch to follow—the one which leads to the *one-true-ending*. The other branches would not lead to dead-ends as such, but would doubtlessly leave the audience scratching their heads wondering if they took a wrong turn and ended up in a different film. In this case, as I would soon discover, my inadequate assessment of the plural possibilities any one of us, and therefore, any character has in front of them had caused this problem: to avoid openly breaching the idea that a well-drawn protagonist has a clear will and can only make one viable choice, I had retreated into meta-level awareness which was not appropriate for the story I was telling.

In the next chapter, I focus on how I attempted to fix this problem during post-production. My editor and I attempted to reduce an overly long trunk of the film which had bloated during screenwriting and production. Cannibalising parts of the trunk and reconfiguring them as new boughs and branches pushed me to break with the *two Annas* problem and embrace more radically anti-dramatic trajectories and endings for the film which were more concretely tied to the themes of the film and more consciously examining what it means for one ending to contradict another within a self-contained film.

5. THE INESSENTIAL FILM

The production was over. A few weeks after the adrenaline and excitement had worn off and after most of the over a hundred-strong cast and crew had moved on, I was left with all my new mistakes. As I sat in my office at the end of April, the most miserable period of the long Estonian winter, surrounded by grey skies and the slushy remnants of the winter's final snow, I watched the assembly cut of the film and came to a wretched revelation: *the film doesn't work*.

Problems with the film could be traced, broadly, to the different stages of the film's creation. There were editorial problems, such as abrasive edits, which would be ironed out naturally by further editing. There were production problems—for example, I have a tendency to be distracted by features of the location or an actor's intuitive addition during a rehearsal which potentially slow the film's pace. And then there are the more serious problems with the screenplay which are rendered visible when watching the filmed material.

I had approached making the interactive film as a *film first and foremost.* I had begun with the structure to make that plot more dramatic, and then reoriented the narrative as the characters embroiled in that plot had become more complex. Interactivity had always been treated as a disruptive force which required compensatory moves to continue making the film; these compensatory moves involved an embrace of meta-level games which privileged one particular ending over others (as a reaction to the *two Annas* problem) in a minimal and ostensibly very closed interactive system which relegated the interactivity to the final scenes of the film. These compensatory moves would continue into post-production as I now wrestled with the deeper question of what kind of film I was making, and I began to understand that the interactive film I had written and directed *was not complex enough* because I had been resisting the form I had adopted all along.

In this chapter, I examine how the story development process extended itself into the editing process. As this process continued, I was finally able to overcome the *two Annas* problem, and instead of minimising interactivity, I embraced it and found a greater diversity in the film's boughs, branches, and endings. Through the frame of meaning, which is derived through the film's endings and is uniquely overridable in an interactive film, I discuss how the new boughs and branches, which were constructed during the edit, emphasised the significance of endings themselves. These endings I would never have dared to write if it were a traditional unilinear film, and I still could not write earlier in the process because I had treated the film's interactivity as a problem to overcome rather than an opportunity to harness. The problems this interactive film was facing, ironically, were mostly to be found in the unilinear portion of the film, which was overly long and slow compared to the rest of the film's material—the trunk.

THE TRUNK

Trees have long trunks. What is advantageous for the tree is not necessarily advantageous for the story which structurally emulates the tree. The trunk of *The Limits of Consent* is very long relative to the boughs and branches; it grew this way through the screenwriting process. The first node is found at the lowest moment for Anna as a prelude to the film's climax; I tethered it to this moment as one of the significant stages of a dramatic structure (as outlined in Chapter 1). It means that the film effectively allows for multiple endings, but not middles or beginnings. It means that the interactivity employed here is *climatic in nature and that the unilinear portion of the film deals with not only the set-up but the confrontation, too.*

In the trunk of the story, I present the facts, make clear the goals and needs of the protagonist, and elaborate the conflict. At the end of the trunk, I leave matters to the audience to decide. They are not just influencing the course of the narrative, nor are they simply influencing the nature of the protagonist; they are influencing the conclusion and, to some extent, how the confluence of two lines (Anna's goal and Anna's need) will play out consequently—if at all. They are given a moment focused on Anna's need to do this: the moment when Anna finds her lover with his arms around another woman and with it a realisation that this is the sort of man he is and this is the relationship Anna is in. Anna has consented to this, as ill-advised as it is; so has Mart, and now here they are in a moment of collision which they cannot recover from. Anna cannot proceed; Mart cannot proceed. Neither side can break the impasse without the audience.[351]

One obvious advantage of placing the first node here is that it gives time for the story to develop before it is bifurcated repeatedly; it means that *the context of the story has been well and truly established.* The who, how, where, what, and why of the story have been detailed and explored before the first decision can be made. It means, finally, that the decision is *informed* to the extent that the context is clear even if the consequences of the choice are not. The consequences of the decision are still (hopefully) surprising and unpredictable, but a gamut of facts about the characters are already known. In earlier drafts of the step outlines, this was not the case. Anna and her plight had barely been introduced before the first decision, but the audience still had to make it. This meant that there was no context with which to make that decision and so the decision would be *ill-informed*.

However, a long trunk offers a problem which arguably eclipses its advantages. It delays the novelty of the film for a longer period and reduces its impact when it arrives because the boughs and branches are so short relative to the length of the trunk. The interactive film still occupies a rare space in cinema; it means that the audience is naturally aware of the uncommonality of interactivity and may be waiting for the first time they have to make a decision. In the first draft of the screenplay, the first decision arrived on page 16; by the final draft of the screenplay, it had

[351] Appendix A: *Start* 00:20:14-22:15; Appendix D: scene 18A page 28.

moved back to page 28. So, based on the rule that one page of correctly formatted screenplay equals one minute of screen-time,[352] it was clear that the audience would need to wait almost half an hour for the film's first interactive moment. An inevitable consequence of this is that the trunk is predominantly anticipatory, the dramatic question being meta-level: *when will the interactivity begin?* This sort of meta-level anticipation can be desirable, but if one is making a comedy it is undoubtedly a faulty strategy to wait for thirty minutes before the first joke. In short, I want the audience engaged in the story, not constantly anticipating a narrative element which has been ceded to them in an ekphrasis.

The short trunk also has problems, however, with its scant context and quickly interrupted narrative flow. How can any decision be reasonably made by an audience member under such conditions? In *Bandersnatch,* this problem was addressed with some trivialities: for instance, the first decision was between which kind of breakfast cereal the protagonist wished to eat and the second was between types of music the protagonist wanted to listen to on his way to a job interview. Neither of these decisions had any major bearing on the plot and instead offered a safe way to practice decision-making with novel technology and low stakes before the third decision needed to be made, which would actually have a bearing on the story. The writers of *Bandersnatch* were aware that it would be the first time the vast majority of their audience had interacted with a film in such a way.

The most notable downside of pushing the first node so far back within the story is that by the time it arrives, it might amplify the estranging shock of its appearance. The audience will accept anything which happens in the first five minutes of a film; if it is a film with dragons or spaceships, make sure there is a dragon or spaceship or at least some hint at their appearance in the first five minutes and the audience will accept it as credible within its diegesis.[353] The same is arguably true of interactivity. The most notable downside of having 'practice choices' early in the story is the risk of chilling the audience's enthusiasm for the interactivity; if the first choices they have to make are so trivial and without consequences for the story, one might begin to question the point of the entire experience.

It seems like there are no watertight solutions to the question of how long the trunk ought to be. However, having tied the film to the most prominent structure that underpins unilinear films where we have a beginning, a middle, and an end,[354] the audience might be more attenuated to the emergence of interactivity at a moment of great significance. In other words, pinning the interactivity to a particular moment of narrative transition within the traditional structure of a unilinear narrative (end of the confrontation/protagonist's low point) may activate the audience's meta-level awareness of the forthcoming interactivity and render it more acceptable.

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[352] David Trottier, *The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Script.* (Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 1994), 112.

[353] William Miller, *Screenwriting for Narrative Film and Television* (Hastings House, 1980), 28.

[354] Ogle "Screenwriting for New Film Mediums," 11.

WHAT KIND OF FILM IS IT?

While writing the trunk had not been nearly so problematic, a seemingly inordinate amount of time was spent on editing the first part of the film leading up to the first node. After assembling it and refining it but not yet *editing* it, the trunk came in at an unwieldy 40 minutes in length; effectively making it the equivalent of watching an entire episode of a TV drama series before the first choice needed to be made. It was too long. My editor, Karl-Olaf Olmann, and I spent many hours experimenting with different possibilities but always coming up against the same problem. I wanted to make a long, slow, serious film; but while *The Limits of Consent* could be serious, it could not reasonably be long and slow. At least, the trunk could not.

This had been something of a pivot from the pre-production stage. At that point, I had written the screenplay with the definite aim of being snappy. Making the opening scenes of the film half a page each with the aim of propelling the audience into the story. At what point had it become a meditative film in my mind? During the production, as a response to the disappearing protagonist strategy, I had taken a cue from Cristi Puiu's film *Aurora*.[355] In that film, Puiu's camera remains tethered to its protagonist in a very clear way; the visual rule I interpreted from that film was that the audience is either observing its laconic protagonist or seeing what he is seeing. The exception to this rule comes in the film's two violent outbursts where the protagonist noticeably disappears from view momentarily or is observed at a great distance as if we are sharing an out-of-body experience with him.[356] *Aurora* is built up of many long takes and is an example of slow cinema. Its influence on me changed my approach to planning shots and sequences with the film's cinematographer, Diego Alejandro Barajas.

Scenes where, as a director, I should have been following my screenplay to the letter were now being elaborated on and were spoiling the pace. During the aforementioned boat-selling scene, Anna tries to negotiate a better price. My cinematographer and I became enamoured with the location, a dry dock, and elaborated a new long shot on the location which would follow Anna as she moved between the hulls of these boats before finding the man who wanted to buy her ex-husband's boat. The scene became much longer than the half-minute it was allocated in the screenplay and is emblematic of the much slower pace I found in production as the locations we had scouted offered visual possibilities which were difficult to resist.

The consequence of this in post-production was that more needed to be elided. It was my primary supervisor's first comment after watching an early edit for the first time. The high-class bar sequence alone was twenty minutes in virtually uninterrupted real-time; precursory scenes in the early edits took more than five minutes of screen time. Still, I took his comments poorly because I was overly attached to the filmed

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355 *Aurora* directed by Cristi Puiu (Mandragora, 2010).

356 Michael Keerdo-Dawson, "Being(,)Undone: The Romanian New Wave and the Limits of Epistemic Violence," (MA thesis, Tallinn University, 2019), 39.

material. I rebelled and wrote out the whole of the film again on Post-it notes on an A1 sheet of paper and then in a *21 Grams* fashion,[357] scrambled the entire chronology so that the film began with random scenes assigned to the various branches and followed an achronological order; the result was very fresh but incoherent and full of the feeling that it had been made this way in post-production (and was not part of the story's design at all). The overall emotion while watching this edit was akin to the feeling one has while constructing a jigsaw puzzle—which was not the sort of feeling I wanted to evoke in my audience.

My editor and I then did what I mockingly referred to as a 'Hollywood cut' of the film: chopping out absolutely everything that was not nailed down by plot. It was faster but had no anima. A further option was to chop up the bar and the airport sequences and intercut them so that they would run in parallel in the way Christopher Nolan does with certain films. My editor and I agreed that the 'Nolan cut' did not work either, as the film had not been planned in such a way; events did not connect in terms of pace or significance.

It was infuriating that we seemed to be stuck on the trunk. We seemed to be mired in the high-class bar, the therapist's office, and the airport forever and were no closer to the interactive parts of the story and all of the problems they would inevitably bring. However, as my primary supervisor continued to remind me, rendering the trunk correctly was pivotal to the film's effectiveness because, as is perhaps obvious, audiences will only want to engage with the interactivity if they have engaged with the main part of the film. What is present in the trunk needs to accurately feed into what comes in the boughs and the branches, too; something which had not been a focus in the screenwriting process but when watched as an edited version of the film became more and more apparent. The clearer the connections, the more natural the narrative felt, despite the interactivity and the stranger trajectories the stories took. So, exploring considerations of a tree-structured interactive film must focus on the trunk as well. Everything needs to be set up correctly in the trunk so that it can manifest correctly in the boughs and branches.

However, I was still caught between the pace of the screenplay and the pace of the scenes as filmed. A conflicting approach meant that I had wanted to create a challenging film, inspired by Romanian New Wave cinema, but I had written something far more entertaining. I had then pivoted back to something more difficult in the branches of the film which embraced anti-drama to avoid the problem of *two Annas* and that anti-dramatic sentiment seemed to have bled into the production of the trunk and the dramatic branches.

If I honestly thought about films like *Tuesday, After Christmas* or *Aurora,* I could see that *The Limits of Consent* was only tangentially related to them. Nothing as heightened as rushing between airport gates ever happened in such films, let alone a seduction by radio mic on an airplane or prosecutions over data hacking, or even

[357] *21 Grams* directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu (This is That Productions, 2003).

patients having affairs with their therapists. I had to be honest with myself; I had not made such a film. It was not a piece of slow cinema or a Robert McKee-style Miniplot, but my attraction to both was now seriously hampering my efforts to create something unified. The fact that I and my cinematographer had devised long hand-held shots and followed some of the visual rules I had gleaned from the Romanian New Wave did not, objectively, make this a Romanian New Wave film. Not even close.

Another problem was my fascination with my characters. Michael Sergei argues that the director's role should be as the clarifier of the story and that a common problem for writer-directors is a love of watching their characters just do things; they love this because they created the characters and the characters are inherently interesting for them but they are rarely interesting in and of themselves for the audience.[358] I do love my characters and I love just watching them do things but I must admit that normally my films are more enjoyable when I focus on the story rather than every subtle nuance of an actor's performance. I also, usually, need more than one person to tell me so.

I sent the latest version of the edit to one of my producers, Helen Räim, for some feedback in the summer of 2021. It was the slowest edit of the film yet, opening with a long dialogue scene between Liis and her partner where she confesses to him about hooking up with Sten over New Year's Eve.[359] The trunk was still close to forty minutes in length. My producer wrote back that it was quite long and needed a quicker pace. I started to take on board what others had been telling me.

The other thought which germinated at this time was also where the film would be seen. This is not a film for a traditional theatre exhibition—it is too complex to be screened three times a day at a multiplex, as it requires far more attention from the projectionist and a facilitator to introduce the film. Although I wanted a cinema exhibition of some kind, I had already anticipated that the majority of people watching the film would do so through some sort of streaming platform. In this case, it needs to grab attention and hold it. In the cinema, the audience has paid for the ticket and they are in for the ride; a writer-director can therefore afford a slower opening. On a streaming platform, it is a different matter entirely. 'What else is on?' 'Shall I make a cup of tea?' 'Did my friend post something on social media?' There are manifold potential distractions. The film must cut through all of them or die in a crucible of inattention.

David Mamet notes that the best way to improve any film is to burn the first reel; start late and finish early.[360] In that vein, the prologues were cut; the film begins now

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[358] Michael Sergei, "Focusing The Story Between the Screenplay and the Audience: The Director as Clarifier of the Film's Story," (presentation, Australian Screen Production Education & Research Association 2023 Conference, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, June 27th 2023).

[359] Appendix A: *Tell the Truth* 00:00:00-01:13. In later edits this scene was moved to this branch. The scene was also not scripted.

[360] Mamet, *On Directing Film*, 28.

with Anna in the bar, amid her operation, looking at Liis. The audience must play catch-up with the who, how, where, and why of the film. There is no time to establish anything beyond the immediate facts. Five minutes into the film, we find out Liis is a police officer and that Anna promised Sten he could have any woman he wants, and that he wants Liis. The stakes are already raised as we slowly realise what is going on. It was a stronger opener for the film and left open many possibilities as to what to do with the rest of the material which had already been excised.

SAVE YOUR DARLINGS

For any artistic process, it is necessary to pause, take stock, and look again with fresh eyes; not simply produce endlessly.[361] I decided to look at the structure of the film once more from the macro perspective. I was aware that it was a closed system, but this felt too closed. There were only five endings now (a sixth where a peripheral character makes a bed had been jettisoned during production). The maximum number of choices the audience had to make before they reached the end credits was three. I deemed that the system was not complex enough. The interactivity had been tethered to the climaxes since early drafts of the screenplay, but watching the edited film made it clear that the audience would feel, frustratingly, that they were just beginning to be involved with the interactivity and then it would be over.

Figure 11. Mart (Rain Tolk) and Anna in the therapist's office.

I went back to the drawing board, literally, again. I wrote out all the scenes of all the boughs and branches and reformulated them on Post-it notes on an A1 sheet once more. 'Murder your darlings,' is taken to mean in filmmaking that any scene or moment that you love personally which is not serving the film needs to be cut no matter how wonderful it might be on its own. With interactivity, I cannot say this rule does not apply, but the cut itself seems not so severe because interactivity offers more chances to save the darling later.

[361] Borgdorff, "Practice-based Research in the Arts," 103.

The first murdered darling was the therapist's office scene.[362] In this scene, we are witness to what was intended to seem like a bizarre reversal: the therapist, Mart, is upset and his client, Anna, is trying to comfort him. Mart cannot sleep; Anna tells him that she too could not sleep when her ex-husband left her, but finally, she realised it was a choice not to sleep, that it is easier for him to face the world half-awake. Mart and Anna then embrace and kiss, and Mart performs oral sex on her; the scene ends with Anna's face convulsing in pleasure. It was less than two pages in the screenplay but had been inflated in length by a slower pace adopted in rehearsals with the camera resting on the characters for long stretches and the addition of Mart performing oral sex on Anna at the end of the scene.[363]

It is one of my favourite scenes from the film. The performances are strong and the cinematography is gorgeous, making best use of the high-rise office at night with twinkling city lights in the distance and Anna and Mart sunk in moody darkness and orange hues. Here, more than almost anywhere else, my cinematographer managed to capture a sense of the nocturnal and things happening in the night which perhaps should not be. The actors' performances convey the duality of consent which I wished to capture, that here consent is given, the sex is great, the chemistry is clear, but the circumstances are completely improper. In summation of their circumstances, Mart says to Anna 'I'm going to hell,' to which Anna playfully replies, 'Is that a problem?'[364]

But what of its function? The information it heralds to the audience is crucial for understanding why Anna is so crushed when she sees Mart with another woman, or at least amplifies this feeling. Not only do we see how close and intimate they are here, we also hear about Anna's ex-husband and how he left her for a younger woman. It is backstory which is essential for understanding Anna's reaction later when she discovers that Mart is meeting his wife at the airport and for establishing how improper their relationship is; at later moments of the film this improperness would return again and again at key plot points and without knowing it the audience would feel that they are missing an essential part of the puzzle. That Mart's wife turns out to be a much younger woman only serves to collapse the distance between Mart and Anna's ex-husband. 'They're the same person,' I directed Karin Rask (the actor who played Anna) as we filmed the scene in the airport when she breaks down. The stakes would be lowered without the scene and Anna's reaction would be an overreaction.

My editor, my primary supervisor, and I experimented by placing the scene in different parts of the trunk but often with the effect of misbalancing the story. The solution came when we broke the scene into smaller segments and spread it across the trunk at different intervals. It effectively made the trunk part of an achronological film, something one of my producers, Katariina Rahumägi, cautioned me against

[362] Appendix D Scene 3 pages 1-2.
[363] See the ethics review in Appendix G for more on this late-stage addition of a sex scene during production.
[364] Appendix D Scene 3 pages 2.

after a test screening (She felt the film was already complex enough without it, and perhaps she was right); but adding an achronological element to the trunk in the form of a parallel flashback sequence was giving more overt permission to the boughs and the branches to be achronological, too. The unidirectional multilinear narrative was instead becoming multidirectional as well as multilinear. Indeed, it is a regret of mine that I learned too late that everything which pays off in the boughs and branches should be somehow reflective of what is planted in the trunk. Anna is stuck in the memory of her time in Mart's therapy: her helping him, his distraction, their sexual encounter, and the inappropriateness of his behaviour. It would become an essential part of her character which was in no way present in the screenplay: Anna is a woman caught in the past.

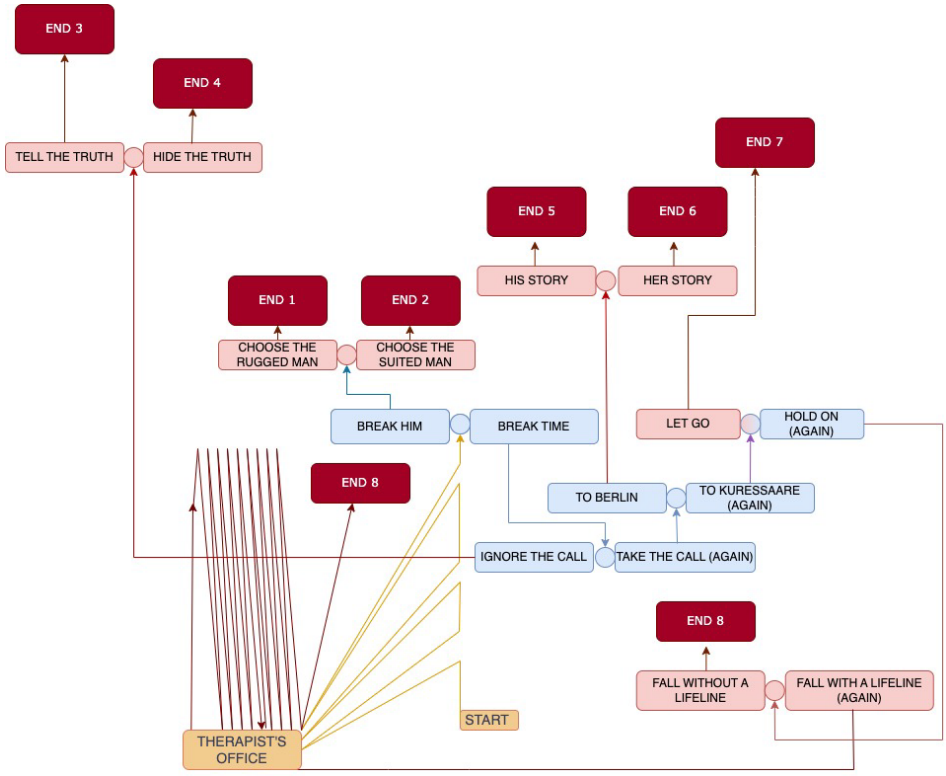

Figure 10. Final structure of *The Limits of Consent* with achronology accounted for. NB! Positions of scenes and nodes indicate the chronology but the distance between events is not in proportion e.g. *Therapist's Office* scene takes place before the start of the film but may be many hours earlier; *End 3* takes place approximately a year after the main events of the film, etc.

Another related darling which connects Anna to the past is the scene where she sells her ex-husband's boat.[365] This was a second prologue originally intended to be the second scene of the film after the therapist's office. A production difficulty meant it needed to be shot in daylight forcing it to be the first scene of the film as the rest of the story took place at night. In this scene, Anna mentions that the boat she is selling belonged to her ex-husband, solidifying the importance of this always-offscreen character in the dynamics of the film. To call the boat-selling scene a darling is to mislabel it; the performances are strong, the scene has several important functions, and the cinematography is beautiful, but the tone undermines the film's nocturnal atmosphere and slowed the film down too much. When I reconfigured the entire structure, I placed it as one of the endings and its significance changed drastically.

I formed a new pathway in the film when the audience opted to 'Disrupt Time,' whereupon they would follow Anna through the airport again from a different perspective until Anna arrives at the men's toilets looking for Mart (again). In the men's room is Dmitri (Liis's partner), but we do not know who he is yet. He looks at Anna, perplexed as to why a woman has come into the men's room. Another option appears on the screen :

(A) To Berlin

(B) To Kuressaare (again)[366]

If the audience selects (B) we find ourselves repeating further events of the trunk only differently; eventually arriving at the gate again and this time Mart and his wife board the plane before Anna can confront them. Another option appears:

(A) Let Go

(B) Hold On (again)[367]

If the audience selects (A), we arrive at the boat-selling scene. It is now the day after the events of the trunk, rather than sometime before it. Anna is calm and no longer distraught. She negotiates with the buyer and from the smile on her face at the end we know she has won the battle. When viewed as a prologue, this scene had one set of functions and implications: set the visuals about the boat and the lifeline and establish Anna as a tough woman who may look small and demure but is able to stand up to much bigger and forceful people. However, once it was moved and became a conclusion for the film it emerged as something completely different. It

[365] Appendix A: *Let Go*; Appendix D: scene 4 pages 2-3.

