

## **CILECT PROJECT**

### **Blueprint**



**Theory for Screenwriting**

**FAMU**

**Prague**

**24th - 26th April 2003**



The “Blueprint” conference / workshop on theory for screenwriting followed on the “Theory for Filmschools” held in Ljubljana, November 2001.

The event, hosted by FAMU, Prague, explored various avenues of the teaching of screenwriting, with a very special attention to screenwriting guru František (Frank) Daniel who was Dean of FAMU in the 60s. He left Czechoslovakia in 1968 for the United States, taught at the American Film Institute, set up with Miloš Forman the film programme at Columbia University, New York, moved to Los Angeles and became Dean of the Film Department at USC. Frank was also artistic director of the Sundance Institute and his numerous workshops in Europe were crucial for the development of screenwriting in many European filmschools.

The Prague conference was also a formal recognition in Frank’s home country of his invaluable contribution to the teaching of screenwriting. Frank was a born story-teller, a firm believer in the value of the spoken word who unfortunately left very little in writing. Here are two papers by former students, now screenwriters and teachers on their own.

### LITTLE WHITE PAPERS

I’LL always remember his little white papers. When we would read from our screenplays in Frank Daniel’s class (we always read