[366] Appendix A: *Take the Call (again)* 00:02:10.
At this point in the restructuring, we simplified the choices at the nodes as much as possible. For example, (A) 'Pursue an Investigation' or (B) 'Let Anna Go' from the screenplay became (A) 'Tell the Truth' or (B) 'Hide the Truth' in an effort to make the choice as clear as possible for an audience who must make a decision within 20 seconds. That logic extended into the other nodes in an attempt to make all the choices presented mirror one another or appear as two sides of the same coin.

[367] Appendix A: *To Kuressaare (again)* 00:01:20.

now demonstrates that she is ready to move on from men like Mart and her ex-husband.

Of course, it is possible for a unilinear film to reconfigure itself in this way, too. It is possible for any film to move an opening scene to the final scene and give it a new context and resonance; however, when one has multiple endings and a multilinear and multi-directional achronological structure to play with, one can take far greater liberties with the edit of the film and its materials. There are simply numerically higher chances to find a place for such a scene in an ending if one has nine endings from which to choose or one can fashion further endings out of existing materials.

The ability to reconfigure this scene was also borne of the embrace of anti-drama as a narrative strategy in the form of an anti-climax where none of the film's major threads are in any way resolved, but Anna does achieve some inner peace and can begin to rebuild herself. However, it must be noted that the freedom to move this scene was equally borne of my abandonment of a previously held narrative impediment which I now elaborate: the problem of *two Annas.*

MULTIPLE VIABLE CHOICES

Moving the boat-selling scene to create an additional ending broke with the *two Annas* problem I had wrestled with throughout the screenwriting process. To briefly recap, Anna became a more rounded and complex character during the screenwriting and later casting and rehearsal processes. I could not countenance the idea that two versions of Anna existed in the story space—how could there be one Anna who would throw away the toxic advances of Mart and another Anna who would surrender to them? This dilemma had caused me to embrace meta-level nodes which disrupted the essence of the story itself and forced the protagonist to disappear from the film except in the *one true ending,* where Anna destroys Mart's marriage using her skills to enact this revenge.

With the addition of the time loop, the events of the trunk are re-traced and an ending where Anna sells her ex-husband's boat emerged. The protagonist no longer disappears completely. She was now present and illustrating another version of the character who peacefully let go of her past onscreen instead of seeking vengeance against her lover. There were now *two Annas* onscreen.

The answer to the problem of *two Annas* lies in philosophy. As Jeanette Kennett and Steve Matthews note, agents must often choose one narrative path instead of another; in the cases where the agent has two or more narrative options that are equal or close to even, the agent decides one way and in so doing, closes off another viable narrative path.[368] In this way, we can posit the interjecting audience as effectively deciding what the protagonist's or perspective character's narrative will be. But this

[368] Jeanette Kennett and Steve Matthews, "Normative Agency" in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, ed. Kim Atkins and Catriona Mackenzie (New York: Routledge, 2008), 213.

is only possible when both paths are equal or nearly equal in viability. If you choose between travelling the world or staying in one country and starting a family, one comes at the exclusion of the other; you effectively change your life story—or at least partially.

Cheshire Calhoun argues that an agent can control which parts of their psychology move them; in which case the main threat to agency is a failure to control one's inner state when unauthorised impulses move us rather than our own motives. In this way, obsessions, compulsions, irresistible urges, overwhelming aversions, addictions, and weakness cause us routinely to act against our higher reasoning.[369] Does it not then follow that at the moment when there appears to be only one viable choice, the audience interjects as one of these unauthorised impulses? We all act against our own agency and reasonableness under certain conditions. In *The Limits of Consent,* the audience thus supplies a powerful motivational force which is potentially in direct competition with what the writer-director determines is the protagonist's agency.[370] In a sense, the audience has the potential to be an unauthorised impulse for the character at the making an unviable choice.

There are not only unauthorised impulses; there are also demotivational forces in one's life which become volitional disabilities which allow one's agency to retreat and become un-actionable, such as depression or crisis. Anna is certainly in crisis when she witnesses Mart embracing his wife. The shock of the scene causes an internal defeat of her agency and disengages it,[371] allowing the audience to step in and hijack her agency within a constricted choice. Fundamental attachments or self-conceptions so related to one's sense of identity fail;[372] when they do, agency is demoralised and can no longer act upon its will. These characters are estranged from their normal outlook by the events and circumstances of the film; as Calhoun describes it, they are 'impersonating an agent rather than being one,'[373]

A character in crisis seems an excellent bellwether for the multiple-arc protagonist. It is worth returning to *Blind Chance*, where a man's life has radically different trajectories depending on whether he catches a train or not. The protagonist's father has died at the beginning of the film, and he is in deep grief at the moment the story ruptures when he catches the train to Warsaw. What happens to him next—becoming a communist, being anti-communist, being neutral—would be untenably diverse were it not for the fact we can accept this sort of diversity from a person in crisis more than one who is stable. Therefore, despite the English language version of the film's title, the protagonist's multiple arcs in this film are more connected to his traumatised psyche than any other random intervention of fate. Likewise, in

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369 Cheshire Calhoun, "Losing One's Self," in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, ed. Kim Atkins and Catriona Mackenzie (New York: Routledge, 2008), 195.
370 Calhoun, "Losing One's Self," 196.
371 Calhoun, "Losing One's Self," 196.
372 Calhoun, "Losing One's Self," 197.
373 Calhoun, "Losing One's Self," 204.

Sliding Doors, the protagonist on one timeline discovers her husband in bed with another woman, which destroys her marriage and makes her question everything; the changes in her life when compared to the other version of herself—who does not uncover the affair—are understandable because of the severe nature of the rupture.

Anna sees her lover in the arms of another woman. It is her low moment, and I chose this moment to introduce the film's interactivity. Her agency is demoralised, and the audience is allowed to make a choice which will send her on two different paths; both of them legitimate; neither one more true than the other. She can at that moment, depending on what occurs next, destroy Mart's marriage, continue her affair, or go home and sell her ex-husband's boat. When we are in the throes of such pain, we often need someone to guide us out of it and, in this case, it is the audience who does the guiding.

I was pleased that with this revelation I was able to offer Anna at least one compassionate ending. I sent her back in time, I allowed her to pass through events again and reconfigure them; I allowed her to let go of the past and move on. But there were still darker, unhappier endings in store, as I again leaned towards anti-drama and constructed a further four endings for the film.

THE STORY OF AN UNHAPPY COUPLE

In the final draft of the screenplay, the story followed Liis's partner, Dmitri, to Berlin. The audience would then peek into the worlds of different peripheral characters lying in their bedrooms and find out about their lives as they narrated each other, omnisciently and atemporally.[374] The problems they had were vastly different to one another and the problems of Anna and Liis for that matter, too. That difference was sort of the point. To move away from everything which had come before, to move away from the protagonist, the style of the film (they would be the only narrated scenes in the film, shot statically instead of hand-held, originally intended to be presented in an aspect ratio 1.33:1, filmed from directly above in a bird's-eye-view instead of eye-level like the rest of the film). Crucially they were to be a total departure from the themes of the film as well. Consent, infidelity, control: all were gone.

The unravelling of the plot should arise from the circumstances of the plot itself;[375] the same may be adapted to the boughs and branches of an interactive film—as I reflected in earlier in this chapter, they must arise from the circumstances of the trunk. But the thematic exodus in this branch, as part of the *disappearing protagonist* strategy, seemed to take matters too far. Without the theme, this sequence would remove all meaning from its existence; it would only sit as the most extremely anti-dramatic ending. The characters, unlike others in the film, were speaking with one voice; as my primary supervisor wryly observed, the voice was 'clever Michael.' I decided with this comment that I needed a new approach.

[374] Appendix D: scenes 39-43 pages 48-54.
[375] Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," 52.

My rejection of meta-level incursions into the story came with this late acceptance of the interactive form and my overcoming of the *two Annas* problem. The nodes which disrupted the unities of time and space and action felt like a compensatory move in the wrong direction. The strategy to hide the seams of the film in plain sight by acknowledging the seam within the node itself, now felt faulty. There was *nothing in the trunk of the film to justify their presence*, narratively or thematically; there had been no self-recognition and it was neither a story about stories nor a film about films. The inclusion of meta-nodes no longer seemed a viable way to mitigate the seam. Rather, it felt like it was surrendering to the seam.

A solution to this problem emerged when I realised that many of the bedroom scenes we had filmed for the scripted narration featured couples and that these couples became steadily older (a total coincidence of casting). I thought to flip Tolstoy's immortal opening words of Anna Karenina on its head: *all unhappy families are unhappy in the same way.*[376] I made their story into one long story which developed across the shots of the steadily aging couples; it begins with an early mistake which is compounded by later missed opportunities until it becomes the status quo and can only finally be broken free from when something radical changes.

What do unhappy couples have in common? A lack of honesty, tactics of withdrawal, a lack of connection—or at least a one-sided one—and a lack of empathy. Thus, in the final edit, the film cuts to Dmitri lying in bed in a Berlin hotel room, the scene then cuts to Liis in Tallinn standing up after having sex with Sten. Liis sends Dmitri a voice message wishing him a happy new year. A moment later Dmitri receives that message in Berlin. Liis stands and leaves the hotel room leaving only a cityscape twinkling at night.[377] The node appears:

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(A) His Story
(B) Her Story
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It is not an agentic node. It is not a meta node. We have well and truly lost Anna's perspective and Liis has walked off screen, too. It is now a *story node*. No longer a question of which outcome at all but rather a question of which perspective. After selecting the option, the audience is taken through this unified narrative from the man's perspective or from the woman's perspective or both if they replay the film. The narrators are Dmitri and Liis, and they are telling their story from their perspectives through the stories of four other couples, before finally reflecting on the state of their own relationship.[378]

Two perspectives are separated and rendered mutually *inessential* by interactivity. The film may be viewed without ever accessing these parts of the character's psyche at all, or equally only one perspective might be explored and understood while the

[376] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina,* trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, 1918 (Folio Society, 1875-1877), 3.

[377] Appendix A: *To Berlin.*

[378] Appendix A: *His Story* and *Her Story.*

other is left deliberately unknown; deliberately because when one accesses one of these stories *it is impossible not to know that the other side is accessible, too*. If you listen to his story, you must be aware that you have yet to listen to her story because the node presented it as an option. In that case, it is the audience's choice whether they take the full picture or live with one perspective just as Liis and Dmitri do. It is inessential because once one side of the story has been explored, the end credits roll and there is nothing but each audience member's curiosity or lack thereof which promotes a recourse; one understanding does not preclude the other, but it does not demand the other either. When an audience member decides to stop watching an interactive film, they effectively end the story; and as George P. Landow notes with the hypertext, within that decision comes a willingness to interpret certain events as conclusive and prevent other alternatives from coming into being.[379]

The *tree structure* separates and renders different sides of the equation inessential but paradoxically, through its mechanism, promotes exploration of both sides. As with an unhappy relationship, the other perspective is there and often ready to communicate, but it often must be sought out. It is therefore inviting the audience to navigate the film and decide where it must end, and from that end understand that some material might be left but an interpretation is possible already. When a film, or more commonly a theatre play has an intermission, in my experience, the discussion with fellow audience members is regarding the overall quality of the work so far and predictions about the second half; offering an interpretation at this point would seem unnatural. The interactive film meanwhile offers us a chance to do so before we explore (or not) more of the content and perhaps expand on this interpretation. Indeed, what is left out might very well contribute to that interpretation—the audience could interpret the story with their sense of narrative incompleteness as a prism in a way that is less natural with a paused film.

This is also often the case at the end of an unhappy relationship. Not knowing how the other feels because there is not enough honesty in the relationship can carry over into the relationship's demise. When the relationship is terminated, it often highlights that there is another side to the relationship which we do not know, it invites us to learn more but we might sit at the end of a union with partial knowledge and continue that way, with our interpretations based on incomplete material—if we so choose.

This thought further complexified the interpretive realm of the film. It is not just that more than one version of the film exists which goes beyond singular interpretive responses,[380] but makes incompletion an inessential feature of these interpretations. The audience can end the experience at any ending they please and derive an interpretation from their chosen version of the film. An unintuitive possibility for the unilinear film but one actively invited in the interactive film which follows the *tree structure*.

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379 Landow, *Hypertext*, 234.

380 Koenitz, et al. "Introduction," 1-2.

In hindsight, I regret that I did not more consciously consider how different interpretations could be derived from different intervals in the film. I now reflect on this aspect of the interactive film before considering how two further endings were devised for *The Limits of Consent.*

MULTIPLE INESSENTIAL MEANINGS

Endings were a dominant consideration in the story development process for *The Limits of Consent*. While it might seem self-evident that the ending is important from the perspective of telling a story, it is also important from the perspective of the film's meaning, as the ending is where meaning is most often found. Interactive narratives open up concerns that need to be addressed about why *not to have multiple climaxes or why is it necessary to have a climax at all*.[381] According to narrative theorist, Brian Richardson, a definitive ending is an unnatural appendage to the series of events which came before; the very presence of this ending threatens to reshape the 'totality of the represented events.'[382] The protagonist proceeds to the final event and then the end credits roll, but it is the writer-director who decides when we should leave this protagonist behind.

We have a variety of meanings on offer; the ones which emerge from the structure and grammar of the film and are clear (such as educational films),[383] and ones which transgress these grammatical constructions and reveal hidden meanings.[384] Meanings most starkly emerge from the point where the plot, as told through the protagonist, demonstrates something about a theme of the story. This is one of the reasons why we have a protagonist with a singular transformation—to make a point. Experts on playwriting and later screenwriting often advise on how a theme should be expressed: through how the characters change or what they learn,[385] by proving a position on an issue,[386] etc. The majority agree, however, that a theme is expressed in the clearest terms at the story's climax;[387] where the prior series of events are retrospectively endowed with significance,[388] because consumers of stories cannot tolerate the

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[381] Maria Cecilia Reyes and Giuliana Dettori, "Developing a Media Hybridization based on Interactive Narrative and Cinematic Virtual Reality," *Ekphrasis* 2: Crossing Narrative Boundaries Between Cinema and Other Media (2019): 139.

[382] Brian Richardson, "Endings in Drama and Performance: A Theoretical Model," in *Current Trends in Narratology,* ed. Greta Olson. (New York: De Gruyter, 2011) 182.

[383] Andrew Dudley, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 167-169.

[384] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press), 2.

[385] Andrew Cowan, *The Art of Writing Fiction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 122.

[386] Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, (New York: Touchstone, 1942), 2.

[387] Egri, *Art of Dramatic Writing,* 6; Paul Joseph Gulino and Connie Shears, *The Science of Screenwriting,* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 30; Howard and Mabley, *Tools of Screenwriting,* 55.

[388] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984), 94.

meaninglessness of temporality, as literary theorist Peter Brooks argues.[389] The climax is where the theme, protagonist, and the narrative's result often converge in *the terminal of the thematic statement.*[390] Meaning can be discovered throughout, but at the narrative's terminus, the meaning becomes clearest. If the theme is established and elaborated on during a narrative, then its end is where the author expresses their position on the matter through the narrative's result.[391]

If the result for the protagonist is changed, then the themes of the film do not change; however, the meaning which is ascribed to those themes will be different. The screenwriter affects how the story is perceived through the communicative act that is narrative; this effect could be precisely the intended result, could be a total failure of communication, or it might arrive somewhere in between.[392] But in all cases, knowingly or unknowingly, the screenwriter, and later director and editor, grafts his or her agenda to the protagonist, demonstrating their position on an issue through the protagonist's resultant position.

What of the interactive film with multiple endings which can end differently every time? From an early draft of the step outline, *The Limits of Consent* had dealt with seduction as predicated on a series of outright lies, emotional manipulation, and data theft in the subplot; meanwhile, in the main plot, there is a power differential completely out of balance: an extra-marital affair between a therapist and his patient. In the film, both Anna and Liis give their consent willingly and happily with or without the full picture. Consent in these cases is given but can it really be consent when the circumstances surrounding it are dubious? Patricia Marino asserts that why consent is given might be just as important as the fact that it is given at all.[393] In this sense, context should not be dismissed because it gives rise to uncomfortable conversations. With this film, I wanted to start one such uncomfortable conversation; I wanted to demonstrate that any attempt to draw a line where we can see a division between right and wrong will often fail in its efforts to be definitive because the problems around sexual consent are always contextual. I wanted to highlight the *quality of consent* rather than *the line between consent and non-consent* and by highlighting the former, there would be a chance to understand better the problems associated with the latter.

As I have argued elsewhere, the decisions made at the various nodes effectively change the film's thesis on these themes.[394] The ending when Anna destroys her

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[389] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 323.

[390] Michael Keerdo-Dawson, "Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 3, Act 3...: De-centring the Climax as the Terminal of the Thematic Statement in the Interactive Film *The Limits of Consent*," *Interactive Film and Media Journal* 2 no. 3 (Summer 2022): 114.

[391] Egri, *Art of Dramatic Writing,* 8.

[392] Malcah Effron, Margarida McMurry, and Virginia Pignagnoli, "Narrative Co-construction: A Rhetorical Approach," *Narrative* 27 no. 3. (2019): 334.

[393] Patricia Marino, "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent," *Inquiry* 51 no. 4. (2008): 335.

[394] Keerdo-Dawson, "Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 3, Act 3," 121.

relationship with Mart can easily be interpreted as arguing that the consequences of a violation of consent can be overcome with vengeance; the ending when Anna agrees to stay with Mart contradicts the first: the consequences of a violation of consent cannot be overcome and will persist as maladaptive schemas.

The degree of explicit difference between the various endings cannot be denied. Thus, even if there were nine didactic endings or nine ambiguous endings, there would still be at least nine endings with an excess of nine potential interpretative junctions. One can argue that without a permanent ending, the interactive film avoids privileging a single conclusion over another and therefore the privileging of one thematic statement over another.[395] *The Limits of Consent* is able to hold multiple inessential interpretive potentials. This ability contributes to the film's ambivalence, which de-centres the writer-director as the moral arbiter through the actions or inactions of its protagonist. If the writer-director contributes one thematic statement which leans towards ambiguity or ambivalence that writer-director still cannot create the sort of explicit unprivileged bidirectional contradictions which an interactive film is capable of with its non-hierarchical series of endings.[396] The endings are potentially ephemeral, overridable, contradictable, and compelled to apportion its meaning with other endings.[397]

The dramatic Endings 1 and 2 contradict each other as Anna irreconcilably destroys her affair with Mart or continues it, respectively. Endings 3 and 4, which anti-dramatically switch the protagonist out and replace her with Liis, take the same position (telling the truth is better) but the difference is more connected to how Liis responds to the intervention of the audience (taking Anna to court or chastising the audience for making the wrong choice).

The endings which emerged during editing were more complex. The anti-dramatic Endings 5 and 6, which narrate the history of four unhappy couples from different perspectives, respectively rest on the notion that it is better to stay committed to someone even if one knows they are unfaithful and that it is better to leave someone than continue in an unhappy relationship. It is also contradictory, though not bi-directional. Dmitri's narration when taken in isolation offers hope and tolerance for someone's flaws; Liis's narration contradicts this: there is no hope for this couple and Dmitri's denial will not save them. If taken in isolation, either ending can inessentially conclude the theme of the film in the manner described; however, if Liis's narration is taken second, then it overrides Dmitri's hopes, and if Dmitri's narration is taken second, then for the audience his thoughts are tragically ill-informed as he has no idea that Liis is ready to end their relationship; it thus comments on the naïve idealisation of one's partner. The flavour of these narrations is different depending on the order they are consumed.

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395 Keerdo-Dawson, "Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 3, Act 3," 123.
396 Keerdo-Dawson, "Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 3, Act 3," 123-4.
397 Keerdo-Dawson, "Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 3, Act 3," 124.

Themes were becoming the glue which held my latest anti-dramatic branches together. As we passed through the newly configured story, the '(again)' boughs and eventual branch emerged which layered in a further inessential contradiction. Finally, I reached back into the film's central metaphor to offer two further anti-arcs to Anna.

THE FURTHEST REACHES OF ANTI-DRAMA

The second research question of this PhD is: *To what extent did the introduction of interactivity allow for the co-existence of drama and anti-drama in one narrative space?* Throughout the process, since the earliest drafts of the step-outlines, anti-drama had been employed repeatedly and unconsciously as a means of diversifying the narrative trajectories. I return to deeper reasons for this approach in next chapter but reiterate the question here because it was at this point in the process where my creative conservatism was abandoned, and I no longer concerned myself with how much the audience would be entertained by film. Interactivity allowed for the co-existence of drama and anti-drama with its ability to accommodate multiple trajectories, but that ability still needed to be met without fear.

Restructuring the film in the edit was, in part, an attempt to improve upon the problem of nodal depth, i.e. how many decisions needed to be made to reach an ending. In the final edit of the film, there are *shallower endings* where only two decisions needed to be made; and then *deeper endings,* where three, four, and finally five decisions had to be made to reach the end credits. The shallower endings are ones which follow the protagonist's trajectory to what might be described as a traditional dramatic conclusion; meanwhile, the deeper endings are, perhaps naturally, the most anti-dramatic and the most divorced from the dramatic trajectory of the trunk.

These most extreme of anti-dramatic endings are discovered if the audience follows the '(again)' path through the airport sequence once more. The '(again)' boughs and one 'again' ending signal to the audience that if that particular option is taken, then events they already witnessed would repeat themselves. They eventually return the audience to the moment when the first node appeared; the only difference this time is that Mart and his wife disappear through the gate, so it is impossible for Anna to intervene.[398] Anna looks out of the airport window distraught. A new choice appears on the screen:

(A) Let Go

(B) Hold On (again)[399]

If the audience chooses for Anna to let go, then Anna sells her ex-husband's boat. If the audience opts instead to 'Hold on (again),' they are taken back to the beginning of the film; Anna is back in the bar and guiding Sten in his seduction of Liis who then makes her speech about lifelines again. Mart calls Anna again, she looks at

[398] Appendix A: *To Kuressaare (again)* 00:01:14.
[399] Appendix A: *To Kuressaare (again)* 00:01:20.

the phone and then back at Liis and listens to the remainder of her story. Without a lifeline, you are lost at sea but at least there is a chance you will be rescued; with a lifeline, you will be left dangling on the boat with no way to pull yourself aboard. There is a cut to black and the deepest choice of the film is presented:

(A) Fall without a Lifeline

(B) Fall with a Lifeline (again)[400]

Here, the choice extends the central metaphor of the film into the nodes. To select 'Fall without a lifeline' divorces the film from a subject. Anna's phone is left in the bar unanswered and there is no Anna. The concept was to abandon Anna, so we would see a series of shots of Tallinn without Anna present at all—just emptiness in the city. The appeal of this idea was amplified by one of the shooting principles taken from Romanian New Wave cinema—no establishing shots. If one of the endings was a series of establishing shots in a film without any other establishing shots, it would be rendered distinct.

Figure 12. The camera hunts around the cityscape at night looking for Anna.

Despite this shooting principle, cinematographers cannot help themselves, especially when they are in a location with a great view. My cinematographer had taken many shots wildly panning and scanning the city from the windows of our high-class bar location catching cruise ships docked in the Bay of Tallinn and shadowy figures traversing the cityscape below among trams and cars and the life of the city going on, murkily. The seeking nature of these shots serendipitously demonstrated that Anna was not present any longer and the camera was searching for her and unable to find her. Anna was lost at sea and perhaps we could find her in the water if we looked hard enough. Finally, the camera does not find Anna again, only a distinctive light in a car park, perhaps a sign of hope that Anna will emerge and continue her life.[401] If she does not chase Mart to the airport, there is no arc and therefore no story.

[400] Appendix A: *Hold on (again)*.

[401] Appendix A: *Fall without a Lifeline.* This ending was not scripted.

The length of this anti-dramatic sequence is deliberate (as it is in the next example, too); to make the audience conscious of time and consider the development of the film and perhaps concentrate on the anti-dramatic scene in more thoughtful ways;[402] instead of moving between plot points, we are now moving between states of mind.[403] Interactivity had always offered the ability to accommodate multiple trajectories, but here I was able to use it to fulfil the dramatic promise of the story on one branch and on another branch evade not only the promise of that story, but the story itself.

If this ending is somehow about rising above the story, the final ending I elaborated is about being caught within it. Some people make the same mistake again and again and again. If the audience chooses '(again)' five times on different nodes and finally selects 'Fall with a lifeline (again)', they are condemned to repeat heartache for Anna again and again, but not before that heartache is recontextualised. First, we witness Anna's phone call with Mart;[404] this is another orphan of the trunk re-homed in this most bizarre of branches. In this scene, Anna calls Mart back and it is revealed that she knows Mart is married and has children. In this ending, this gap in the story is filled. Anna is no longer the victim of a rogue therapist who is secretly married. She is having an affair with a man whom she knows is married and has children. Anna is recontextualised, inessentially. Her victimhood is complexified and her motives for finding Mart in the airport are different, too. No longer is Anna seeking the man she loves because she feels the need for a connection; now she is seeking her lover because she thinks *he needs the connection*.

The difference is, crucially, *inessential* because the trunk and other endings which followed do not require this information to be conclusive. It means that one version of events may stay the same through the original trunk, or they may be overridden by this particular branch. The structures of puzzle films often draw attention to themselves and only make sense when the causal chain is finally definite.[405] As a multilinear and achronological multidirectional puzzle film, *The Limits of Consent* is somewhat different; it makes sense in different ways depending on the ways it is completed because *the audience knows that there are things they do not know and that those things are inessential, but it is still possible to know them if they want to explore further. It is not an impossible puzzle film or a puzzle film with a single solution—it is a puzzle film with multiple inessential overridable solutions.*

This solution, however, is arguably not a solution at all. The aim of the phone call scene with Mart is certainly not to typify Anna nor diminish the suspense of the film. On the contrary, the effect of the trunk has already been had by the time the audience reaches this point; the complexification of Anna's victimhood (as with

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402 Jeremy Bubb, "The Missing Page: Place as Palimpsest and 'Foil'" *Journal for Artistic Research* 20 (2020).

403 Knudsen, "Zen and the Art of Film Narrative," 349.

404 Appendix A: *Fall with a Lifeline (again)* 00:00:00-44.

405 Maria Poulaki, "Puzzled Hollywood and the return of complex films," in *Hollywood Puzzle Films* ed. Warren Buckland (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36.

the endings where the focus is on Liis and the negative feelings she has towards Anna for instrumentalising her) aim to cast events in a new light and demonstrate that although the whole picture might have been clear, it was far from whole and who knows what other distortions this narrative bias in Anna's favour might have produced. From here the audience is able to revisit the airport sequence again with this new knowledge. Anna had concluded from Liis's speech about lifelines that is better not to fall alone but had not guessed that Mart himself *was the very lifeline through whom she would be strung up.*

In all honesty, I had not known this either until late in the editing process until I stared at those Post-it notes stuck on my office wall and finally realised what it is about toxic relationships which keeps them going. *A toxic relationship is not moving at all. It is going in circles.* Like a fever dream which resets itself continuously with every stumbling moment of consciousness; like the stuttering vinyl with no-one sane around to lift the needle; the toxic relationship is a nightmare in its unending repetitions. To reflect this, the film here simultaneously fixes in place and transforms the protagonist. Clare Foster writes that repetition is the means to make a bounded entity perceptible;[406] only when Anna goes through this cycle again and again does the emotional distress and shock become clearer. At a critical juncture when the material is repeated once, then twice, then three times, it becomes recognisable because it can prescribe future events;[407] but, ironically enough, in this ending, there is no future for Anna.

Anna kisses and has sex with Mart in his office, finds him in the airport, has sex with him again in the toilets, discusses lifelines with him, is abandoned by him, finds him with his arms around his wife, and weeps in grief as the memory of her ex-husband returns to her. Then she does it again and again and again. She is caught in a nodical loop, moving from the first node in a loop back to the same node. Just like a fevered looping dream, there are slight variations, but they neither increase in intensity nor momentum. Mihkel Maripuu's score, likewise, remains consistent over the same events again and again until the end credits roll over two more nodical loops indicating that it will continue ever onwards.[408]

David Mamet warns writers against circularity and repetition calling them antithetical to drama;[409] but in such circular narrative structures the audience cannot help but become aware of the repetition, cannot help but recognise it,[410] and therefore respond to it. Anti-drama, here, highlights its own lack and in that highlighting asks the

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406 Clare Foster, "Afterword: Repetition or Recognition," in *On Repetition: Writing, Performance and Art,* ed. Eirini Kartsaki (Bristol UK, Chicago USA: Intellect Publishers, 2016), 213.

407 Foster, "Repetition or Recognition," 214.

408 Appendix A: *Fall with a Lifeline (again)* 00:01:10-12:48. This ending was not scripted.

409 Mamet, *On Directing Film*, 93.

410 Alice Bell, "Unnatural Narrative in Hypertext Fiction," in *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative,* eds. Jan Alber, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Brian Richardson. (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013) 190.

audience to reflect on what else might be happening. Mamet's warning is a sensible one, but it is for unilinear writer-directors and does not consider the freedom which accompanies the *tree structure*; the freedom to devise multiple and diverse endings for one story brings with it the freedom to take storytelling risks with anti-drama for certain endings—risks which I would not dare take had the film had only one ending. To make a unilinear film in which events of the trunk took place and then half of that trunk was repeated again and again would not have occurred to me in the screenwriting process; there were so many non-repetitive possibilities with which to end the film that it did not occur to me until deep into post-production.

Time has stopped, but it ploughs onwards for Anna. The protagonist is caught in a loop on one branch, has disappeared on another, is letting go of the past on still another, and is taking revenge or forgiving her lover on others still. This is how life scars us; we can heal, move on, imagine the effects our pain had on others, consider the alternative trajectories and even live in them a little if we so choose—but part of us chooses to remain with the cut. This feeling becomes inessential over time, but just like my protagonist, it cannot disappear completely.

I have detailed in this chapter how the bloated trunk was repurposed to make the interactivity, and particularly the nodal depth of the film, more complex. These final compensatory moves resulted in achronology being adopted, which ironically gifted the trunk a faster, more dramatic pace, and allowed for the construction of five further anti-dramatic endings that explored anti-dramatic possibilities in more diverse ways. To re-cap, the new anti-dramatic endings shift the focus to peripheral characters whose tragic love life is then narrated from different inessential perspectives and are almost totally divorced from the dramatic trajectories of the trunk; abandoning the central conflict of the film and focusing instead on how the protagonist closes off a chapter of her backstory and moves on without any confrontation with her lover; transcends the protagonist altogether and instead offers two anti-arcs; one which leaves the camera hunting around for Anna in the blackened cityscape and another which re-contextualises the protagonist before catching the protagonist in an unending loop of pain. In other words, interactivity, once embraced, allowed me to render more outlandish trajectories for the plot and its characters which would never have occurred to me in any other guise.

Had I not been resisting interactivity during the screenwriting stage of the process; had I not been attempting to maintain the dramatic protagonist's journey through both the set-up and the confrontation; had I been more willing to breach the confines of the unilinear story at an earlier stage instead of preserving the *one true ending*, then I could have developed these endings more consciously in the screenwriting phase. However, even from early in the writing process, anti-drama had been my default alternative. But why? In the next and final chapter, I re-examine what motivated my compensatory moves and the tension they highlight in my creative practice. I return, finally, to the desire to entertain and the desire to experiment.

6. PROCEEDING TOWARDS DIFFERENCE

I attended ten public screenings of *The Limits of Consent* in four countries and held question-and-answer sessions after each of them.[411] In so doing, I came to understand the film I had created differently. In this final chapter, I use the initial exhibition of *The Limits of Consent* to frame my final reflections as I re-excavate the story development process. My aim here is not to understand the audience but rather to understand *how I perceive the audience as a writer-director.* This is what Susan Kerrigan describes as the 'filmic agent,' one who exists on a spectrum between creator and audience, allowing writer-directors to judge the quality of their work and anticipate whether it is acceptable to their imagined audience.[412] I frequently considered the audience in the creative process and how they would respond to a scene or sequence or the film as a whole. The compensatory moves which interactivity generated were ostensibly to harness interactivity within the parameters of a unilinear film; *but if I look closely, I see that these moves were often taken with one eye on how the audience might react*.

With this in mind, I return to my initial research question: I set out to discover the extent to which the introduction of interactivity complexifed, enhanced, and/or limited the process of story development for a psychological drama. Here I redress that question in light of what I have discovered and instead ask, *to what extent did interactivity first highlight and then reconcile within the story-development process my core tension with regards to telling a story on film: a desire to entertain the audience with drama and my seemingly irreciprocal desire to experiment with anti-drama?*

IN THE SHADOW OF A GIMMICK

Upon its exhibition, my hope was that the discussion of the film would gravitate towards the plot, characters, and *themes*. What might branching interactivity highlight in the themes, in particular? The main strategy when writing the screenplay was to emphasise Anna as an anti-hero protagonist who operates in a morally murky world that instrumentalises other human beings. My hope was that the audience would empathise with her and not question her actions. My additional hope was that if the audience explored branches which focus on Liis and her strong negative reaction to what Anna is doing,[413] they would feel as if the rug had been pulled from under them; Anna, their empathetic protagonist would suddenly be recast as a villain. Crucially, I hoped that this perspective would be limited to audience members who explored those branches and not necessarily be there for every audience member to

411 See Appendix E for a full list of public screenings.

412 Kerrigan, "The Spectator in the Film-maker," 195.

413 Appendix A: *Ignore the Call*, *Tell the Truth*, and *Hide the Truth*; Appendix D: scenes 31-8 pages 42-7.

discover. *The Limits of Consent* had become a puzzle film more and more as the story development process went on and on, and uniquely, it is a puzzle film which can be unsolvable or solvable depending on the individual audience member's curiosity (and to an extent, interpretive skill) or lack thereof.

I hoped that the puzzling bi-directional contradiction between Ending 1 and Ending 2, where the deictic centre is shifted by Anna either destroying or maintaining her affair with Mart, would highlight the ambivalence of their situation.[414] Events culminate and plot threads converge in the film's final act; the protagonist makes a choice which results in the film's consummate event leading to a climax which is both inevitable and unpredictable—the logical yet surprising resolution of the story;[415] but with *The Limits of Consent* the audience would receive two such endings. In a sense, I was aiming to reconcile the climaxes of *Tuesday, After Christmas* and *Brief Encounter* where the adulterous affair ends with a dissolved marriage or a dissolved affair respectively. Both conclusions would be possible and co-exist in *The Limits of Consent,* and would also draw attention to themselves and the feeling in a toxic relationship that one wishes for and fulfils both outcomes.

In these endings, Will Storr's *fundamental question that drives all drama,* 'Who am I?'[416] would be answered for Anna in two definite and yet irreconcilable and overridable ways, thereby negating the idea that the question can be answered definitively within a film narrative and problematising the idea that real character change can emerge from the protagonist and not just from random events in the plot. The bi-directional contradiction in these two endings emerges from a trivial choice: which proxy is Anna to send onto the plane to find out the truth from Mart.[417]

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(A) Choose the Rugged Man
(B) Choose the Suited Man
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That choice informs the approach and the approach informs Mart's responses. Mart's responses inform Anna's final decision to stay with him or leave him. It all comes from the audience's intervention at the moment when they choose between the Rugged Man and the Suited Man, and they have no more idea where any of these actions may lead Anna than Anna does herself.

Unfortunately, interactivity itself was obscuring a lot of what was meant to be under discussion; especially in the actual discussions that audiences were having with me after the film was screened. *Instead of opening up questions about the contradictions and grey zones of sexual consent, I was more often opening up questions about the nature of the film itself.* This is probably, in part, because it is easier to ask questions about interactivity than sexual consent and adultery in a public forum with a stranger;

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414 Appendix A *Choose the Rugged Man*, and *Choose the Suited Man*; Appendix D: scenes 20-6 pages 31- 41.

415 Iglesias, *Writing for Emotional Impact,*120-21.

416 Storr, *Science of Storytelling*, 103.

417 Appendix A: *Break Him*; Appendix D: scene 19 pages 29-30.

however, it is also, in part, because the interactive system highlights itself in its periodic interruptions and finally opens up questions about the interactive film as a form (because it is so rare) which overshadows every other part of the film. Were the interactive film a more common form; were *The Limits of Consent* one of thousands of interactive films released to audiences in 2022; then this would not be the case.

Figure 13. Anna must choose between the Rugged Man (Rauno Polman) and the Suited Man (Rasmus Kaljujärv).

Historian of interactive films Chris Hales argues that to interact with a film is no longer the novelty it once was.[418] My experience exhibiting *The Limits of Consent* contradicts this. The interactive film is still very novel. To illustrate, in the run-up to the festival, I was invited to several television and radio interviews to discuss the film and the film was highlighted in local print journalism, too.[419] If the plot or themes of the film were asked about in these interviews, their subsequent discussion rarely made it into the broadcast version (especially true of the two news programmes I appeared on); usually, the focus was entirely on the film's interactivity: something different and therefore something newsworthy. To compound this notion, during the opening ceremony of the *Tallinn Black Night's Film Festival*, the then-Estonian Minister of Culture Piret Hartman mentioned the film in her speech.[420] As much as I would like to believe that of the hundreds of films screened at that festival, mine was singled out by a cabinet minister of the Estonian government because of its story, characters, themes, visuals, or my screenwriting and directorial abilities, I am almost certain it was because it was something rare and different—an interactive film. This is because, as I argued in Chapter 2, it is not a film and it is not a game; it is something in between in a very exclusive club of films with interactive elements. Interactivity seemed to overshadow every other consideration, including themes and their resultant meanings as elaborated on at the different endings. Perhaps the writers of *Bandersnatch* were right to more consciously foreground themes of agency and

418 Hales, "Interactive Cinema in the Digital Age," 46.

419 See Appendix F for a full list of media appearances and links.

420 *Black Nights Film Festival* opening ceremony, November 11, 2022, Tallinn, Estonia.

images of other interactive media; in this way, their thematic portfolio became more consciously married to the discussion of the novel interactive film and was not overshadowed by it.

During question-and-answer sessions after the film's screenings, audience members often inquired whether or not I would make another interactive film. I cheerfully answered that I was planning to use a randomiser in my next project which would make the film literally different every time it was screened. This left me asking another question of myself: do I only want the discussions of my films to be centred around breaches in the unilinearity? As happy as I was that the film was receiving lots of attention; it left me questioning what kind of filmmaker I wanted to be, and intensified my insecurities about the legitimacy of the success of the film I had written and directed. Perhaps whatever limited success it was having was only thanks to the gimmick.

The answer to this doubt is double in nature. Yes, the interactive component of the film was probably responsible for a lot of the attention the film was receiving; but the interactive component had also been responsible for the content of the film itself all along. The compensatory moves the interactivity had generated in the story development process delivered a totally different film than the one I would have otherwise created. Paradoxically, *the film's exploration of its thematic portfolio might be overshadowed by interactivity, but the film's diverse exploration of its thematic portfolio through* drama *and* anti-drama *would not be possible without interactivity and thus without the compensatory moves which interactivity brought about in the story development process.* In other words, what was being overshadowed would not have been possible without the thing casting the shadow.

TO ENTERTAIN OR TO EXPERIMENT

Applying interactivity is analogous to applying restrictions. It is well known that restrictions generate creativity;[421] like following the rules of the Dogme 95 manifesto (a set of ten filmmaking commandments, eight of which remove or partially remove possibilities from the filmmaker with the use of negative verbs or adverbials).[422] Such restrictions force the practitioner to create differently. Mechanistically, the similarity between applying restrictions and applying interactivity is in how both procedures force *compensatory moves* to generate solutions to problems which would not otherwise occur. The interactive film does this by grafting something unnatural onto something that is pre-set and formed by a strong gravity of conventionality. *While the unilinear film with its fixed sequence of scenes demands that we proceed towards one final narrative outcome, interactivity when employing a* tree structure *demands that the sequence is unfixed and once it is unfixed we proceed toward difference.*

[421] Catrinel Haught-Tromp, "The Green Eggs and Ham Hypothesis: How Constraints Facilitate Creativity," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 11, no. 1 (2016): 15.

[422] Birger Langkjær, "What Was Dogme 95?" *Film International* 4 no. 1. (February 2006): 35.

Compensatory moves are present in the process of writing a unilinear film, too. However, they usually have the aim of correcting something deficient within the parameters of unilinear narrative. The compensatory moves for writing and directing an interactive film, in this research, have more broadly resulted in a *diversification* of the narrative possibilities which emerge from interactivity and, within the new problems present within that very diversification, finding even more narrative possibilities and alternative paths to the end credit crawl.

The diversity of co-existing, inessential, and adjacent endings is only possible for an interactive film with a branching narrative. As this interactive film was *approached as a film first and foremost,* it shows that the procedure is also possible for any unilinear film. Laura Jesson might decide to leave her husband in *Brief Encounter;* Paul might opt to remain with his wife in *Tuesday, After Christmas;* and Betty might find fame and fortune as an actor in Hollywood in *Mulholland Drive.* These different trajectories and endings are merely the first most obvious alternatives; what happens if the screenwriters and writer-directors of these films are forced to conjure nine endings for their scenarios (or even more) and retain them within the finished film? What kind of diversity might be possible? Certainly, I can say for my previous films that there was a diversity of possibilities which I might have disregarded out of hand. This might have been due to the gravity of narrative conventions or simply because I know that writing a film involves writing a fixed sequence and so the ending I write is the one which I determined at that moment to be the most appropriate, logical, dramatic, unpredictable, or whatever other criteria I might have had. And if I have already written an ending that rises from the events of the narrative naturally and closes the story satisfactorily why would I bother to deeply explore another eight possibilities?

At first, I tried not to write any other resolutions to my interactive film either. The first step outline began with the story of a woman who wants to abandon her toxic relationship. No matter what decision was made, the film would redirect the audience to the same ending; therefore, crucially, there was no need for the audience to re-watch the film. To compensate for this perceived problem, I re-plotted the film and unknowingly employed the *tree structure* which initially led to eight *dramatic* endings. The problem of a singular outcome in an interactive film is only such if re-watchability is a consideration. I have cited numerous examples of interactive films with only one outcome, including the very first interactive film, *Kinoautomat,* and some of the most experimental interactive short films such as *Possibilia.* So why was a single outcome such a problem for me? To concern oneself with re-watchability is to concern oneself with the audience; I want the audience to return to the film and watch it again. I understood, from the beginning of the creative process, that interactivity was inviting the audience to rewatch by disnarrating other possibilities and thus I attempted to craft a re-watchable narrative as a result.

The best way I know to make a film re-watchable is to follow the conventions of drama as I have been trained by screenwriting experts, screenwriting manuals, and by watching other films which follow these conventions. If I stop to consider the films I rewatch, they are most often the films which have entertained me rather than

the ones which have challenged me. This possibly has more to do with the trigger to rewatch something rather than watch something new. In rewatching, I most often gravitate towards something I know I have enjoyed in the past already. Something safe. Something entertaining.

The later step outlines had differences in outcomes, but these differences were cosmetic, so I diversified the boughs and branches to make the trajectories of the protagonist more distinct. I began including anti-dramatic boughs and branches such as one where the protagonist is killed halfway through the film. At the core of this compensatory move is also, to a certain extent, rewatchability. I wanted the audience to rewatch and for the second watch to be meaningful in its difference.

As I drafted the screenplay, I pushed the first node further and further back in the narrative (concomitantly creating a longer and longer trunk) and thus allowed the story more time with my *unilinear* protagonist before the arrival of the first node. I wrote in the previous chapter about giving the audience an informed choice with the long trunk, but equally important is the notion that the audience is *involved in the story* by the time the first node arrives; again, making them more likely to rewatch. Extending the trunk, however, exacerbated the *two Annas* problem (I could not accept the idea that a truly rounded protagonist could have two viable choices at critical junctures). To circumvent this problem and maintain my well-rounded dramatic protagonist, I used meta-nodes to facilitate the protagonist's disappearance from the narrative if anything other than the *one-true-ending* was selected. If the audience made a choice which moved them away from the dramatic endings, then they would have accidentally walked into a different film focusing on a different character—an inherently anti-dramatic tactic which suddenly abandons the trajectory set by the trunk which is intrinsically tied to the protagonist.

As well as making the trunk more dramatic and therefore giving audiences more reason to rewatch, there was another reason to push the first node further and further back into the trunk: *it meant that the film would be more unilinear and less interactive*. The interactive system became less complex (from eight endings in the last step outline to five endings in the first edit of the produced film) not just as a cost-saving measure; it was also a reaction against the form I had adopted for this research. Doctoral guidelines (that the film had to be screened at an international film festival in order for it to qualify as part of the PhD) encouraged me to expend great effort in writing and directing a film that was as high-quality and glossy as I could with the resources available. Experimenting with interactivity was becoming a secondary consideration. If the bulk of the film was unilinear and only the final ten minutes were interactive, I strategised that *it would be taken seriously as a film first and foremost by festival curators*.[423]

[423] Interactivity did create many difficulties on the festival circuit. With the Berlin International Film Festival, it proved to be technically difficult to submit the film because their system precluded the possibility of submitting more than one file, and *The Limits of Consent* comes with 18 video files and an explanatory document. Meanwhile Sundance and Julien Dubuque refunded the entry fee and informed me that they were unable to accommodate the film due to its interactive nature.

The *one true ending* was crucial to this strategy. If they selected it, they would be more likely to be entertained. By the final draft of the screenplay I was, at the first node,[424] making the choice which would lead to that ending being plainly obvious:

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(A) Confront him
(B) Disrupt the Unity of Time and Place
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My thought was that if an audience member selected A, they would be inviting further drama and, if they selected B, they would be breaking the narrative's trajectory and *should not blame me* when they end up in a long narrated bedroom daisy chain or with two supporting characters chatting randomly about video games in the most peculiar reaches of the film's scripted branches.[425] If they did not like these endings, it would be their fault for making the wrong choice. If they did like them, then my experiment with film narrative would succeed and I would therefore prove myself to be capable of making both an entertaining film and an experimental film. I did not wish to risk anti-dramatic endings without it being transparently obvious that the audience would be moving off the laid-out dramatic boughs and branches.

But why anti-drama? Why not simply plot out a significantly different story with the same protagonist which goes in a totally different direction depending on the first choice the audience member makes? Equally, I could explore different but related genres on the different boughs and branches without being transparently disruptive; one choice leads to a horror movie, for example, while another leads to a thriller. I could have written a truly multi-protagonist film where the narrative splits off with different characters with different goals from a node placed earlier in the story. I flirted with all of these ideas during the initial writing process, so why did I instead gravitate towards anti-drama of all things?

As noted in Chapter 1, Steven Maras, Glenda Hambly, and others are critical of screenwriting handbooks by Syd Field, Christopher Vogler, and Robert McKee, whose grand claims of universal archetypal story structure (what McKee described as the archplot)[426] privilege it and risk dampening any aspiring screenwriter's ambitions to tell their screen story in a different way.[427] If this criticism is accepted, one comes to understand that embracing a diversity of narrative approaches is the natural antidote to anything which forecloses them. An adjunct to this is the need to dilute the archplot with other approaches and thus erode its homogenising claim on a universal story.

I am simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the archplot. In attraction, I see success as a writer-director and in repellence I see a more interesting world of screen stories waiting somewhere else. I want storytelling to be more than just a join-the-

[424] Appendix D: scene 18A page 28.
[425] Appendix D: scenes 39-45 pages 47-57.
[426] McKee, *Story*, 55.
[427] Maras, "Towards a Critique of Universalism," 179; Hambly, "The Not So Universal Hero's Journey," 147.

dots exercise which the excesses of dramatic conventionality promote; dramatic conventions bounce echoes of predictability on one another in acquiescence to the archplot. Moreover, as a writer-director who embraces liberality, I wish to challenge the homogenising and universalising claims of the purveyors of dramatic conventions. Perhaps a rejection of these posited universals will lead to the narrative's failure, but it does not matter because I am desirous of this rejection precisely for the sort of subjectivity within storytelling it promotes. However, a timidity within my creative impulses emerges which often discourages me from pursuing anti-dramatic storytelling.

McKee argues that writers should only write what they believe and that the majority of writer's do not believe what anti-drama promotes and only embrace anti-drama as a juvenile rebellion against established practices, '[l]ike a child living in the shadow of a powerful father, you break Hollywood's "rules" because it makes you feel free.'[428] To challenge his interpretation of the situation, perhaps more of these children do not break the rules because they are afraid of the power which this father wields or *perhaps they are afraid to feel so free*.

With this film, interactivity afforded me opportunities to overcome this fear via a mechanism which mitigated the risks involved within that very overcoming. I leaned more into anti-drama as the interactive system was deepened. Achronology was added to the trunk, and elements from the trunk were moved to the boughs and the branches, creating additional endings which were far more outlandishly diverse in their anti-drama than those I originally wrote. Ironically enough, anti-drama emerged more from a tightening of the trunk of the film, which rendered the trunk more dramatic or at least gifted it a faster pace. A tighter and more dramatic trunk contrasted more vividly with the anti-dramatic boughs and branches. Doubly ironically, in the editing process the *one true ending* (when the audience chooses the Rugged Man to enact Anna's revenge),[429] was becoming less and less appealing to me in its quotidian rendering as the obvious climax to the film's trajectory. Meanwhile, instead of offering anti-drama via meta-nodes, the choices at each of the nodes would instead emerge from elements of the story. In the removal of the meta-nodes, I removed the explicit warning about what the audience might find on this or that bough. At the first node in the final edit of the film,[430] there is a dramatic and anti-dramatic choice which does not unjustifiably and insecurely draw on meta-level awareness:

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(A) Break Him
(B) Break Time
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In a sense, this is me acknowledging ownership of the anti-dramatic endings I had been developing and further overcoming my fear of them. I would entertain the

[428] McKee, *Story*, 66.
[429] Appendix B *Choose the Rugged Man*; Appendix D: scenes 20-4A pages 31-6.
[430] Appendix B *Start* 00:22:05-56.

audience with a tight twenty-minute trunk which sets up all of the story's elements and then either pay this off with one of the film's two dramatic endings or undermine it with one of the film's seven other anti-dramatic gear shifts. In the final edit, half of the film's content is anti-dramatic and these anti-dramatic scenes, from the writer-director perspective, offer a diversity which makes sense precisely because they are anti-dramatic and anti-drama has no requirement to make any kind of sense within a given narrative. In hindsight, I wish I had been bolder and not offered my audience any kind of dramatic endings, and from the first node, all the trajectories were taken to diverse and different places to what was set up in the trunk. But I was not brave enough at any stage to allow myself such a move. Even as my concern with re-watchability faded, it never completely disappeared.

Creating anti-dramatic scenes and endings within a film with nine possible endings was a lot safer to do than for a film with just one. Risking the possible alienation of the audience with a fifteen-minute looping of the film's central airport sequence,[431] for example (arguably the ending of the film which is most difficult to watch), was done with the full knowledge that they could look to other boughs and branches if they are dissatisfied. More than that even, with that particular ending I gleefully conspired with my editor to create a sequence which would encourage the audience to stop watching and try something else. The second part of that ambition is telling. In a film with one ending, 'try something else,' means watch another film. But with *The Limits of Consent,* it means 'try another branch.'

The anti-dramatic endings were no longer there to preserve the sanctity of the dramatic endings. The dramatic endings had instead become the safety valve for the anti-dramatic endings.

As a writer-director, I still struggle with hedging my impulses. Sometimes a compensatory move is a generative creative leap; sometimes it is creative dilution. My tendency to experiment is often undercut by my tendency towards conservative conformity and an often-unacknowledged aim to please the nebulous ideal audience I have in my mind. Interactivity allowed me to explore both these tendencies in a process which oscillated between the two poles; I could be as *radical* as I wished to be without fear because I knew that a *less radical* vision lay elsewhere in the disnarrated material on other boughs and branches. If an audience member dislikes one pole or another, they can simply try another one. And with that truth, I worry less about what they think of the film and care more about the kind of difference I might obtain in the absence of this worry.

Interactivity and the *tree structure*, in particular, had offered me a diversity of endings. By the final edit, I was, perhaps too late, embracing the particular plurality it offered both the story and the protagonist. Instead of making a film first and foremost, I was making an interactive film first and foremost.

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[431] Appendix B *Fall with a Lifeline.*

CONCLUSION

In this PhD, I set out to better understand the story development process from the perspective of a writer-director who introduces interactivity to the traditionally fixed and unilinear film. By employing artistic research as a methodology and filmmaking as a mode of enquiry, I was able to explore the practitioner's inside-in perspective on the development of the structure, protagonist, and endings of a film which had been unfixed. My hope is that this PhD is useful for other writer-directors, screenwriters, or narrative-based artists interested in exploring multilinear forms and disrupting any sedimented conventions which buffet their work.

This PhD has exposed many other fruitful avenues of potential research connected to *The Limits of Consent*. Variously, discussions of this research have shown interest in the film's exhibition,[432] the technical elements of interactivity, and an analysis of the audience's reaction to the film. On numerous occasions, audiences or members of the academic community asked whether I was studying the frequency with which certain choices were made, or how the film was received if one or another ending were reached. A reception-based study of these questions might yield useful results, but this was outside the scope of both my research questions and methodology, as well as my reasons for employing interactivity to begin with: not to understand the audience but to disrupt the story development process. Interactivity in this process became a propagator of complexity which impacted the story development by forcing me to seek out greater storytelling diversity within a series of compensatory moves. In this monograph, I traced my compensatory moves as I attempted to make a film first and foremost and how interactivity continually informed changes in the story's direction across various drafts of the step outline and screenplay as well as edits of the film. These changes in direction most readily reflect my insecurities about following my anti-dramatic instincts and my reciprocal embrace of safer conventional and dramatic choices in crafting a story on film. The tension between these two poles was repeatedly demonstrated at intervals of writing the step outline, screenplay, and editing the film. Interactivity, finally, allowed for a partial reconciliation of these two poles and the co-existence of dramatic and anti-dramatic trajectories in the same film.

Filmmaking rewards structured and rigorous processes. Space for new practices or experimentation must be fought for in inception and maintenance because filmmaking with all its logistical and financial challenges discourages risk-taking. The penalties for failure can be both financially and personally harsh. It had been over a decade since I had last found myself directing a film and one of my mistakes in the creation of that film was, in part, the risks I took in the writing process and the sort of hedging I undertook in postproduction against those very risks. This sort of experience (in combination with the high-stakes/intolerance-of-failure found in film production) promotes a sort of conservatism which adjunctively promotes an

[432] See Appendix G for my own account of *The Limits of Consent's* exhibition.

embrace of narrative conventions which often promote themselves as universals and thereby encourage the curtailing storytelling possibilities. But when attempting to tell stories on film, what I have discovered is that one must attempt to resist this embrace if one truly wishes to push boundaries and explore new possibilities. One method of resisting this embrace is to employ multilinear forms, such as interactivity, which force the sort of compensatory moves I made throughout the writing and editing of *The Limits of Consent.*

Compensatory moves brought about by interactivity's disruption allowed me to overcome my creative conservatism—albeit partly. The central irony of this PhD is that in attempting to maintain a certain unity of dramatic structure and protagonist, I not only opened up more anti-dramatic opportunities, I forced myself to take them to preserve the dramatic ones. I deemed that there was only *one true ending* of the film and took greater screenwriting and editorial risks in the other endings because of that ending's status within the interactive system. A further irony of this compensatory move is that, finally, one of the endings I am least satisfied with is the very one I deemed to be the *one true ending*. In screenings of the finished film, I continually hoped that audiences would not select this conclusion to the story, and I was disappointed when they did. Finally, I would, if I had an opportunity to make this film again, dispose of this ending altogether and embrace anti-drama in a more committed fashion while still at the screenwriting stage.

My experiment in interactive filmmaking is replicable. I believe that any film with a single protagonist adopting the interactive *tree structure* could find a similar diversity of character arcs and possibilities across genres and individual screenwriting/ directorial styles. A different protagonist and plot would generate a different sort of diversity; a film with a stronger or weaker emphasis on plot or character or theme would likely result in different emphases in the diverse endings within the tree structure. This project began with plot and then moved to character concerns more consciously as the screenplay developed; further research in multilinear storytelling on film which uses character as the narrative progenitor (rather than plot) would most probably generate different results.

A limitation of this research was that I only thoroughly explored the *tree structure;* there are many more possible structures where perhaps equally diverse story-development phenomena might emerge. Because I set out to make a film first and foremost rather than an interactive narrative which happened to be a film, I did not take the time to examine these structures before embarking on the writing process therefore I gravitated towards the structure with the clearest resemblance to existing unilinear films with forking paths such as *Blind Chance* and *Sliding Doors*. By focusing on the *tree structure* and applying it across the whole filmmaking process I was able to immerse myself in the structure and its implications. However, there is most certainly room for further artistic research in this area by exploring different interactive structures (such as *the network* or *the maze*) or examining what kind of new structures might emerge from technological innovations.

Another limitation of this research is that I wrote and directed only one film which belongs to the psychological drama genre with a thematic portfolio steeped in the ethically grey. Had I produced multiple shorter film projects in other genres with different themes, then different kinds of films would have emerged with different narrative emphases. These films would possibly have been constrained differently, and thus would have been reciprocally free to move in directions which were not obvious for the narrative of *The Limits of Consent*. Despite embracing multiple anti-dramatic endings, those endings still emerged from what was set up in the unilinear portion of the film which preceded them.

I can unhesitatingly predict that the interactive film will never supplant unilinear film nor become a popularised cousin to unilinear film. It should perhaps be considered more often than it is currently by writer-directors of all stripes for the sort of narrative complexity and opportunities it affords and the disruption it enacts on the story development process. My reluctance, in this regard, comes from a perspective that multilinear forms potentially overshadow thematic considerations in their novelty and I am not entirely comfortable, as a writer-director, being placed into the narrow niche of a multilinear storyteller. This reluctance is about how effectively other elements in the story (plot, characters, themes, etc.) are maintained as the focal point of the film's reception over and above multilinear innovation. However, this problem can only be overcome by the continued increase of the number of films which embrace multilinear strategies in their development processes.

Writer-directors attempting to disrupt the foreclosure brought about by narrative conventions need to be vigilant in their resistance to the draw of conservative tendencies amplified by the often expensive and therefore high-risk art form which is filmmaking. Resisting such tendencies allows one to explore the form in new ways, but it takes a constant awareness of whether or not one has gone far enough. As a creative method undertaken in this PhD, interactivity offers many benefits even for writer-directors who ultimately still choose to make a unilinear film. If written and even edited in a multilinear way, there is, naturally enough, a diversity of possibilities which emerge that would otherwise not. I can confidently claim that none of the anti-dramatic narrative trajectories or endings would have ever occurred to me, let alone made it into the final edit of the film, without the interactive form releasing me from the conformity of pursuing a single ending and instead permitting me to experiment more freely with anti-dramatic trajectories.

For my future creative practice, at the initiation of the story development process, I intend to consciously seek out and employ a comparable propagator of complexity, whether that be interactivity or another multilinear device. The concept of employing a randomiser on one of the branches of *The Limits of Consent* offered multilinear *and* non-interactive possibilities which could be explored within the realm of artistic research, for example. In the employment of such a complexity propagator, writer-directors have an opportunity to actively consider what the resultant compensatory moves underscore within their creative process and, in that underscoring, any

potential way forward that they might indicate, circumventing the curtailment of the universal story in favour of a plurality of possibilities where dissimilarity is a virtue to be embraced rather than an anomaly to be flattened. These possibilities will not only be acknowledged but embraced and actioned with a diversifying intent.

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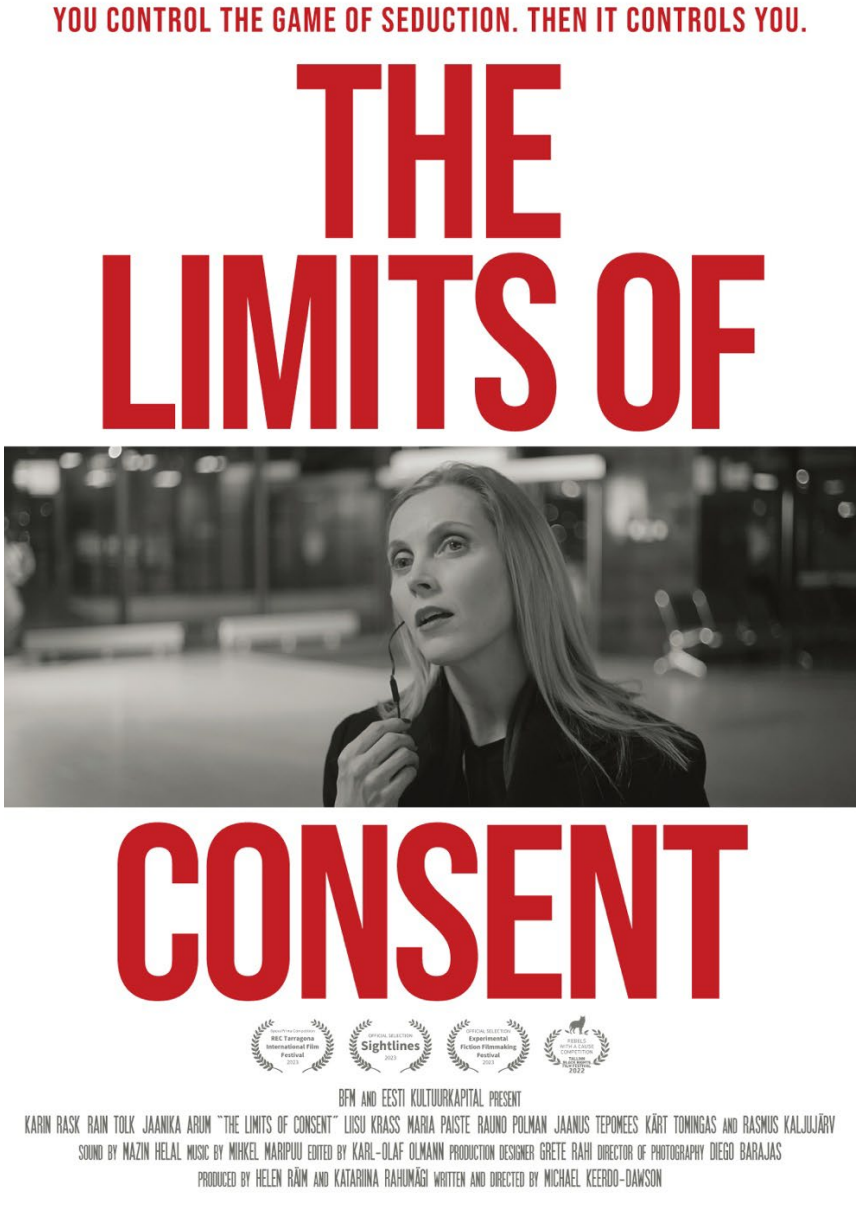
APPENDICES


YOU CONTROL THE GAME OF SEDUCTION. THEN IT CONTROLS YOU.
THE LIMITS OF
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Sightlines
BFM AND EESTI KULTUURKAPITAL PRESENT
KARIN RASK RAIN TOLK JAANIKA ARUM "THE LIMITS OF CONSENT" LIISU KRASS MARIA PAISTE RAUNO POLMAN JAANUS TEPOMEES KÄRT TOMINGAS AND RASMUS KALJUJÄRV
SOUND BY MAZIN HELAL MUSIC BY MIHKEL MARIPUU EDITED BY KARL-OLAF OLMANN PRODUCTION DESIGNER GRETE RAHI DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DIEGO BARAJAS
PRODUCED BY HELEN RÄIM AND KATARIINA RAHUMÄGI WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MICHAEL KEERDO-DAWSON

APPENDIX A: *THE LIMITS OF CONSENT* (2022)

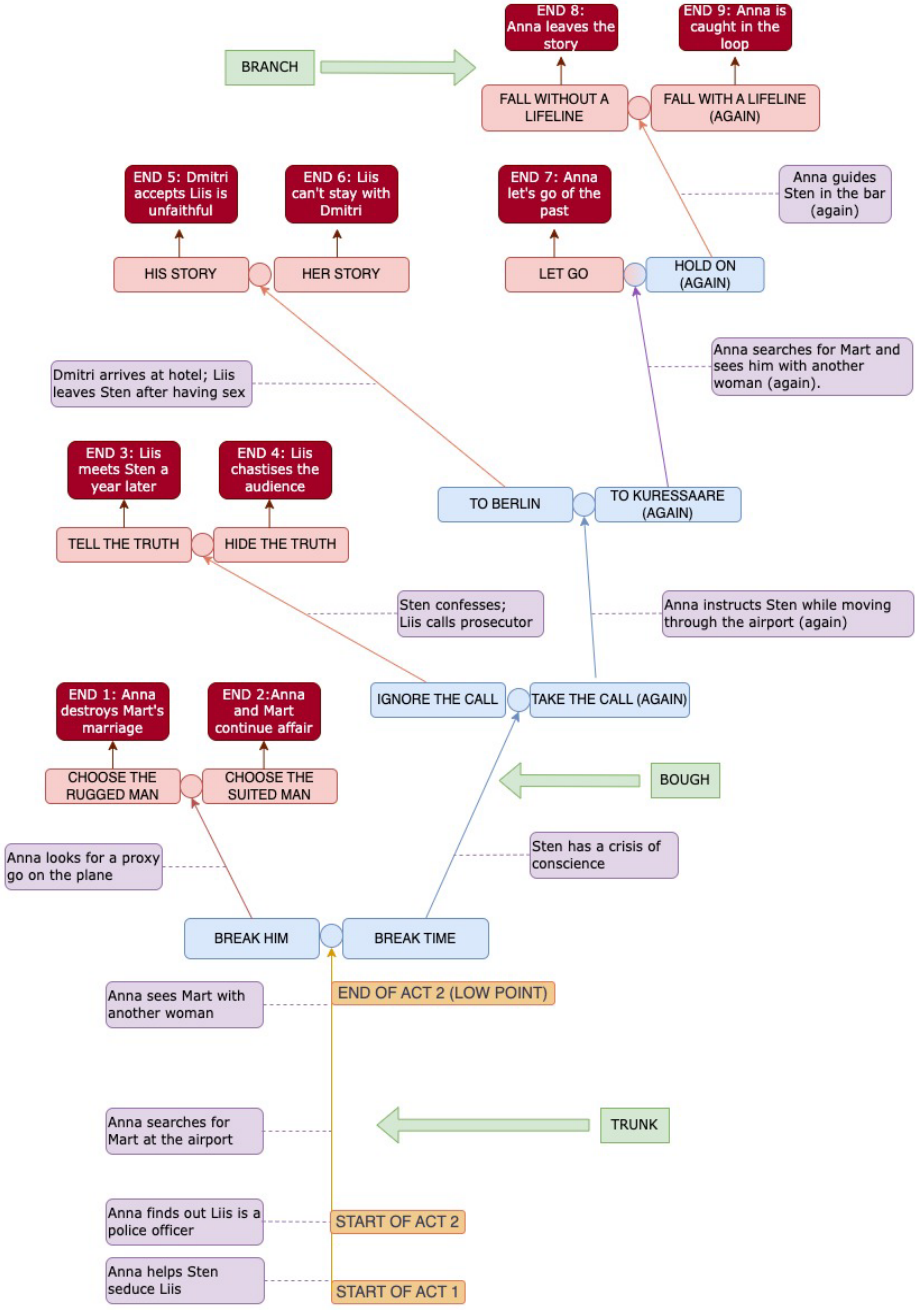
View the film: https://youtu.be/9rbVZdb1QCw

LINKS TO DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF THE FILM

Password for all videos: thelimitsofconsent1701D

1. START https://vimeo.com/741546692
1A. BREAK HIM https://vimeo.com/741548251
1B. BREAK TIME https://vimeo.com/741548343
2A. CHOOSE THE RUGGED MAN https://vimeo.com/741548429
2B. CHOOSE THE SUITED MAN https://vimeo.com/741549180
3A. IGNORE THE CALL https://vimeo.com/741549635
3B. TAKE THE CALL (AGAIN) https://vimeo.com/741550149
4A. TELL THE TRUTH https://vimeo.com/741550322
4B. HIDE THE TRUTH https://vimeo.com/741550843
5A. TO BERLIN https://vimeo.com/741551224
5B. TO KURESSAARE (AGAIN) https://vimeo.com/741551507
6A. HIS STORY https://vimeo.com/741551641
6B. HER STORY https://vimeo.com/741552423
7A. LET GO https://vimeo.com/741553428
7B. HOLD ON (AGAIN) https://vimeo.com/741553847
8A. FALL WITHOUT A LIFELINE https://vimeo.com/741554007
8B. FALL WITH A LIFELINE (AGAIN) https://vimeo.com/741554485

APPENDIX B: DETAILED PLOT MAP & SUMMARY



In an up-market bar in downtown Tallinn, Anna, a forty-year-old pick-up artist, is in the middle of remotely assisting an awkward man to seduce a lonely woman using hidden earpieces, microphones, and facial recognition technology. Anna controls her client, Sten, as she would a puppet by telling him what to say and what to do. Sten has little agency in the process as Anna and her assistant manipulate the target, Liis, into sleeping with him by mining information from Liis's social media accounts and making Sten seem like a charismatic stranger who magically intuits her personal history and deepest feelings.

In a flashback, Anna is with her therapist Mart telling him he's not a bad person.

Anna uses the death of Liis's father to seduce Liis, making it seem as if Sten has a deeper connection to her when he speaks about losing someone important to him. Liis becomes enamoured with Sten and cannot perceive the puppet master at all. Liis is prompted to speak about the biggest problem in her life: she is lonely despite the fact she is in a long-term relationship with a man who is somewhere else tonight. Liis's description of loneliness triggers an uneasy feeling in Anna.

In a flashback, Anna is amid a passionate kiss and then sex with Mart in his office. He comments that he must go home and pack. Annas says she knows what time his flight is leaving.

A woman slaps a man in an airport cafe. Anna witnesses this but does not give it any attention. Anna spots Mart in the airport cafe and continues to guide Sten in the seduction. Anna speaks explicitly about sex while guiding Sten and catches the attention of several passengers in the airport.

Anna sees Mart rush into an airport toilet. She follows him inside passing a confused man (Dmitri) and tells him she's coming with him to Berlin. They have sex in the toilet, it is fast and awkward, but Anna does not mind. Mart, however, is distracted and agitated.

While waiting for their plane, Anna continues to guide Sten in the bedroom. Mart goes for a coffee and does not return.

Flashback: Mart listens to Anna in the therapist's office. He's agitated as she talks about choices.

Mart confesses by text message that he is not going to Berlin and wishes Anna a good trip. Anna rushes back into the airport as her client's orgasmic climax plays in her ear, desperate to find Mart. A beautiful woman passes Anna, also seemingly desperate to find someone. The beautiful woman rushes into the arms of a man standing at another gate. The man is Mart. Anna witnesses this and walks to an airport window and cries.

Flashback: Mart tells Anna that their time is up in the therapist's office and approaches her. The power in their intimacy is now out of balance.

Anna recomposes herself and turns to face outside an airport window. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) BREAK HIM
(B) BREAK TIME

BREAK HIM: Anna confronts Mart pretending to be a ticket inspector. Anna discovers that the woman Mart met is his wife, Katrin and they are going to Kuressaare--not Berlin. Anna looks at which seat they are in before they turn to board the plane. Anna rushes around the gate looking for the person who is sitting next to Mart. A confused passenger and a passenger who only speaks French make it seem hopeless. Finally, Anna must choose between a rugged man and a suited man. Another choice appears on the screen:

(A) CHOOSE THE RUGGED MAN
(B) CHOOSE THE SUITED MAN

CHOOSE THE RUGGED MAN: The Rugged Man sits next to Mart and Katrin on the plane. He tells Mart that a woman is screaming about killing herself at the gate. Mart decides to leave the plane. Katrin is shocked and asks the Rugged Man if the woman is the ticket inspector. The Rugged Man nods.

Mart is in the airport. It's empty. There's no sign of Anna.

Katrin listens to the Rugged Man as he describes, magically, all the problems in their relationship.

Anna is in an airport corridor. She has been guiding the Rugged Man remotely and telling him what to say with a hidden earpiece. Mart has found Anna; he is angry but confesses that he thought she would turn up uninvited. Anna asks him if he is worried that she would destroy his marriage or his career. She then offers him a choice. She will destroy one. Mart chooses that Anna will destroy the marriage. Anna walks away from Mart disappointed.

On the plane, the Rugged Man begins to seduce Katrin.

In a Kuressaare hotel room, the Rugged Man and Katrin fall into bed. Katrin ignores Mart's call.

CHOOSE THE SUITED MAN: The Suited Man approaches Mart in a waiting room and makes it subtly known that he is Anna speaking through a hidden earpiece

and the Suited Man is her latest puppet. Mart pulls him to one side and explains that he did not tell her that he was going away with Katrin because he did not want her to be jealous. The Suited Man (Anna) tells Mart that she will forgive him if he kisses her. Mart is confused: kiss Anna or kiss the Suited Man? It's clear he must kiss the Suited Man or Anna will tell Katrin everything.

In a nearby bathroom, Mart and the Suited Man kiss passionately. Anna is convinced of Mart's commitment to her and agrees to stay with Mart.

BREAK TIME: Anna is waiting in line at the check-in desk of the airport. A couple quarrels behind her. Her assistant calls.

Sten is in a hotel corridor. He's having a crisis.

Back in the airport, Anna's assistant describes what Sten is doing. Anna says she'll call him.

Sten's phone rings. It's Anna. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) IGNORE THE CALL
(B) TAKE THE CALL (AGAIN)

IGNORE THE CALL: Sten ignores Anna's call. He approaches Liis in the hotel room and confesses that he's not the man she met in the bar.

Flashback: Sten is trying to seduce Liis again. It is from Liis's perspective (Anna is an invisible figure in the background).

Kaivi, a prosecutor, is in Liis's hotel room. The pair debate whether Anna has broken any laws. Kaivi sees that it is not morally right but does not think that any laws have been broken. Kaivi kicks Sten out of his hotel room but tells him to leave the equipment Anna was using.

Kaivi is in bed with her husband who is trying to sleep while she loudly ponders the morality of Anna's profession.

Kaivi meets Liis and has had a change of heart. She tells Liis coldly that her colleague can prosecute Anna if she's been illegally hacking data but that the truth will come out and will compromise Liis's relationship with her partner Dmitri and might hurt her career. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) TELL THE TRUTH
(B) HIDE THE TRUTH

TELL THE TRUTH: Liis confesses to her boyfriend Dmitri that something happened while he was in Berlin.

Sometime later, Liis is walking her dog and passes Sten. They try to talk on a frozen bay. Sten confesses that he does not know what to say. Liis asks him to let her speak for both of them—they proceed to say nothing.

HIDE THE TRUTH: Liis has a chance to confess to her partner, Dmitri. Instead, she breaks the fourth wall and chastises the audience for choosing this option. After her monologue, she embraces Dmitri and does not confess.

TAKE THE CALL (AGAIN): Anna convinces Sten to continue. The seduction continues as it did before but from the point of view of Sten's bodycam.

Anna sees Mart going into the toilet (again) and follows him inside.

Anna passes a confused Dmitri who is leaving. As she looks for Mart in the toilets (again) a choice appears on the screen:

(A) TO BERLIN
(B) TO KURESSAARE (AGAIN)

TO BERLIN: Dmitri enters a hotel in Berlin and rests in his room, then opens the window to the bedroom and runs himself a warm bath. Dmitri finally lies in bed.

In Tallinn, Liis is getting ready after having sex with Sten. She sits down and leaves Dmitri a voicemail saying she misses him.

In Berlin, Dmitri receives Liis's message and smiles.

In Tallinn, Liis recomposes herself and leaves the hotel. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) HIS STORY
(B) HER STORY

HIS STORY: Dmitri narrates a series of short stories about different couples (who lie in different beds together or separately). The couples are people whom Anna passed at the airport. He tells the story of different men who ignored the signs that their women did not love them. Finally, Dmitri admits that he knows Liis has been unfaithful to him but he is choosing to ignore this fact and will continue to be her man.

HER STORY: Liis narrates a series of short stories about different couples (who lie in different beds together or separately). The couples are people whom Anna passed at the airport. She tells the story of different women who suppressed the signs that their men were wrong for them. Finally, Liis admits that she cannot suppress her feelings about Dmitri anymore; he's not right for her and their relationship will end soon.

TO KURESSAARE (AGAIN)
Anna finds Mart, waits at the gate with him, goes to the plane, receives his text message that he's not coming, and rushes back into the airport to find him with his arms around Katrin—again. All the while, a mysterious chess master narrates it as if it were a pre-determined game. The only difference this time is that Mart and Katrin go through the gate and Anna has no chance to check their tickets. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) LET GO
(B) HOLD ON (AGAIN)

LET GO: Anna finds a man who is interested in buying her ex-husband's boat. She sits on the boat and thinks and let's go of the lifeline. The man tries hard to negotiate a lower price but Anna stays firm and gets what she wants.

HOLD ON (AGAIN): Anna, Sten, and Liis are back in the bar amid the remote seduction again. Anna lists (through Sten) the various types of ropes that there are on a boat. Anna then listens to Liis's speech about lifelines, Mart calls and Anna ignores the call—again. A choice appears on the screen:

(A) FALL WITHOUT A LIFELINE
(B) FALL WITH A LIFELINE (AGAIN)

FALL WITHOUT LIFELINE: Anna's phone is left on the bar table.

Tallinn at night; different images of the city and the harbour. A tram runs through the city and a lonely light in a car park remains isolated and by itself.

FALL WITH A LIFELINE (AGAIN): Anna takes Mart's call (again); Anna knows that Mart is married and has kids and tries to convince him to go to them instead of calling her. Mart confesses that he loves Anna.

Anna rushes to the airport, meets Mart, has sex with him in the toilet, is abandoned by him at the gate, sees Mart with his arms around Katrin, and cries. She then repeats this sequence with slight variations ten times.

APPENDIX C: END CREDITS

Passenger	Aleksandra Kotjužinskaja
Airport Announcer	Aleksander Solovjov
Russian Translations / Maria	Alexandra Shadrina
Production Assistant	Aliisa Rantanen
Female Narrator	Alina Karmazina
Second Boom Operator	Andrea Mark
Alexander	Andri Arula
Make Up Assistant	Ann Miller
Bar Goer	Anthony Chapman
Spark / Driver	Antonio Pozojevic
Spark	Ardi Ossaar
First Assistant Director	Carol Alice Tõniste
Key Grip	Daniel Chedid
Bar Goer	Daniel Kerge
Passenger	David Wilkinson
Director of Photography	Diego Barajas Riaño
Story and Editing Consultant	Dirk Hoyer
Male Narrator	Eduard Tee
Costume Assistant	Eliisabet Merete Leppoja
Make Up Artist	Elsa Levo
Passenger	Erik Kiviselg
Bar Goer	Erkki Kasenurm
First Assistant Camera	Fabó Toth
Kaivi's Husband	Gerhard Saks
Production Designer	Grete Rahi
Set Photographer	Hannariin Lamp
Producer	Helen Räim
Passenger	Heleriin Pärkma
Bar Goer	Helina Kurist
Consultant	Inna Ombler
Grete	Ira Tumanova
Liis	Jaanika Arum

Chess Commentatory	James Canty III
Passenger	Janika Nuka
Sten	Jaanus Tepomees
Passenger	Jason Medina
Woman at the Beach	Jekaterina Kazantseva
Passenger	Jelena Leit
Passenger	Jevgeni Afonin
Passenger	Juhan Rodrik
Confused Passenger	Julia Spellman
Bar Goer	Karel Airapetjan
Anna	Karin Rask
Tristan	Karl Markus Mäesalu
Editor	Karl-Olaf Olmann
Janne	Karmel Naudre
Kaivi	Kärt Tomingas
Producer	Katariina Rahumägi
ADR Assistant	Kreete Kokovkin
Location Assistant	Kristiina Varimets
Second Assistant Director	Kseniia Buzhbetskaya-Rudkevitš
Bar Goer	Lana Star
Passenger	Laura Maarand
Passenger / Additional Translation	Liis Slugen
Katrin	Liisu Krass
Passenger	Marelle Vaino
Bar Goer	Margherita Marchetti
Translator	Margit Keerdo
Krista	Maria Kasesalu
Hele	Maria Paiste
Bar Goer	Marina Shindenkova
Bar Man	Mark Kersman
Passenger	Martynas Lapinskas
Bar Goer	Mayra Lynn Assink
Sound Designer	Mazin Helal
Writer-Director	Michael Keerdo-Dawson
Production Assistant (COVID)	Michaela Dlouhá

Composer	Mihkel Maripuu
Bar Goer	Moonika Vane
Script Supervisor	Nata-Triin Eisel
Passenger	Natalia Vainkula
Seccond Assistant Camera	Nathalia Gardin
French Man	Nicholas Marsh
Taavi	Priit Vainus
DIT	Rafael de almeida
Mart	Rain Tolk
Boom Operator	Ralf Schneider
Suited Man	Rasmus Kaljujärv
Rugged Man	Rauno Polman
Lights	Reece Mladjov
Passenger	Reena Uusmets
Graphic Designer	Rob Bowden
Dmitri	Roman Maksimuk
Passenger	Roope Valtteri Ristsoo
Passenger	Sergei Filipov
Master of Light	Shishir Bishankhe
DIT	Sofia Kai Jürimäe
Passenger	Susanna Saar
Passsenger	Svetlana Nõmme
Shocked Young Passenger	Triinu Lota Lepp
Best Boy	Tristan Luige
Passenger	Viire Väli
Ticket Inspector	Viktoria Kurotskina
Casting Assistant	Vivian Melder
Sergei	Vladislav Saveljev
Location Assistant	Zoya Slavina

APPENDIX D: FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAY

The Limits of Consent

Written by

Michael Keerdo-Dawson

michaelkeerdodawson@gmail.com
+372 5300 6230

1 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATE 13 - NIGHT. 1

ANNA (42 y-o), divorcee-whose-kid-has-flown-the coup, black clad with her hair down, sits on an airport bench and blushes to the roots; breathing DEEPLY, she looks around and tries to get control of herself. She leans back and exhales as an act of self-fortification.

A numbness takes over as she finds a point of focus before her as the ambient sounds of the airport fades.

2 EXT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - NIGHT. 2

Anna stands in the corner of her therapists office speaking to someone we can't see; the dark Gulf of Finland looms behind her.

3 INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS). 3

MART (40 y-o), wearing a thin jumper and a slick blazer over it, sits beside his desk; behind him is a view of Tallinn at night. His intellectual attire belie his good looks.

Mart wipes away HIS tears, angling himself away from Anna.

ANNA
You should be paying me for this. You're my therapist, remember?

MART
I wake up in the middle of the night. Every night. I can't get back to sleep. Then I come here and I get judged--

ANNA
I didn't say you're an awful person, Mart...I just said that you do awful things.

Anna sits down opposite him in an expensive looking chair.

ANNA (cont'd)
You can't get back to sleep because you MAKE yourself stay awake. Because it's easier to face reality in a half-woken stupor.

Mart, with an ounce of borrowed calm, closes his notebook and then looks at the desk clock, it's nearly 17:30, and then at Anna who is waiting patiently. He fortifies himself.

MART
We're out of time.

Mart stands, Anna does too and offers him HIS OWN box of tissues. Mart refuses.

Mart goes to hug her, Anna allows him to do so, she is unresponsive but doesn't reject him either. His hands caress her and explore her sides and the folds of her back.

Anna pulls back and they look into each others eyes. Mart kisses Anna on the lips and Anna slowly responds and kisses him back -- it gets heated. Mart stops.

MART (cont'd)
I can't today. I have to pack.

ANNA
Your flight's not until ten thirty.

Mart takes his jacket off. Anna unzips her top.

MART
I'm going to hell.

ANNA
Is that a problem?

Mart stops and looks into her playful eyes. He's going to say something...he doesn't. They kiss and continue to undress each other.

4 EXT. SAILBOAT - DAY. 4

Anna walks between sailboats standing on dry docks until she finds hers.

CUT TO:

Anna standing on the sailboat watching TAAVI [55 y-o], a gruff, older-sailor type is beneath her examining the boat. It's windy and cold.

Anna fingers the LIFELINE on the boat, she twists it around her wrist distractedly.

Taavi climbs a ladder and joins Anna on the deck.

TAAVI
Two thousand.

ANNA
Two thousand? My ex paid five times that not three years ago, how can it be two grand?

TAAVI
If he did he was ripped off. These things lose half their value as soon as they hit the water. He should have known that.

ANNA
He was always wowed new shiny things.

TAAVI
Paint's good but the rudder is broken and the electrics are shot. I'd need to rewire the whole thing. No sails...

Anna pins her mouth closed and stares him down in frustration; the Boat Man breaks eye contact first.

ANNA
Four. Four thousand is fair.

TAAVI
Two five. Final offer.

ANNA
Four.

TAAVI
Alright, three, but you're taking me for a ride.

Anna considers it.

ANNA
Four.

5 EXT. TALLINN STREET - NIGHT. 5

Anna crosses the street at a level crossing. Tall buildings loom above. Many people are coming from the other side of the street. Anna walks alone into and through the crowd.

INTER-TITLE (Black screen white text): The Puppet Master

6 INT. HIGH END BAR - NIGHT. 6

Cars driving through the streets from above, they pass into the reflection of a large tower with a disorienting effect, seemingly converging on the reflection's intersection and disappearing into themselves. This is what --

-- ANNA SEES looking down from a window thirty floors up. Passion and replaced with concentration, frustration with attitude. She wears an earpiece with a microphone.

ANNA
Sten, it's Anna. Can you hear me?

STEN (O.S)
(Through a radio mic)
I can hear you.

Anna moves out of a closed-off section of the bar and into a busier area.

Anna sits down next to HELE (25 y-o); Hele looks like she just fell out of bed with the posture and body language of a woman who cares less than is necessary. In her lap is a tablet and next to her is a laptop hidden behind a table.

People pass by laughing and chatting with drinks in their hands. The music is loud with heavy bass.

Anna sees:

-- Two young women laughing opposite their table. They vacate their seat and head to the bar.

-- A young woman smiling and talking to a man opposite.

-- A trio of young women. One touches the others arm as she speaks. They head back to a table in the centre of the room.

Anna looks at Hele then at the tablet.

On Hele's tablet: a live feed from hidden camera attached to a person's chest moves through a crowded bar (it's the same bar!) The camera focuses on a seat and turns and lowers as the man the camera is attached to sits, presenting a clear view of the room from his vantage.

ANNA
Let's see what you like.

Anna turns from the tablet and looks across the room again.

Anna is watching STEN [40 y-o] the man to whom the hidden camera is attached. He sits at a table on the other side of the bar. He has a severe face, well-dressed but there's something AWKWARD about the way he sits. He scans the room.

On the tablet: The camera passes over several groups of young people clustered together, partying and dancing and having a good time.

The camera on the live feed stops panning and lands on a woman, LIIS (30 y-o), at the bar wearing a figure-hugging white dress with jet black dead-straight hair in a ponytail.

Liis is alone. There's something off about it, a woman like this naturally moves in larger numbers.

ANNA (cont'd)
That's what we're looking for.

On the tablet a small rectangle appears around Liis's face. On the OS monitor a freeze-frame of the same image appears.

A host of web-links and other images of Liis pop up.

HELE
Okay, so. Facial recognition is a go. Meet, Liis Lepik. 30. No relationship status. I'll be in her facebook in two seconds.

Anna turns from the tablet and surreptitiously looks at Liis standing at the bar.

Liis turns and looks in Sten's direction.

Hele is scanning through various posts and pictures. Picture of Liis and a young man appears. There are four similar pictures in a variety of happy-couple situations.

HELE (cont'd)
Okay...But... it looks like she is in a relationship with Dmitri Oja. A newly minted in-house lawyer for a Swedish company called Talstar.

HELE
Pulling down a big salary.

ANNA
Go back to Liis. Tell me more about Liis.

Hele goes back to Liis's social network pages.

HELE
Mum's on here. But no dad. Maybe... Yep, Dad bought the farm two years ago.

ANNA
Was she with Dmitri when the Dad died?

HELE
Yes. But where is Dmitri tonight?

ANNA
Doesn't matter. He's not here.

Anna watches Liis. Liis is standing STRAIGHT and surveying the room CAREFULLY. Legs apart. Arms folded. Anna contemplates her essence for a moment longer.

ANNA (cont'd)
Sten, are you ready?

STEN
Yes.

ANNA
The woman in white at the bar. Stand up and head to the space next to her. You're going for a drink NOT for her.

Sten stands from the table and starts to walk,

ANNA (cont'd)
Tell me more about the father.

HELE
Died of cancer. Um, liked fishing, football, brief military career, worked in the ship yards. Painting ships. Went to Ukraine a lot. Catamaran's, looks like he raced them.

Sten is at the bar on the tablet: the camera moves between the busy bar staff and Liis who's not looking his way.

ANNA
What's she drinking?

HELE
Looks like a vodka tonic.

ANNA
Sten, order dry martini.

Sten gets the barman's attention.

STEN
Dry martini, please.

ANNA
Don't look at her yet.

LIIS
Good choice.

ANNA
Now look. Offer her a high five.

Sten turns towards Liis and offers his hand for a high five. Liis HESITATES but reciprocates.

ANNA (cont'd)
It's more of a summer drink but, I make an exception for New Year's Eve.

STEN
It's a summer drink but, I make an exception as it's new year's.

ANNA
Better yet... on a boat ride around the bay. Somewhere warmer than Tallinn though.

STEN (O.S)
Better yet... on a boat ride. Maybe somewhere with a bit more sun than Tallinn though, right?

LIIS
Definitely.

HELE
Shit.

Anna covers the microphone and turns to Hele.

HELE (cont'd)
(Disbelievingly)
She's a cop.

A picture of Liis in a police uniform is on the monitor in front of Hele.

Anna turns back to Sten and Liis at the bar.

ANNA
Sten...she's not a suitable candidate.

Sten reacts but doesn't say anything.

ANNA (cont'd)
Sten? Take your drink and walk away. We'll find someone else. I promise.

STEN (O.S.)
(To Liis)
Excuse me a second.

On the tablet the live feed shows Sten lifting his phone, opening notes app and typing: "I want her".

ANNA
I really don't recommend--

Sten continues typing: "You said you could get me anyone I wanted."

On the tablet Sten puts the phone away.

STEN
So you live in Tallinn?

LIIS
All my life.

HELE
This is a dead end.

ANNA
Sten, take her hand and look at it.

Sten takes her hand and looks at it.

HELE
We have his deposit.

Anna covers the microphone.

ANNA
You might be able to live on 10% but I can't.

Hele reluctantly turns back to the tablet.

ANNA
(To Sten)
You live in Tallinn but you never spent a day on the water in your life.

STEN (O.S.)
You live in Tallinn but you never spent a day on the water in your life.

ANNA
Let go of her hand.

Sten let's go of the hand. Liis's still smiling.

LIIS
I was on the water most of my childhood. And you can't tell that by looking at someone's hands.

ANNA
Oh yeah, tell me, how many ropes are there on the boats you sailed.

STEN
Tell me, how many ropes do you use on the ships you sailed.

LIIS
Ah, you're full of shit. If you were a sailor you'd know...

ANNA
There are no ropes on the sail boat.

ANNA
There's the barber hauler, cunningham, bow line, lifeline...Every rope has a name.

STEN
There are no ropes on a sail boat. There's the barber hauler, the cunningham, the bow line, the life line... They all have a name.

ANNA
Sten, gently touch one of her earrings.

Sten reaches up and touches one of the earrings.

ANNA (cont'd)
These are beautiful.

STEN
These are beautiful.

Two men, a younger one and an older one pass between Anna & Hele and Sten & Liis. The dominant of the two is HENRIK (25 y-o) he's gangly but has something handsome about him. They both eye Anna and Hele as they pass. The other is PAUL (25 y-o) and obviously uninspired by this bar.

HELE
Uh-oh.

Anna turns and looks as the two young men sat at the table next to them whispering conspiratorially, eyes full of mirth.

ANNA
(To Sten)
I've got a table if you want to join me.

STEN (O.S.)
I've got a table if you want to come sit with me... join me.

Paul stands, approaches, and sits next to Hele -- too close.

Anna looks past him tries to concentrate on Sten and Liis.

PAUL
(To Hele)
Mind if I sit here?

HELE
Deeply and intensely.

HENRIK
Deep and intense is the way I like it.

Henrik dives in now, carrying his own chair, he sits down across from Anna blocking her view..

HENRIK (cont'd)
We are in dire need of female company.

Anna ignores him and watches Sten as he starts to move towards his table with Liis.

HELE
You're in dire need of something, for sure.

HENRIK
Is this flirty mean or really mean?

ANNA
I'll be right back, Sten. Let her talk.

Anna takes the earpiece out and turns to Henrik with a big forced smile on her face. She takes his hand.

ANNA
Guys, ignore my young friend here. We're flattered. But we are in the middle of something.

Anna stands up and pulls Henrik to his feet as she does.

HENRIK
It's New Year's Eve, what are you in the middle of?

Henrik spins her on the spot and pulls her to his chest.

HENRIK
Come with us! This place is dead. Me, and Paul we can take you somewhere that will blow your mind.

PAUL
She's not going to come with us.

Paul stands up as Anna gently pushes herself away from Henrik.

PAUL
She's not going to come with us.

HENRIK
You want to come with us, I can see it.

Anna stands in the middle of the two men and hooks her arms with them and starts walking them away from her table.

ANNA
You know what, guys. I would love to.

Henrik whoops with excitement as they get further and further away from Anna and Hele's table.

Anna throws a glance to Sten and Liis and sees them sat together at Sten's table now.

7 INT. ADJACENT CORRIDOR - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS) 7

Anna, Henrik, and Paul get further down the corridor.

HENRIK
That's great! You see!

ANNA
But we ARE in the middle of something.

HENRIK
Oh, come on please. You gotta.

PAUL
Told you, you just gotta ask her how much she costs.

Henrik pushes Paul a little. Anna lets go of them and starts walking backwards looking back at them.

HENRIK
(To Paul)
Don't be such a idiot!

ANNA
Where are you guys heading next?

PAUL
Place called Night Star.

HENRIK
Night Star.

ANNA
You think you can show a woman a good time in a dump like that?

PAUL
Where then?

ANNA
Do you know Linna Piirid? It's new.

HENRIK
Can't says I do.

PAUL
Never heard of it.

HENRIK
You'll go there later?

ANNA
Get your phone out.

Both fumble for their phones as they walk. Henrik playfully pushes Paul.

HENRIK
She was talking to me.

ANNA
You want my number or not?

8 INT. HIGH END BAR - NIGHT. 8

Anna quickly scrambles back to the table. She drops her phone and it clatters to the ground. Anna turns back and scoops it up then puts her earpiece in and looks across the room to Sten and Liis. She hears the audio.

Hele's face is full of worry.

HELE
He's talking about his ex.

STEN (O.S)
And then she left me, about two months ago. I don't know his name but I've seen him before.

ANNA
Sten, stop. Don't say another word about your ex. I'm back now.

LIIS
I'm just going to visit the lady's room.

Liis angles her body towards the front of the bar.

ANNA
Take her hand.

Sten takes her hand.

ANNA (cont'd)
You lost someone, too, and in a more significant way, I can tell.

STEN (O.S.)
You lost someone as well, and in a more significant way. I can see that.

Liis moves her body back to face Sten; her eyes glaze with sadness and confusion.

ANNA
It's hard, right. Was it your mother or your father?

STEN (O.S.)
It's hard, isn't it? Was it your mum or your dad?

LIIS
My Dad. How did you know?

ANNA
I could just feel it about you.

STEN
I got a sense about you.

LIIS
What else do you sense?

Hele gets Anna's attention and points to a picture on the screen of Liis in an army uniform wearing a beaming grin.

Anna sees the people at the table next to Liis and Sten stand up and start putting their coats on.

Anna stands and begins to move to the vacant seat.

ANNA
You're a professional. And I think you like to live dangerously. Me, too. Are you one of those women who volunteered for national service?

STEN (O.S.)
You're professional. I think you like to live dangerously. I do, too. Are you one of those women who volunteered for national service?

LIIS
Yes.

Anna walks past Sten and Liis and takes a seat behind them at another table; she can now see Liis and it's like they're looking directly at each other bypassing Sten.

ANNA
To impress your father, right?

STEN (O.S.)
To impress your dad, right?

Liis gives another sad smile to show Sten is correct.

ANNA
I bet you're a border guard.
something like that?

STEN (O.S.)
I think you're a border guard.
Border police? Something like that.

Liis smiles coyly and plays with her glass.

LIIS
Close enough. What else?

Beat.

ANNA
You're lonely.

STEN (O.S.)
You're lonely.

LIIS
Not right now.

ANNA
Sten, laugh.

Sten laughs.

ANNA (cont'd)
I hope not.

STEN (O.S.)
I hope not.

ANNA
But you have a boyfriend,
right?

STEN (O.S.)
But you've got a man, right?

LIIS
Yes.

ANNA
But you're still lonely.

STEN (O.S.)
But you're still lonely.

Silence at both Anna's table and at Sten and Liis's table.

Anna's phone vibrates. She grabs it and sees Mart is calling. Anna doesn't answer.

LIIS
You know, the funny thing about a lifeline. If you're sailing alone the lifeline can be deadly.
(Beat)
If you fall off the boat in the middle of the sea and land in the water someone might find you. If you fall off attached to the lifeline then you just hang there, tethered to the boat, exposed to the elements while your boat sails onward with no-one at the helm. With no-one to pull you back on-board.

ANNA
Best not to fall alone then.

STEN (O.S.)
Best not to fall alone.

Liis smiles in agreement. A glimmer of a smile passes over Anna's mouth and eyes.

MART (V.O.)
(Over a phone)
I just wanted to tell you something.

9 EXT. HIGH END BAR - NIGHT. 9

Anna is on a balcony outside the bar. It's a cold night and Anna isn't wearing enough clothes. ANNA is on her phone.

MART (O.S)
I wanted to say it earlier but I--

The sound of a child speaking can be heard over the phone.

MART (O.S.)
Sorry, just a second.

Muffled sounds of Mart chiding the kid.

ANNA
Mart. Really. Be with your kids, be with your wife. You're not going to see them for days.

MART (O.S.)
I want to say something.

ANNA
How's Katrin going to feel? It's your last night together for a week and you're on the phone.

MART (O.S.)
She's not here, she's working late and please don't use her name...Okay, I'm sorry, I just--

ANNA
Don't be sorry. She's not even going to say good-bye to you?

MART (O.S.)
It doesn't matter.
(Pause)
Sorry, I just miss you.

ANNA
Okay.

MART (O.S.)
And I love you.

Silence.

ANNA
Oh... Thanks.

Silence. Anna grimaces at her own response.

ANNA (cont'd)
Are you still there?

MART (O.S)
Yeah.

ANNA
I have to go, I... Have a good time in Berlin.

Anna ends the call. Stunned. She thinks.

ANNA (cont'd)
"Thanks"?... Fuck.

INTERTITLE: Sex. And Other Things You Can Do at an Airport.

10 EXT. TALLINN AIRPORT ENTRANCE CORRIDOR - NIGHT. 10

Anna pulls a small case into the airport, walking at a pace, her phone to her ear.

ANNA
Where are they now?

HELE (O.S.)
Getting to the hotel room.

Anna starts unwrapping her scarf. She checks her watch again.

A man behind her, Karsten (50 y-o) is on his phone, too [Karsten speaks in German].

ANNA
Wait until they get into the room and then turn the camera off. I don't think he needs any extra help. Oh, and say happy new year to your mum for me.

KARSTEN
Ich kenne ihn, klar. Ein netter Typ. Er wird in jedem Fall bezahlen und da sein, wenn Du ihn brauchst. Ausserdem kann er gut kochen.

HELE (O.S)
Will do. Have a great trip! Happy new year! By the way, where did you send those guys earlier?

KARSTEN
Wenn Du Dich gut mit ihm verstehst, zeigt er Dir vielleicht sogar das Casino. Dort gibt es ein Gratis Buffet.

ANNA
Liina Piirid. Why?

KARSTEN
Nein, seine Frau wird Dir nicht wehtun. Nicht so wie sie das mit Calvin gemacht hat

HELE (O.S.)
No reason.

ANNA
Okay, go do what ever you kids do on New Year's Eve. Have a nice night!

Anna and Karsten walk through a pair of sliding doors.

11 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT CHECK-IN DESK - NIGHT. 11

Anna arrives at the check-in desk queue. Her phone rings. A couple behind (MARIA and KEVIN) her are talking [in English]. Anna drops her phone as she tries to answer, she hooks it up and answers it as the line crawls forward.

ANNA
Not quite New Year yet, Hele.

KEVIN
I didn't say that.

Anna looks towards the parallel check-in queue.

HELE (O.S.)
Sorry, they went in to the hotel room together but he's come out again.

MARIA
You said that he was going to look after it.

ANNA
Where did he go?

KEVIN
No, I said maybe. Maybe.

HELE (O.S.)
He's sat in the corridor. Banging his head against the wall

MARIA
You didn't say maybe.

ANNA
Did she say something?

KEVIN
I didn't say definitely.

HELE (O.S.)
No, she didn't say anything. Looks like he's trying to call you.

MARIA
You didn't say definitely, no. You said he would. That basically means definitely.

Anna's phone starts beeping.

ANNA
That's him.

KEVIN
I'll call him and make sure he's there over the weekend.

Anna adjusts her bag and answers. While looking at the parallel queue again.

ANNA
Sten. What's happening?

MARIA
Your brother isn't always where he says he's going to be though.

It's Anna's turn to check in, she steps forward and away from the bickering couple. Anna hands her passport over and smiles at the check-in girl, while putting her bag on the scales.

STEN (O.S.)
I don't think I can do it.

Anna looks to the parallel check-in desk (15 meters away) and sees --

--MART, alone, speaking with a blonde woman, JANE, working the check-in desk. Jane smiles at something he said.

ANNA
Hold on, Sten.

Anna types out a message on her phone.

At the check-in desk, Mart looks at his phone.

SUPER CAPTION: Did you mean what you said? Wouldn't you prefer some skinny twenty-something?

Mart scans around him.

Anna is moving away from the check-in desk now keeping one eye on Mart as she walks.

ANNA (cont'd)
What's the problem Sten?

STEN (O.S.)
It's a lie, Anna. It's all a lie. I might as well get a prostitute.

ANNA
How is it a lie, Sten?

STEN (O.S.)
It's not me. It was you.

ANNA
It was your face, your eyes, your voice.

Anna watches sideways as Mart makes his way from the check-in desk and heads for security.

Anna watches Mart walk away.

ANNA (cont'd)
Okay, Sten. Here's what we're going to do.

12 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT CAFE - NIGHT 12

A man and woman [KRISTA & SERGEI] stand opposite each other. Suddenly the woman slaps the man's face.

Anna sees this but walks by unfazed by it. She's walking at a fast pace, has an ear piece in now and is holding a TABLET in one hand. On the tablet she can see a live feed from Sten's camera.

Anna looks between the tablet and where she's walking.

ANNA
(To Sten)
Open the door.

On Anna's tablet Sten opens the hotel door. Inside we glimpse Liis sitting on the edge of the bed.

ANNA (cont'd)
Walk straight over to her slowly and take her hands.

LIIS
Where'd you go?

ANNA
Don't answer. Put one hand behind her head and the other on her cheek and kiss her.

12A OMITTED 12A

Mart takes a seat an the airport cafe. A PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN heads to him to take his order.

Anna sits at a safe distance so Mart can't see her; Anna types a message.

The sound of Liis and Sten's lips smacking can be heard.

Mart's phone, resting on the table lights up. He picks it up and looks.

SUPER CAPTION: Maybe you'd prefer a twenty-something brunette?

Mart grows cold and looks around as the pretty young brunette returns with his glass of wine. He stares at her brown hair as she leaves.

Anna watches Mart sat by himself.

ANNA
Sten, run your hand on the back of her head down her lower back. Support her weight and lower her onto the bed.

Anna looks down at the tablet. Liis appears again under Sten's shirt camera. Liis shuffles up on the bed and starts unbuttoning Sten's shirt.

Anna stands and walks away from the cafe.

ANNA (cont'd)
Let's get her out of that dress.

12B INT. TALLINN AIRPORT TERMINAL - NIGHT. 12B

Anna walks further down the gate corridor.

ANNA
Now, kiss her down the neck and over her breast. With your right hand, use your thumb to trace circles on her nipples. Clockwise.

MATCH CUT TO:

Anna further down the corridor.

ANNA (cont'd)
With your tongue, go around the edge of her outer labia until you reach the the base of the perineum. Firm your tongue as hard as you would to clear a pip from a piece of mandarin; run your tongue up the length of the perineum.

MATCH CUT TO:

13 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 9 - NIGHT. 13

Anna further down the corridor. Sits down on one the of the benches at Gate 9.

ANNA
Stop. Hold it at the bottom of her outer labia. Now, up through the middle of the inner labia, slower this time.

A lady behind Anna, GRETE (60 y-o), takes her headphones out.

ANNA (cont'd)
Find that nerve cluster again and run your tongue around it. And then over it. Now, gently put your nose inside her, try to brush the nerves with the bridge of your nose.

Grete looks over at her strangely. Anna notices and smiles at her pleasantly.

Anna stands up again.

ANNA (cont'd)
Fingers: with your right hand this time, compress your thumb and your index finger at the top and make a circle with the thumb, a little bit of pressure, like you're holding a wine glass just by the stem.

Anna peers down the corridor to where Mart should be coming from.

Liis can be heard moaning over the ear piece.

ANNA (cont'd)
That's it. Keep doing that.

Liis's moans get louder.

ANNA (cont'd)
Keep going.

Anna's spies down the corridor toward the cafe where she left --

-- Mart is COMING. He sees her but breaks eye contact IMMEDIATELY and makes a beeline for the men's room on the other side of the corridor.

ANNA (cont'd)
With your tongue, lick that spot fast like a cat drinking milk.

14 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT TERMINAL - NIGHT. 14

Anna heads towards the entrance of the men's room, surreptitiously scanning to make sure she's not seen.

ANNA
Keep going.

Anna heads inside the men's room as Liis's moans get louder over the earpiece.

15 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT. 15

A handsome man walks past Anna and gives her a peculiar look.[It's DMITRI, Liis's man, but Anna doesn't realise]. Anna continues with a what-can-you-do smile. The look drops as soon as the Dmitri is gone.

ANNA
When her thighs pincer your head. Keep going for another minute. If she tries to pull you away don't let her.

Anna checks the first stall -- empty. Anna checks the second stall -- empty. Before she reaches the third stall a hand reaches for her shoulder --

It's Mart, he pulls Anna close to him and instantly into a passionate kiss and embrace.

MART
Anna, what are you doing here?

Anna puts her finger to his lips. They speak quietly.

ANNA
I'm coming with you. I couldn't bear the thought of you going to Berlin alone on New Year's Eve suffering through some conference and... well, you took me by surprise earlier.

Mart kisses her again. Anna pushes him against the sinks-- raw passion unloaded. Mart starts unbuckling her belt. Anna stops him.

ANNA (cont'd)
I don't fucking love you, okay?

MART
Okay.

ANNA
And you don't love me either. You're just confused.

MART
Okay.

They start kissing again. Anna puts the tablet down on the sink and pulls the head phones out. The audio switches to the speakers and Liis's moans are clearly audible.

Mart stops, hearing the sounds of Liis moaning.

ANNA
Work.

Mart kisses Anna with a new found passion.

Mart undoes his trousers. He stops, embarrassed (implied flaccidity). Anna glimpses this and steps close to him taking his penis in her hands (implied).

ANNA (cont'd)
(Whispering)
We are in your office. It's the first time you sat next to me, he's left for good and I'm all tears, you want to comfort me but it's more... You finally dare to put your hand on my knee, it stays there too long.

With new found energy, Mart lifts Anna onto the sink and slides inside her.

Mart comes instantly and falls onto her chest. Anna smiles, stifles a laugh, and shhhs him.

The automatic taps come on. Anna yelps and jumps off the sink so her her dress doesn't get wet then pushes Mart away bemused at his speed.

ANNA (cont'd)
Get me some toilet paper.

Mart pants loudly.

Mart hands her some toilet paper. She wipes her genitals and then throws the tissues in the bin.

Mart pants again.

16 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 9 - NIGHT. 16

Mart is sitting at the Gate 9 with other passengers. Anna is still pacing.

ANNA
(To Sten)
Keep your tongue on the vaginal ceiling and extend it inside the birth canal approximately five centimeters.

Anna sits, checks herself in her phone camera then grabs Mart's hand and puts it over her shoulder.

Mart pulls it back diplomatically.

MART
Tallinn is a village. Berlin isn't. Let's wait.

Anna looks at him with a disbelieving smile while Mart nervously rubs his upper-lip.

ANNA
After what we just did. You're still worried about appearances?
(To Sten)
Okay, now back down to the fourchette. Stroke it with your tongue like you're catching melting ice-cream.

Mart looks at his watch, it's 22:25. Mart then looks down the airport corridor.

ANNA (cont'd)
Are you okay?
(To Sten)
Back to the clitoral cluster now, gentle strokes on the clitoral head.

Mart tries to conceal his mood with a strained smile.

MART
Yeah, just a bit tired.

Anna covers the mic.

ANNA
Did you know that when you're sailing alone a life line can be deadly?

Mart stands up.

MART
I didn't. Do you want some coffee?

ANNA
I'm not sure the place is still is open.

ANNA
You can check, but be quick.

MART
That wine went right to my head.

MART
Black, two sugars?

Anna nods and watches as Mart walks away.

TANNOY (O.S.)
Gate 9 for the 22:45 Flight 227A to Berlin is now open. All passengers for Flight 227A to Berlin. Please proceed to Gate 9 and have your boarding pass ready.

ANNA
(Less into it)
Put your right finger tip on her annus and apply gentle pressure.

As the message repeats in English and then in Russian the passengers around Anna stand and move to the gate.

Anna gets her phone out and starts typing.

SUPER CAPTION: Gate open. Hurry.

Sound of the message being sent but Anna keeps the phone in her hand.

CUT TO LATER:

Anna is standing now. She looks at her phone and paces nervously. The queue of passengers is getting shorter and shorter.

Anna types another message.

SUPER CAPTION: Where are you?

Sound of the message being sent again.

Message comes back. Anna reads:

SUPER CAPTION: I'll be there in a moment. Get on the plane.

17 INT. PASSENGER PLANE - NIGHT. 17

Anna negotiates her body through the crowd. She's alone. Anna thinks.

Anna gets out her phone and types.

SUPER CAPTION: Where are you?

Sten starts to moan over the ear piece.

ANNA
Sten, if you're close say 'oh my god'.

STEN (O.S.)
Oh my god!

ANNA
Sten, pull out of her turn away and hit your penis as hard as you can.

Anna's phone beeps.

SUPER CAPTION: Are you on the plane?

Anna waits. Thinking.

ANNA (cont'd)
Now get back inside her and try to stay to the left.

Anna types a new message.

SUPER CAPTION: Yes.

Anna's phone beeps again. Anna looks.

SUPER CAPTION: Anna, I'm not going to Berlin. Please, try to have a wonderful time. I'm sorry.

Anna SLOWLY takes this message in. Then grabs her bag from the overhead locker. She collides with a man.

18 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATE 9 - NIGHT. 18

Anna rushes off the gangway and back into Gate 9 just as the doors are being closed.

18A INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATE 13 - NIGHT. 18A

Anna stops, seeing Mart ahead of her in the queue for another plane looking around anxiously.

Anna moves towards him again quickly with a strong desire for an explanation.

Anna drops her phone and leaves it. Then changes her mind and goes back to get it. An ELEGANTLY DRESSED WOMAN passes her as she does.

The ELEGANTLY DRESSED WOMAN is MART'S WIFE, KATRIN (30 y-o). She's stunning and too young for him. She approaches Mart and kisses him on the lips, out of breath from running she's clearly explaining to Mart. Mart gives her a hug. Over Katrin's shoulder Mart sees --

Anna, about twenty meters away watching them.

Sten is still moaning.

LIIS (V.O.)
I'm really fucking close.

Anna sinks into an empty row of airport chairs; her vision fixed.

LIIS (V.O.) (cont'd)
Keep going.

ANNA
Sten, you can ejaculate now.

Sten groans in pleasure. Liis's moans reach their peak.

We're back to where things started. Anna blushes to the roots and looks around, breathing DEEPLY, she tries to get control of herself. She leans back into the seat and exhales self-fortification.

A numbness takes over but sadness simmers.

Anna watches as Mart proceeds along the queue with Katrin, throwing glances Anna's way but trying to ignore her.

STEN (V.O)
Anna, are you there?
(Beat)
This was the best night of my life.
I'll transfer the money first thing
in the morning with a bonus for going
all the way with me. I know, like,
ten guys who need this service...

Sten trails off as Anna pulls the earpiece out and sits... empty.

NODE 1

SUPER CAPTION: (A) Confront Mart.

SUPER CAPTION: (B) Disrupt the Unities of Time, Space, and Action.

[Note to reader: Continue reading from this point if you want to see what happens between Anna and Mart. Go to page 38 if you want to see the plot take an unexpected left turn]

(A) AGENTIC BRANCH - Confront Mart

19 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 13 - NIGHT (CONTINUED). 19

Anna stands up and walks towards Mart and Katrin at the front of the queue. One PASSENGER stands behind them. Anna's pace gathers into a controlled STORM to match her face.

The gate has yet to be opened. Anna goes straight boarding pass inspector and flashes her wallet quickly.

ANNA
Estonian Domestic Ticket Inspectorate.

Before the boarding pass inspector can say anything, Anna turns back to Mart and Katrin.

ANNA (cont'd)
I need to look at your boarding pass.

Mart reluctantly hands the boarding cards to Anna. She looks at then quickly and hands them back.

ANNA (cont'd)
Have a nice trip to Kuressaare, Mr and Mrs Tamm.

KATRIN
Thanks! Happy new year.

ANNA
You, too.

The queue starts moving and Katrin steps forward to give her boarding pass to the attendant.

Mart doesn't make eye contact with Anna despite her obviously staring at him. Mart moves away and presents his boarding pass. Katrin hold hands with him and walks down the gangway towards the plane.

Anna watches them go. Mart doesn't turn back.

Mart turns the corner and moves out of Anna's sight.

Anna quickly turns and moves to PASSENGER.

ANNA (cont'd)
Excuse me, are you sitting in seat 4?

The passenger shakes her head.

PASSENGER
Sorry, no.

Anna stops and steps back.

ANNA
(Authoritatively)
Excuse gentlemen. May I have your attention. Does anyone here have the ticket for seat 4?
(In English)
Seat 4?

A towards the back of the queue a man puts his hand up. Anna approaches and sizes him up. He's not Estonian.

ANNA (cont'd)
(In English)
Do you speak English or Estonian?

FRENCH MAN
(In French)
Do I look like I speak English?

ANNA
Fuck.

Anna looks at the last two passengers. The SUITED MAN -- with well-groomed hair. He looks obviously checks out the man in front of him --

A RUGGED MAN dressed jeans and rough leather jacket with a 5 o'clock shadow reading his phone.

NODE 2i

SUPERCAPTION: (A) Kill the Affair.

SUPERCAPTION: (B) Disrupt the Unity of Place.

[Note to reader: Continue reading from this point if you want to see Anna destroy her relationship with Mart. Go to page 33 if you want to see her maintain her connection to Mart]

(A) AGENTIC BRANCH - Kill the affair

ANNA (cont'd)
Stay here.

FRENCH MAN
(In French)
I'm in the queue, where am I going to go?

Anna makes a beeline for the RUGGED MAN who is about to present his ticket..

ANNA
I have 500 Euros. Would you be willing to swap seats with that man over there and do me a huge favour?

RUGGED MAN contemplates Anna's proposal.

INTER-TITLE: Lifelines

20 INT. KURESSAARE PLANE - NIGHT. 20

Mart and Katrin are sat together, Katrin is by the window and reading something on her phone and wearing headphones. Mart is in the middle seat trying to recompose himself.

Rugged Man takes a seat next to Mart and exhales. He touches his ear quickly and assesses Mart with his eyes. [In English]

RUGGED MAN
Did you guys see that?

Mart smiles weakly at him.

RUGGED MAN (cont'd)
Never seen anything like that before.

MART
What happened?

Katrin takes her headphones out.

RUGGED MAN
Some blonde woman just went ape-shit at the gate, screaming about killing herself.

MART
She's still there?

RUGGED MAN
Think they'll need a fucking garrison to move her.

Mart's eyes twitch in his sockets.

MART
(To Katrin)
Stay there. I'll be back.

KATRIN
Okay.

Mart is gone.

Katrin gets her phone and call's Mart. There's no answer. She looks upset like tears are coming. She laughs sadly.

A flight attendant closes the plane door. Katrin stands to object but then hesitates and sits down again.

KATRIN (cont'd)
It was a woman? The one who said she was a ticket inspector?

The Rugged Man shuffles across one seat so he's next to her.

21 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 13 - NIGHT. 21

Mart runs up to the waiting area and see Anna sitting alone. Her ear-piece in again.

ANNA
(To the mic)
Yeah, I saw. It's the same woman.

Mart is confused and transforms from savior to lost puppy.

MART
Someone said...

Anna takes the earpiece out.

ANNA
So you were never going to Berlin?

Mart walks away a little bit and gestures and yells in frustration.

MART
I said that because I thought you might try something like this.

ANNA
Like what?

MART
Like this!

ANNA
I wouldn't be 'trying' anything if you hadn't said you loved me!

22 INT. KURESSAARE PLANE - NIGHT. 22

Katrin and Rugged Man sit in silence. The Rugged Man looks around, He touches his ear. Then taps out a beat on his thighs while Katrin stifles more tears.

23 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 13 - NIGHT. 23

Anna and Mart are facing off like a pair of rabid dogs.

ANNA
What were you thinking exactly? That I'd destroy your marriage or your career?

MART
I wasn't thinking.

Anna moves away and contemplates this choice; nodding angrily.

ANNA
Choose.

MART
What?

ANNA
Choose. Marriage or career?

Mart swallows. He proceeds cautiously.

MART
Now let's not get too drastic.

ANNA
Marriage or career?

MART
Which one to save or which one you'll destroy--?

ANNA
Fine. I'll destroy them both.

MART
Marriage. Marriage. Destroy my marriage.

Anna studies Marts face.

MART (cont'd)
How are you going to tell her?

ANNA
I'm not going to tell her.

Anna puts the earpiece back in and walks away from Mart.

ANNA (cont'd)
I'm going to fuck her.
(In English)
He's done this before.

24 INT. KURESSAARE PLANE - NIGHT. 24

Rugged Man comes alive again turns to Katrin, still despondent.

RUGGED MAN
He's done this before.

Rugged man puts his hand on Katrin's upper arm.

KATRIN
I...I don't...

RUGGED MAN
Women like you and guys like that.

KATRIN
(Pause)
What?

RUGGED MAN
It's not worth the punishment. Let me guess, he works late.

KATRIN
He has irregular hours, so do I.

RUGGED MAN
You try to do things with him and he doesn't want to. A walk in the park, trip to the theatre...

KATRIN
He's busy. He doesn't like theatre.

RUGGED MAN
Forgets your anniversary.

KATRIN
All men do that--

RUGGED MAN
No, they don't... And in the bedroom...It's ah... not great-

KATRIN
This is getting too personal. I'm sorry, I don't even know you. Can we just sit in silence, please. I'd like to be quiet now. Please.

Rugged Man holds up his hands. He digs into his bag and pulls out a book and opens it to the middle.

KATRIN (cont'd)
(Quietly)
What? What about in the bedroom?

RUGGED MAN
(Quietly)
It's like he's making the sex deliberately bad, right? No foreplay. First thing in the morning when you're half asleep. Always from behind, like he doesn't want to look at you anymore. He comes too fast but he never used to... Makes you feel used, right? Like some rag for him to masturbate into.
(Beat)
He's capable, but not for you, not any more. And I think you know why.

Katrin looks away embarrassed.

KATRIN
Am I... Am I a fool? Letting life repeat itself?

RUGGED MAN
Life only repeats itself because people love a good rhyme. But you know, like poetry, the best one's... don't.

Katrin looks away with an embarrassed smile and a sad countenance.

RUGGED MAN (cont'd)
Did you know, a lifeline can be deadly if you're sailing alone? You're tethered to the boat, you see. If you land in open water there's a chance someone will find you but if you're attached to a lifeline, well, then you sail on exposed to the elements with no-one to pull you back aboard.

KATRIN
Best not to fall alone then.

RUGGED MAN
No, that's not it. Best not to fall half way.

Katrin contemplates this.

24A INT. KATRIN'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 24A

Katrin and Rugged Man fall into bed together, they kiss passionately.

Katrin's phone rings on the bed. It's Mart. Katrin fumbles for it and turns it over.

Rugged Man starts to go down on Katrin. She inhales sharply.

END 1

(B) AGENTIC BRANCH - Disrupt the Unity of Place.

25 INT. TALLINN AIRPORT GATES 13 - NIGHT (CONTINUED). 25

ANNA
Stay there. I'll be back.

FRENCH MAN
(In French)
I'm in the queue, where am I going to go?

Anna makes a Beeline for the Suited Man.

ANNA
Excuse me, do you speak English?

SUITED MAN
(In Estonian)
No.

ANNA
(In Estonian)
Sorry. Would you do me a huge favour for some money?

SUITED MAN
Sure. How much?

Anna gets out her wallet and checks her cash.

ANNA
500 Euros.

SUITED MAN
For 500 Euros I'll suck your dick.

ANNA
Not necessary. But I do need you to swap seats with someone.

INTER-TITLE: The Trap I Laid for Myself

26 INT. STEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 26

Mart and Katrin are sat together, Katrin is by the window and reading something on her phone and wearing headphones. Mart is in the middle seat trying to recompose himself.

Suited Man arrives next to them and puts his luggage in the overhead locker loudly and then squeezes into the chair next to Mart. Mart assesses his appearance and looks away.

Suited Man touches Mart's upper arm.

SUITED MAN
Tallinn's a village, isn't it? It's Mart Tamm, isn't it? We met at the PPL network. Remember?

Mart slowly realises he's being addressed.

Suited Man offers a handshake. Mart hesitantly takes it. The Suited Man holds it for longer than appropriate.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
So, you're not going to the conference in Berlin then?

MART
I don't think any one has conferences over the holiday period.

Katrin looks up from her phone.

SUITED MAN
Oh, of course. How could I be so STUPID?
(Beat)
So you really don't remember meeting me?

MART
No, I'm sorry. I really don't.

SUITED MAN
We are in your office. It's the first time you sat next to me, he's left for good and I'm all tears, you want to comfort me but it's more... You finally dare to put your hand on my knee, it stays there too long--

Mart stands sharply and pulls the Suited Man to his feat and frog marches him the front of the cabin. Airplane staff move past them and passengers continue to board.

Katrin watches, confused.

Mart holds the Suited Man and looks into his ear to see the skin coloured earpiece.

MART
Anna?

SUITED MAN
Yes, Mart.

MART
You are unbelievable. What do you want from me?

SUITED MAN
An explanation.

Mart looks between him and his wife. Mart takes another step back and invites the Suited Man to follow.

MART
I'm sorry for this. She planned the trip months ago and I... I thought you might try something like this if you found out.

SUITED MAN
Like what?

MART
Turning up, uninvited. So I said I was going to Berlin just in case. I don't know what I was thinking. I wasn't... I was worried that you'd get jealous.

SUITED MAN
Congratulations! You've successfully mitigated that.

MART
You know I haven't been thinking straight--

SUITED MAN
So you decided not to speak to me straight.
(Beat)
What were you thinking exactly? That I'd destroy your marriage or your career?

MART
It's not like that...If you let me go, I will be back in a week, I will see you again. I'll look after you. And we can work this out. I love you.
(Beat)
Please, I'll do anything you want.

The Suited Man looks distant, listening for instructions. He turns back to Mart.

SUITED MAN
Okay, Mart.

Mart is relieved.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
But you have to kiss me to prove you're telling the truth.

MART
Kiss you? Kiss YOU?

SUITED MAN
You heard me.

Mart looks to the side and sees his wife watching.

MART
Katrin's right there.

SUITED MAN
Yes, she is. In earshot.

MART
Anna--

SUITED MAN
Tick tock, Mart. You're a resourceful man.

Mart looks behind the Suited Man and then pulls him behind the toilet door. Mart give him a peck on the lips.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
That was shit.

Mart kisses him again, it lasts a bit longer this time.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
What am I, your sister? Kiss me like a man, kiss the trap you laid for yourself you piece of shi--

Mart pulls the Suited Man into a passionate kiss. Pinning him to the toilet door. They both lose themselves in the moment. Mart's hands rise to his cheeks. The Suited Man hands run over Mart's body.

Suited Man puts his hand on Mart's cheek and pulls out of the kiss and catches his breath.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
You're not an awful person Mart... you just do awful things.
(Beat)
I'll see you when I get back.

Mart nods in numbness as the Suited Man touches his ear. His face transforms with a big smile.

SUITED MAN (cont'd)
She's gone. That was fun.

The Suited Man slaps Mart's arm and leaves him speechless. The engines get louder. Mart exhales.

END 2

(B) META BRANCH - Disrupt the Unities of Time, Space, and Action.

27 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR 1 - NIGHT. 27

Sten sits in the hotel corridor. His head in his hands. His phone vibrates next to him. It's Anna.

He declines the call. The clock on his phone reads 21:59.

Sten bangs his head against the wall behind him in frustration.

28 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR 2 - DAY. 28

DMITRI [30 y-o], a handsome well-dressed man in a tan jacket and wearing sunglasses. He walks down the corridor. Looking for his room.

29 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR 1 - NIGHT. 29

Sten puts his phone away, Anna is still calling him. He stands and walks back to his hotel room.

30 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR 1&2 - NIGHT/DAY. (SPLIT SCREEN) 30

The corridor is divided in the middle. Both stand outside doors on opposite sides of the split.

Dmitri searches his pockets for a key card for his door.

Sten knocks on her door.

Node 2ii

SUPERCAPTION (A): Maintain the unity of genre and style.

SUPERCAPTION (B): Disregard the unity of genre and style.

[Note to reader: Continue reading from this point if you want the film to remain in the same style and see what the legal consequences of Anna's actions might be. Go to page 44 if you want to see the film radically depart from this style and for the focus to shift to the background characters]

(A) META BRANCH - Maintain the unity of genre and style.

31 INT. STEN'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT. 31

Liis dressed in her figure-hugging white dress sits on the corner of the bed. Sten walks in; desperate guilt painted on his face.

LIIS (O.S.)
Where'd you go?

STEN
I have to tell you something.

INTER-TITLE: Kaivi in Consideration

32 INT. STEN'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT. 32

Sten sat on the bed alone and calmer but still nervous.

Sten looks to see first Liis staring at him disapprovingly and then--

KAIVI (55 y-o), a no-none-sense prosecutor, in an elegant dress and ridiculous heels. Kaivi looks like she's chewing half a pack of gum. She has the same disapproving stare.

Kaivi and Liis are leaning against the window sill on the other side of the room.

KAIVI
I mean, it's not right but...

LIIS
It's not illegal.

KAIVI
Think about it. What's difference, if you read a book on how to pick up women and used the lines it gave you. People lie all the time for sex.

LIIS
They had all this information about me. They knew about Dmitri, about my father, they knew about my job.

KAIVI
Any of it NOT searchable online?

Liis thinks and shakes her head. Kaivi gives a 'I'm sorry' shrug and a sad smile. Kaivi looks at Sten again.

LIIS
They recorded me, Kaivi.

KAIVI
Public space and it could have been a live feed, not necessarily a recording. This woman...
(To Sten)
What's her name, fuck face?

Sten sits up straight realising that he's being addressed.

STEN
Anna Sisask.

KAIVI
Anna Sisask, she knows the edges and she's keeping inside them.

LIIS
I know, but I felt really...

KAIVI
Where's Dmitri?

Liis's expression says 'Don't ask'. Kaivi gestures that she's sorry she asked.

KAIVI (cont'd)
Not saying it's not assaultive, if that's even a word. But--

LIIS
Okay.

Kaivi pushes herself off the window sill.

KAIVI
(To Sten)
Alright cunt features, get the fuck out of here. Thanks for ruining my new year's eve.

Sten stands and goes for his jacket.

KAIVI (cont'd)
Leave the equipment.

33 INT. KAIVI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 33

Kaivi is sat up right in bed reading a legal document. Her husband is next to her asleep.

Kaivi drops the paper and looks to the ceiling in frustration then turns and looks at her husband.

KAIVI
Oi, shit for brains. Are you awake?

Kaivi's husband groans.

KAIVI'S HUSBAND
(Half asleep)
No, I was in concert with dogs playing trumpets; pugs.

KAIVI
If someone said to you that they could get you any woman you wanted for four thousand euros, what would you say?

Kaivi's husband half opens his eyes, groans and then rolls away from her.

KAIVI'S HUSBAND
I want to find out what the pugs are playing now.

Kaivi continues to think.

34 OMITTED. 34

35 EXT. KAIVI'S CAR - DAY. 35

Liis, in uniform, sits with Kaivi in her car. Parked by a tram line. Liis is still in an awkward pose as if ready to open the door run away.

KAIVI
If she's been hacking private information then we'll be able to get prison time for her.
(MORE)

KAIVI (cont'd)
(Beat)
I know you so I'd have refer it, but my colleague is ready to start working on this. But you have to be prepared, though, things might get ugly. It'll probably make the papers. Dmitri, your colleagues... details will come out. What were you doing in that bar alone? Where was your man? You can imagine.
(Beat)
What do you want me to do?

LIIS
It's going to hurt, isn't it?

KAIVI
Yes.

NODE 3ii

SUPERCAPTION: (A) Pursue an investigation.

SUPERCAPTION: (B) Do not pursue and investigation.

[Note to reader: Continue reading from this point if you want to see what happens when Liis's pursues her complaint. Go to page 43 if you want to see Liis give up her complaint and go quietly.]

(A) META BRANCH - Pursue an investigation.

36 EXT. COASTAL RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY. 36

Sten walks down the street and towards the sea.

36A EXT. COASTAL PATH - DAY. 36A

Sten continues to walk beside the sea.

Liis runs past him in jogging clothes with her hair up, they make eye contact and continue past each other for a few steps.

Sten stops and turns around and sees --

--Liis has done the same. She mops sweat from her brow, catches her breath, and stares at him blankly.

37 INT. COAST - DAY. 37

Sten and Liis walk by the sea.

Liis looks at Sten. Sten looks out to sea. He wants to speak but the words won't come.

STEN
It must have been awful for you.

Liis's face is unchanging. Sten squirms slightly.

STEN (cont'd)
I saw you during the trial, and... you looked so...

Sten closes his eyes in frustration

STEN (cont'd)
I'm sorry...I don't know what to say to you now.

Liis turns to Sten with a look that tells him to shut up. He reads it correctly.

LIIS
Then let me speak for you.

They continue walking They don't say another word.

END 3

(B) META BRANCH - Do not pursue and investigation.

38 INT. LIIS'S KITCHEN - NIGHT. 38

Dmitri walks in and opens the fridge. He glances at Liis, sat at their dining table. Still in uniform.

DMITRI
Hey. You're home early.

Dmitri opens a bottle and takes a gulp.

DMITRI (cont'd)
You okay?

A tear runs down Liis's cheek. Dmitri, unsure of himself, puts the bottle down and comes down to her.

DMITRI (cont'd)
What's wrong?

He kneels and takes her in his arms.

DMITRI (cont'd)
What happened?

Liis's face is over Dmitri's shoulder. She BREAKS the fourth wall-- her emotions clear.

LIIS
(To us.)
This is what you want, coward. This is what YOU want, coward. You want me to shut up and go quietly? It's what you prefer, right? Be a good girl. Don't make a fuss.
(Beat)
I was at that bar looking for a fuck. I was at the bar without my man. I was asking for it. I was fair game.
(Beat)
You don't know me. You know nothing about me. Look to the person next to you. As little as you know about that person is as little as they know about you. What chance do I have? You choose to see me as weak so that's what I am. But before I go quietly I will say this.
(Beat)
Fuck Anna and fuck you.

Dmitri pulls her back and makes eye contact with her again. Liis takes a deep breath and closes her eyes for a second then opens them again.

LIIS (cont'd)
It's nothing.

END 4

(A) META BRANCH - Disregard the unity of genre and style.

39 INT. DMITRI'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT. 39

Dmitri enters the hotel room.

--Dmitri sits at the end of the bed and takes off his shoes.

--He explores the mini-bar but takes nothing.

--He turns the light on in the en-suite. He urinates and then flushes the toilet.

--He unpacks his clothes into the drawers.

--He hangs his shirts and ties in the wardrobe.

--Dmitri showers and suds his body thoroughly.

--He dries himself with a towel and looks out of the window.

--He closes the curtains.

INTER-TITLE: Dmitri and the Daisy Chain of Narrative Ambiguity

Dmitri gets into bed and warms himself under the sheets. He turns on his side and closes his eyes.

[Series of voice overs from here are as dispassionate as they are disembodied, hushed and serious even when their content is not.]

DMITRI (V.O.)
They say trauma does not shatter the psyche; the psyche shatters itself to protect itself from trauma.

MATCH CUT TO:

40 INT. GRETE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT. 40

Grete (60 y-o) [Lady woman who was disturbed by Anna at the airport) tosses and turns and struggles to get to sleep.

DMITRI (V.O.)
(In Russian)
This is Grete. She has had a life of trauma. Miscarriages, first child still born, second dead at thirteen, run over by her neighbour. He didn't go to jail but had to face her in the local supermarket for years. Grete fortified herself through these minor tragedies via an economy of distraction. Though, as a theatre lover she would happily complain that tragedy is only tragedy with irony and therefore her life had no tragedy -- just random deaths that came all too soon.

GRETE
(To the Camera)
This is Krista and her husband Sergei.

MATCH CUT TO:

41 INT. KRISTA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 41

KRISTA and SERGEI [Woman who slaps man in the smoking room] lie in bed next to each other. KRISTA is on the phone doom scrolling. Sergei is asleep.

GRETE (V.O.)
Krista doesn't have any trauma. At least, not yet. Twenty years from now, Sergei will die of a heart attack while out running in an effort to lose weight. His body, partly devoured by wild boars will be discovered several weeks later and the violence set upon his corpse will render Krista's recovery-time longer than it would have been had he died at home leaving a well preserved cadaver.
(Beat)
Upon his death Krista will take the time to read his diaries and discover to her shock that they contains absolutely nothing shocking. Krista, who had spent a lifetime cultivating a second hidden life, will wonder at the foundations of their marriage. Was it worth spending all those years with a man who was more interesting in death than in life?

Krista looks up from her phone.

KRISTA
(To the camera)
This is Maria and her lover Kevin.

MATCH CUT TO:

41A INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 41A

MARIA and KEVIN (Bickering couple from the check-in queue) lie next to each other facing outward.

KRISTA (V.O.)
Maria will never marry nor have any children. She doesn't know what it's like for your husband to leave you in a grand exit from our mortal coil, and she will never know. For her there is a great yawning crater in her soul which, if we were to articulate it would be articulated thusly -- that nothing in her life was ever good enough until the day when she was not good enough for everything in her life. Maria will cut herself off from anything which might constitute joy in her life, because when you decide that something is so, you change your behaviour to make it true.
(Beat)
Desire may have no agency, but one may certainly will more uncommonly if ones features don't fit the assumptions one makes.

MARIA
(To the camera, in Russian)
This is Taavi.

MATCH CUT TO:

41B INT. TAAVI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 41B

TAAVI [Boatman from the start of the film] lies in bed asleep.

MARIA (V.O.)
(In Russian)
Taavi has a secret. He's not actually Taavi at all, he's Andres. In 1991 he killed his brother, or more specifically, let his brother die while they were sailing in the Gulf of Finland. Taavi, the real Taavi that is, fell from the boat during a storm. Andres had the chance to pull him from the water but instead turned away and tried to block out the sounds of Taavi's death wails as he drowned. Andres came to shore, told the truth about the circumstances but lied about his neglect.
(MORE)

MARIA (V.O.) (cont'd)
His mother, knowing that Andres was facing prison time for assault earlier in the year, went along with the posthumous exchange of identities. The two brothers look so similar, that, coupled with the political chaos of the time, ensured that Andres would live out the rest of his life as Taavi. He even managed to convince himself that he was Taavi, two years older, more confident with women, interested in politics - not interested in jazz. He convinced himself that the lie he'd told was in fact the truth and that the cries of his drowning brother were in fact mere remnants of a half-forgotten dream.

TAAVI wakes up with a start.

TAAVI
(To the camera)
This Jane.

MATCH CUT TO:

41C INT. JANE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 41C

JANE (20 y-o) [BLONDE WOMAN Mart speaks to at the check-in] lies in bed with her boyfriend TRISTAN.

TAAVI (V.O.)
(In Estonian)
This is Jane.
(Beat)
Jane's boyfriend, Tristan, is aesthetically perfect but unfortunately has no personality. Not that it matters, Jane has a boyfriend only because that's what she is meant to have at her age. She doesn't want him any more than a tree wants a stone. Jane will die at the age of 21 a few months from now; there is an aggressive form of cancer in her blood and bones, but right now she does not know it.
(MORE)

TAAVI (V.O.) (cont'd)
She will die without ever experiencing any kind of real intimacy not simply because of Tristan's blandness but because Jane had failed to open herself to life's potentialities, and treated her existence as a series of tick-boxes.
(Beat)
First kiss at fourteen. Tick. First boyfriend at fifteen. Tick. Lose virginity at sixteen. Tick. First job at seventeen. Tick. Second boyfriend at eighteen. Tick. Graduate high-school at nineteen. Tick. Start university at twenty. Tick. Dead at twenty-one.

JANE
(To the camera)
This is Karsten.

MATCH CUT TO:

42 INT. KARSTEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 42

KARTSTEN (50 y-o)[German Phone Man] lies fast asleep.

JANE (V.O.)
(In English)
I guess you're expecting some insight about her but since I'm about to die, I thought maybe you'd like hear a bit more about me. You see, even though I'm a Libra, I am actually capable of making a decision on my own, or at least I was, or will be. You know, the tense here is all fucked up. Anyway, dear fellow Libra's, never befriend a Taurus, everything about you will drive them insane. It's not that you're diametrically opposed it's more like how the Japanese people who live in France become crazed with anxiety because what is normal at home is just slightly off in Paris.
(MORE)

JANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
Or the Finnish language to Estonian ears, or in a dream speaking to someone you know in another person's body, or the sound of God passing through a cauldron of moldy water, in a basket woven from hair and blood and shit, or the smell of a child screaming in a cot fire, scorching synthetics wrapping itself around its body, clamping to its skin -- eating the infant alive as my cancer is eating me alive until nothing makes sense, raptured, albatross, vertical flight, into the soil; I'm only a woman if 'woman' is a verb; grey hairs that are never dyed to rust and only the night fires in my synapses and everything goes--

KARSTEN
(To the Camera)
Das ist Paul.

MATCH CUT TO:

43 INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 43

Paul lies in bed with a beer in his hands. He tries to drink it at an impossible angle.

KARSTEN (V.O.)
This is Paul. Paul has been obsessed with the number of woman he has had vaginal intercourse with since he was a teenager.
(Beat)
Decades in the future, on a breezy Autumn morning in Kadriorg Park, while walking his labradoodle, Honeybunny, the leaves will part before him and trees will toss back and forth with the ancient sounds that accompany such a scene. And in a moment undiluted clarity, Paul will realise how utterly reductive and idiotic this obsession has been. How his unfeeling pursuit of sex and his binary conception of the act itself had lead him into unhappy relationships, stripped him of his dignity, and reduced his capacity for radical empathy.
(MORE)

KARSTEN (V.O.) (cont'd)
(Beat)
Honeybunny will lick his tears away, confused about why her master is so upset, but glad that she can nuzzle closer to what, is for her, ultimately, just the main provider of food.

Paul spills his beer on his chest curses and gets out of the bed.

NODE 3iii

SUPER-CAPTION: (A) A thematically ambiguous ending

SUPER-CAPTION: (B) A thematically instructive ending.

(A) META BRANCH - A thematically ambiguous ending.

44 INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUED). 44

Paul pulls the sheets off the bed and starts to remake it, from start to finish.

He lies back on the bed.

PAUL
(To the camera)
This is Dmitri.

44A INT. DMITRI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT. 44A

Dmitri sleeps soundly.

END 5

(B) META BRANCH - A thematically instructive ending.

45 INT. HELE'S FLAT - NIGHT. 45

Hele sits on her sofa playing a video game through a controller. She takes off her hoodie and relaxes.

HENRIK (O.S.)
Do you have anything to drink?

HELE
Vodka, in the fridge.

The sound of the fridge door opening and closing. Henrik sits down next to Hele with a big grin on his face and hands the vodka to her.

Hele's phone rings. She puts the vodka down, answers, and continues to play.

HELE (cont'd)
Hey, yeah I'm listening.
(Beat)
No, nothing important. Yeah, what's the problem?

Henrik puts his arm back on the sofa.

HELE (cont'd)
Just tell him you don't like fingers. You don't like fingers and you don't like pretending to like fingers either. How long does it usually take you to come?

Hele turns and looks at Henrik's arm. Henrik takes it back. Hele continues to play.

HELE (cont'd)
Aha, yeah then it's simple. Tell him you need at least 35 minutes of foreplay that you want to come at least twice before he puts his dick in you. Just be straightforward: you want mostly cunnilingus with a little bit of anal play but only with plenty of lubricant - water based.

Hele NECKS her vodka.

HELE (cont'd)
Yeah yeah, it's so simple if you know how to ask. See you Tuesday. Bye!

Hele puts the phone away, pauses the game and turns to look at Henrik and contemplates him.

HELE (cont'd)
What do you want?

Henrik considers the question for a moment and then cautiously--

HENRIK
To get to know you.

Hele considers his answer. Leans closer to him and hands him another controller.

They start to play a game on Hele's television. Henrik's eyes dart from the screen to Hele until--

HENRIK (cont'd)
I, I don't like hand jobs but I do like--

HELE
--I'm not fucking you.

HENRIK
--Of course not, why on Earth would you?

They continue playing. Henrik reconstitutes himself and clears his throat.

HENRIK (cont'd)
So you have to stop the shark from eating the pink things?

HELE
Yeah, and make sure you collect the adjectives and the nouns.

HENRIK
Why?

HELE
After we have the pink things we need them with the verbs to make a poem but if the poem lacks the predicates then the verbs have fewer points.

HENRIK
Haven't written a poem since high-school.

HELE
Now's your chance.

HENRIK
Is the walking daffodil dangerous?

HELE
No, but the anchovies are.

HENRIK
How do you win this game?

HELE
It's not about winning it's about NOT losing.

HENRIK
Okay, how do you not lose?

HELE
Watch out for the herring!

END 6

APPENDIX E: PUBLIC SCREENINGS

FULL LIST OF PUBLIC SCREENINGS

Listed here in chronological order along with the endings chosen by the audience and the order they chose.

(1) November 20, 2022. *Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival*, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 2, 6, 4, 1.

(2) November 24, 2022. *Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival*, Tartu, Estonia.
Endings screened: 1, 5, 3, 2.

(3) November 26, 2022. *Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival*, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 6, 1, 2, 3.

(4) November 27, 2022. *Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival*, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 2, 6, 1, 3.

(5) February 16, 2023. *Special Screening*, Tiftak, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 1, 6, 3.

(6) March 8, 2023. *Special Screening*, Supernova, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 1, 3, 5.

(7) May 20, 2023. *Special Screening*, Supernova, Tallinn, Estonia.
Endings screened: 1, 7, 2, 3.

(8) June 29, 2023. *Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy*, Adelaide, Australia.
Endings screened: 6, 1, 2, 3.

(9) July 12, 2023. *International Network of Experimental Fiction Filmmaking Festival,* Salford, Media City, United Kingdom.
Ending screened: 6.

(10) November 25, 2023. *REC Tarragona International Film Festival*, Tarragona, Spain.
Endings screened: 1, 6, 7.

(11) November 29, 2023. *Special Screening*, SOHO House, Barcelona, Spain.
Endings screened: 1, 5, 8.

REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC SCREENINGS

Detailed descriptions of the public screenings have been included here as a possible resource for other writer-directors making interactive films. My observations are purely from my perspective as the writer-director of The Limits of Consent *and limited to the ten public screenings which I attended at the time of writing.*

I had many concerns about the technical aspects of cinema exhibition and, certainly, there were some problems in this regard. For example, the switch between different Digital Cinema Package (DCP) files at the nodes was too slow and the audience had to sit in silence with a black screen for some seconds before the film continued. DCP exhibition with only one projector is not advisable. There were other problems, too. Projectionists are not accustomed to attending to a film to such a degree; some projectionists looked at the instructions and immediately understood how the film worked, others did not. One projectionist had not read my instructions and stacked all of the DCP files in a playlist ready to run continuously without asking the audience to vote at the film's nodes at all. It was only because I asked to meet with this projectionist twenty-minutes before the screening that I was able to correct his mistake and avert a disaster; he then insisted that I sit with him in the projection room the entire screening to ensure nothing else went wrong.

If attempting a cinema exhibition for an interactive film, I recommend contacting projectionists as early as possible and wherever possible, meeting face-to-face. It is also worth noting that at international film festivals where local language subtitles must be projected simultaneously by a second projectionist, the subtitle projectionist must also be contacted to make the co-ordination as smooth as possible.

In the cinema setting, the interactivity was administered with the use of a facilitator who went to the front of the cinema and asked for a show of hands at each of the nodes. This facilitator would then signal with out-stretched arms to the projectionist as to which option most of the audience voted. In more intimate screenings, the facilitator could quickly count the vote; in larger screenings (more than a hundred attendees) the facilitator often judged more intuitively the number of hands which were raised. In Estonia and the UK this was a very orderly process; in Australia and Spain audience members called out or even shouted their selections to the facilitator. The facilitator was able to see the audience without the projectionists turning the house lights on (and thereby signaling the end of the cinema experience) because the node faded to white background with black text which illuminated the whole cinema hall.

The initial plan for cinema exhibition was to have the audience vote with their phones by scanning QR codes displayed under a particular node; the projectionist would then see the vote on a website and change the film's direction accordingly. This mechanism was tested and could theoretically be implemented but several possible problems dissuaded me: first, using a phone is against the etiquette of cinema; second, audience members might be distracted by any notifications they see on their phone while voting; third, it would slow the process down and add another technical variable

(the website where the projectionist would check the audience's choice); fourth, it required an internet connection to be possible in the cinema hall.

Finally, I was persuaded to abandon the QR codes system and opted for a live vote with a host facilitating at the suggestion of Xavi Garcia Puerto, curator of the Rebels with a Cause competition at Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival where *The Limits of Consent* had its world premiere. Puerto understood the potential to make the film into a festive event and a collective experience. Actively planning for the facilitator and how they are integrated into the screening is something writer-directors should consider when exhibiting an interactive film in the cinema hall. The facilitators for *The Limits of Consent* were not carefully cast; they were volunteers from the different festivals asked to perform the role, often last minute. The consequence of this was that their chemistry with the audience (or lack thereof) was down to chance. The different personalities of the facilitators might have influenced the mood of the screening; some of them were more playful, others more serious. Considering the film as a hybrid theatre performance and thereby carefully casting, scripting, and producing these live interactions with the audience might more actively embrace this seam in the process and lessen any potential impressions of haphazardness.

The number of endings screened at each exhibition was also a difficult element optimise. One of the driest fundamentals of understanding what a film is, is its length. Usually, accompanying metadata for a film includes a runtime of some description (on any info panel for a film on a streaming platform, for example) and typically we expect a feature film to fall within a generalisable runtime parameter. Saara Cantell defines a short film as running for a maximum of 15 minutes,[433] while Linda J. Cowgill claims it can be up to 40 minutes.[434] On the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) anything over 45 minutes is a feature film, meanwhile for many festivals 60 minutes is the minimum length for a feature film. *The Limits of Consent* is too long to be considered a short film; I was intent on writing a *medium-length film,* or what Sweden and Denmark call the novelfillm or novellefillm respectively;[435] but it quickly became apparent that the film would not perfectly fit this dynamic either. *The Limits of Consent* is an awkward creature, at once being a (long) short film running to 29 minutes if the shortest bough and branch are selected; a medium length film running to 42 minutes if the longest boughs and branches are selected; and a feature film when more than two or three endings are viewed. In total, all the segments add up to 100 minutes; thus, if one searches for information online about *The Limits of Consent* one might automatically assume it is a feature film because usually 100 minutes is the listed runtime.

When the finished film was screened at different festivals it was usually done so in a feature film time slot. To ensure audiences would not feel they had overpaid for the

[433] Cantell, *Cinematic Diamonds*, 27.
[434] Linda J. Cowgill, *Writing Short Films: Structure and Content for Screenwriters* (2nd edition) (New York: Watson-Guptil Publications, 2005), 10.
[435] Cantell, *Cinematic Diamonds*, 26.

screening, three to four endings were selected by the audience per screening. After the film reached an ending, a short recap would play on screen to re-situate the film and the audience would get another chance to select an option at the first node. In this way, with four endings screened, the film ran for approximately 80 minutes with some repeated material and pauses for the votes to be counted. However, repeatedly resetting the film to explore another ending somewhat undermined the feeling that the choices would meaningfully lead to different endings.

The Limits of Consent is a medium length film (or long short) and as such the most satisfactory screening, from my perspective, was when the film was screened in the UK as part of International Network of Experimental Fiction Filmmaking Festival. There it was screened as part of a double-bill and without the pressure to fit a feature film time slot, and only one ending was allowed to be selected by the audience. It felt, for the first time, that the audience had meaningfully made choices which dis-narrated huge portions of the film. At other screenings where multiple endings were screened this effect was diluted.

Finally, the awkwardness of cinema exhibition put an end to any ambitions I had for a wider cinema distribution in a domestic context. There are simply too many variables to consider if the film is exhibited multiple times a day in different cinemas. I shepherded the film through its public screenings in and out of festivals, a burden I took upon myself with which writer-directors of traditional unilinear films obviously do not have to consider. However, I found charm in knowing that the film would have a very limited theatrical release and the ephemeral nature of attending different screenings where different endings were selected and audiences reacted uniquely to the endings they reached, was amplified with this knowledge. In this way the experience was much closer to touring a theatre production than a film on the festival circuit.

APPENDIX F: MEDIA APPEARANCES & NEWS ARTICLES

ETV, "Aktuaalne kaamera," 8 November, 2022. 00:16:22-18:38.
https://etv.err.ee/1608768421/aktuaalne-kaamera

Tõnu Karjatse, "Karlo Funk: kinovaatamise sotsiaalne mõõde ilmselt säilib, aga kogemus nišistub," November 8, 2022.
https://kultuur.err.ee/1608782431/karlo-funk-kinovaatamise-sotsiaalne-moode-ilmselt-sailib-aga-kogemus-nisistub

Andrew Whyte, "PÖFF film festival 2022 competition entries include interactive feature," 11 November 2022.
https://news.err.ee/1608773707/poff-film-festival-2022-competition-entries-include-interactive-feature

Elisa Stage, "Intervjuu filmi 'Läheduse raamid' režissööri Michael Keerdo-Dawsoniga, intervjueerija Andrei Liimets." 12 November, 2022.
https://poff.elisastage.ee/landing/bc/mZ1D2CpUpk/QtMzSrVeV9/w3d8FwqQSe/tAuLlXOcNzb

Tallinn Uudised, "PÖFF sai avatud," 13 November, 2022. 00:03:23-05:26.
https://youtu.be/he_hs6FdQo4

ETV2, "PÖFFi kaheksa ja pool," 14 November, 2022. 00:15:04-20:45.
https://etv2.err.ee/1608777796/poffi-kaheksa-ja-pool

Tõnu Karjatse, "PÖFFi-soovitused: Iraani kinost soomlaste karaokearmastuseni," November 21, 2022.
https://kultuur.err.ee/1608795511/tonu-karjatse-poffi-soovitused-iraani-kinost-soomlaste-karaokearmastuseni

Tarragona Digital, "CINEMA El Festival REC proposa un programa commemoratiu amb motiu del 25-N a Tarragona," 20 November, 2023.
https://tarragonadigital.com/noticia/13286/festival-rec-tarragona-programa-especial-25n

Victor Fraga, "The Limits of Consent (Läheduse Raamid)," November 26, 2023.
https://www.dmovies.org/2023/11/26/the-limits-of-consent-laheduse-raamid/

APPENDIX G: ETHICS REVIEW

The main practical ethical consideration of this PhD was the inclusion of sex scenes and sexual dialogue in the production of *The Limits of Consent*. Hiring an intimacy coordinator is the ideal for any production dealing with such content but was beyond the production's budget so I took it upon myself to read the latest literature on the topic of directing sex scenes, ethically. John Butcher, *A Best Practice Guide to Sex and Storytelling: Filming Scenes with Sex and Nudity* and Chelsea Pace's *Staging Sex* were particularly helpful, and I took many principles from these books into pre-production and production.

The screenplay was transparent about what was necessary in this regard; those who agreed to take roles were fully aware of the type of film I was making. On occasion, as is typical in production, last minute changes to scenes were considered, for example, the protagonist of the film guides a man remotely in an act of extended cunnilingus; while filming these scenes, I intuited that it was important to see the protagonist herself enjoying receiving oral sex earlier in the film in a moment which would cohere the set-up of the film more closely to the confrontations which follow. I spoke with the actors involved as soon as we arrived at the location and ensured there was enthusiastic consent for the proposed changes. In another instance, a slight change to a sex scene in the film was required, in the script the sex was implied but due to the impossibility of obtaining a particular location the scene was moved to a hotel room and offered the opportunity to be more directly depicted. On this occasion, several options were possible including the original implied ending; I presented three options to the male actor and the female actor, the male actor was comfortable with all three, the female actor only with two, one of which was naturally the one we filmed after some discussion. In all cases, last minute changes to the screenplay which were sexual in nature were discussed with the actors who were under no obligation to accept.

Some practitioners feel that the only reason to show sexuality or nudity is moving the story forward or revealing something about the character,[436] this 'rule' is applicable for all scenes, but there are always degrees and tones which can shift dependent on the type of film being made. There is potentially a lot at stake for the actor who is asked to undress for a film; the crew can move on to the next project but the actor's nude performance will be there for the rest of their careers; with this in mind, the choice was always the actor's whether they performed naked or not, whether the script was vague or explicit on the matter.[437] I tried not to state my preferences in this matter, however, if I am a director asking the question about whether an actor is willing to perform naked, the answer I am hoping for is probably still obvious so I stressed that any decision was acceptable. In the case of *The Limits of Consent*, two actors refused and one agreed. The one instance of nudity in the film, a male actor

[436] John Butcher, *A Best Practice Guide to Sex and Storytelling: Filming Scenes with Sex and Nudity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 93.
[437] Butcher, *Sex and Storytelling,* 53.

stripping and stepping into a bathtub, is not necessary for the story at all and it does not particularly illustrate the character either; however, that is partly the point of the sequence where this nudity occurs (a deliberately unnecessary divergence from the main plot).

All the goals of the scenes involving sex and nudity were discussed and made clear during initial meetings with actors and during rehearsals;[438] almost all of the scenes were rehearsed before the day of the shoot.[439] Physical acting choices cannot be left up to the actors as they will still suggest things they are not comfortable with and they might have an experience from their life which does not match that of the character which will lead them to an inappropriate acting choice.[440] Thus all scenes with sexual content were blocked in rehearsals and improvisation was not requested;[441] intimacy deserves the same crafting and attention to detail as any other scene;[442] it should not be left up to the actors to decide. I was always personally in control of the blocking and the actor's actions and directing in as desexualised ways as much as possible. Even into post-production, as recommended, the intimate sounds that were necessary to be recorded in the sound studio were directed through the language of breathing rather than the language of sex. I directed the actors to allow the sounds to come from the stomach or higher up their chest, or the mouth to vary the pitch and tone as if I were conducting a singing lesson rather than directing a sexual climax; desexualising the language minimises embarrassment,[443] but it is also useful for a director to stay specific and give the actors actionable directions rather than emotions to play.

At all times, I made it clear that whatever the actor's limits were, they were also my limits and those limits were perfectly fine where they were.[444] I was working with a policy that 'yes' means 'yes', 'no' means 'no', and 'maybe' also means 'no.'[445] Even so, I was aware that when asked, an actor is trained to say 'yes' and will hesitate to say 'no' even if they're uncomfortable.[446] Being a friendly and approachable director does not negate the power one holds.[447] This is why changes to sexual scenes in the film from script to production were kept to an absolute minimum.

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438 Butcher, *Sex and Storytelling,* 3-4.
439 Butcher, *Sex and Storytelling,* 101.
440 Chelsea Pace, *Staging Sex,* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 3.
441 Butcher, *Sex and Storytelling,* 42.
442 Pace, *Staging Sex,* 6.
443 Pace, *Staging Sex*, 57.
444 Pace, *Staging Sex,* 15.
445 Butcher, *Sex and Storytelling*, 68.
446 Pace, *Staging Sex,* 2.
447 Pace, *Staging Sex,* 9.

KOKKUVÕTE

See doktoritöö avab stsenarist-režissööri dilemmat loominguliste impulsside vahel – kas kohaneda draamanarratiivide tavadega või nende vastu mässata. Töös kasutatakse kahte läbipõimunud uurimisvormi: kirjalikku monograafiat, mis uurib nii interaktiivse filmi arendamise, kirjutamise ja montaaži teooriat kui ka praktikat; ning interaktiivse filmi enda „Läheduse raamid" praktilist arendust ja tootmist.

Selle, filmitegemist uurimisviisina kasutava loovuurimuse eesmärk on uurida interaktiivsuse mõju muidu traditsioonilisele lineaarsele filmile omase loo arendamise protsessile. Interaktiivsuse kasutamisel peab film sisaldama mitut narratiivset trajektoori, kuna filmi tervik ei ole fikseeritud stseenide jada. See interaktiivsus muudabki töö keeruliseks ja sunnib stsenarist-režissööri – käesolevas uurimistöös mind – otsima erinevaid narratiivseid strateegiaid.

Interaktiivne lühifilm „Läheduse raamid" on selle loovuurimuse peamine loominguline tulemus. See on psühholoogiline draama, mis kasutab hargnevat narratiivi, juhtides vaatajad erinevate lõpplahendusteni (kokku üheksa), sõltuvalt valikutest, mida nad filmi olulistel hetkedel teevad. Filmi loo arendamine, mis kestis kolm aastat (2019–22), hõlmas mitmeid iteratsioone, alates algsest kontseptsioonist kuni stsenaariumi erinevate redaktsioonide ning mitmete montaaživersioonideni. Igas filmitegemise etapis sundis multilineaarsuse – interaktiivsuse – kasutamine mind, filmi stsenarist-režissööri, kasutama kompenseerivaid võtteid, et lahendada sellest tulenevaid loo probleeme, mis mõjutasid oluliselt filmi ülesehitust, peategelast ja lõppe.

Käesolev monograafia on jagatud kuueks peatükiks. Lugejale, kes on rohkem huvitatud uurimistöö aluseks olevatest teoreetilistest kaalutlustest, on kaks esimest peatükki kõige asjakohasemad. Peatükk 1: Meelelahutaja ja eksperimenteerija (The Entertainer & The Experimenter) käsitleb narratiivide olulisust ja seda, kuidas filmi stsenarist-režissööre julgustatakse nende filmiõpingute käigus omaks võtma konventsionaalseid draama jutustamise viise ja pigem vältima anti-draamat. Peatüki lõpus arutletakse unilineaarsuse ja multilineaarsuse üle ning selle üle, kuidas multilineaarsed vormid, nagu interaktiivne film, võimaldavad teistsugust narratiivikäsitlust, mida on võimatu saavutada ilma multilineaarsete vahenditeta nagu interaktiivsus. Peatükk 2: Interaktiivse filmi vahepealsus (The Betweenity of the Interactive Film) lahkab, mis on interaktiivne film, uurides selle vormi näiteid ja kasutades neid erinevate stsenarist-režissöörile kättesaadavate interaktiivsete struktuuride taksonoomia kirjeldamiseks. Seejärel kirjeldab peatükk täpsemalt selle uurimuse keskmeks saanud interaktiivset puustruktuuri.

Järgmised kolm peatükki keskenduvad rohkem minu loomingulisele praktikale ja „Läheduse raamid" loo arengule filmi tootmise eri etappides. Peatükk 3: Kõik teed peavad viima draamani (All Roads Must Lead to Drama) kirjeldab üksikasjalikult erinevate pidepunktide kirjutamist ja minu esimesi katseid muuta filmilugu interaktiivseks. See peatükk keskendub ka sellele, milliseid mõjusid tõi

kaasa interaktiivsus struktuursest vaatenurgast, kuna algne filmiidee töötati välja struktuursel viisil. Peatükk 4: Kaduv peategelane (The Disappearing Protagonist) liigub stsenaariumi erinevate mustandite ja strateegiate juurde, mida kasutasin interaktiivsuse rakendamiseks traditsioonilises unlineaarses vormis. Siin on fookuses peategelane ja näiliselt lahendamatu probleem – kuidas võib hästi läbimõeldud peategelasel olla rohkem kui üks usutav valik filmis, kus narratiivne trajektoor on killustatud. Peatükk 5: Ebaoluline film (The Inessential Film) uurib, kuidas loo arendusprotsess kestis kuni lõpliku filmi montaažini ja kuidas minu lähenemine filmi loole järeltootmises muutus stsenaariumi puudujääkide ja tootmises tehtud vigade tõttu ning kuidas ma neid probleeme lahendasin: vähendades filmi unilineaarset osa ja muutes filmi interaktiivsuse osa keerukamaks, lisades narratiivile ajalise ja mitmesuunalise mõõtme. Nende peatükkide läbiv joon on see, kuidas interaktiivsus tekitas väljakutseid loomeprotsessis ja kuidas need omakorda tekitasid vajaduse kompenseerivate võtete järele, et valmiks toimiv film. Peatükk 6: Erinevuste poole liikumine (Proceeding Towards Difference) pöördub uuesti loo arendamise protsessi juurde hilisemast perspektiivist ja toob esile pinge, mille tekitasid kompenseerivad võtted ja valikud, mida ma kogu protsessi jooksul tegin: draama ja anti-draama vastastikune tõmme ja tõukamine. Siin mõtisklen selle üle, miks anti-draama selle protsessi käigus üldse esile kerkis ja millist tähendust see omab minu kui stsenarist-režissööri praktilises töös.

Interaktiivsusega kaasnenud kompenseerivad võtted hõlmasid enamasti anti-draama omaksvõtmist. Anti-draama on igasugune stsenaarne või montaaživalik, mis on vastuolus draama konventsioonidega. Kasutasin anti-draamat teadliku narratiivse strateegiana, et säilitada draama, mille film oma unilineaarses jadas püstitab. Läbi loo arendamise protsessi kadus filmist peategelane ja filmi narratiivne trajektoor hargnes oluliselt enamikus filmi lõppudes. Otsus kasutada anti-draamat filmi draama säilitamiseks on märk minu vastuolulisest soovist lahutada publiku meelt ja samas eksperimenteerida vormiga. Interaktiivsus võimaldas nende mõlema soovi poole püüelda ja julgustas mind anti-draama trajektoore põhjalikumalt uurima; ning mis oluline – ilma hirmuta, mis võiks õõnestada minu eksperimentaalseid ambitsioone. Lõpuks vahetasid draama ja anti-draama oma rollid; ma ei kasutanud anti-draamat enam draama säilitamiseks, vaid kasutasin draamat pigem turvaventiilina anti-draama uurimiseks mitmekesisemal viisil.

Multilineaarsed vahendid, nagu interaktiivsus, kui neid rakendatakse traditsioonilises unilineaarses meediumis, näiteks filmis, sunnib stsenarist-režissööri vaatama loo narratiivset horisonti avaramal pilgul. Multilineaarsed vahendid pakuvad mitmekesisemaid jutustusvõimalusi ja alternatiive enim levinud ühe narratiivse trajektooriga lugudele ja stseenidele, kuid neid võimalusi tuleb kasutada pluraliseeriva kavatsusega.

ELULOOKIRJELDUS

Nimi	Michael Andrew Keerdo-Dawson
Sünniaeg ja -koht	22.11.1981, Aylesbury, United Kingdom
Kodakondsus	Briti

Hariduskäik

Alates 2019	Tallinna Ülikool, doktoriõpingud audiovisuaalsete kunstide
2017–2019	Tallinna Ülikool, magistrikraad, kirjandus, visuaalkultuur ja filmiteadus (cum laude)
2000–2003	Leedsi ülikool, bakalaureusekraad, teatriõpe (dramaturgia)
1994–2000	Stantonbury Kool

Teenistuskäik

2022	stsenarist-režissöör, *Läheduse raamid* (interaktiivne film)
2022	stsenaariumi konsultant, *Pädaste* (lühifilm)
2021	stsenaariumi konsultant *See räägib pulmast* (lühifilm)
Alates 2019	nooremteadur, Tallinna Ülikool
2015–2019	külalislektor, Tallinna Ülikool
2011	stsenarist-režissöör, *Confession* (mängufilm)
2009–2012	stsenarist-režissöör, Five Frames Left Productions
2009	kaasstsenarist-režissöör, *The Dies Residence* (telepiloot)
2008	stsenarist-režissöör, *Hour After Hour* (lühifilm)
2006	stsenarist-režissöör, *Missed Call* (lühifilm)
2004–2013	tehniline koordinaator, ITV Yorkshire
2003–2009	stsenarist-režissöör, Anonymous Room Productions

Uurimisvaldkonnad

Stsenaristika, filmirežissuur, filmitootmine, eksperimentaalfilmi praktikad

Erialane tegevus

Alates 2023	Journal of Screenwriting, retsenseerija
Alates 2022	Interactive Film and Media Journal, retsenseerija

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name	Michael Andrew Keerdo-Dawson
Date and place of birth	22.11.1981, Aylesbury, United Kingdom
Citizenship	British

Education

Since 2019	Tallinn University, doctoral student in Audiovisual Arts
2017–2019	Tallinn University, master's degree in Literature, Visual Culture, and Film Studies (cum laude)
2000–2003	University of Leeds, bachelor's degree with honours in Theatre Studies (Dramaturgy)
1994–2000	Stantonbury School

Professional experience

2022	Writer-director, *The Limits of Consent* (interactive film)
2022	Script consultant, *Pädaste* (short film)
2021	Script consultant, *It's About a Wedding* (short film)
Since 2019	Junior research fellow, Tallinn University
2015–2019	Guest lecturer, Tallinn University
2011	Writer-director, *Confession* (feature film)
2009–2012	Writer-director, Five Frames Left Productions
2009	Co-writer-director, *The Dies Residence* (television pilot)
2008	Writer-director, *Hour After Hour* (short film)
2006	Writer-director, *Missed Call* (short film)
2004–2013	Technical Co-ordinator, ITV Yorkshire
2003–2009	Writer-director, Anonymous Room Productions

Scientific interests

Screenwriting, film directing, film production, experimental film practices

Professional service

Since 2023	Journal of Screenwriting, reviewer
Since 2022	Interactive Film and Media Journal, reviewer

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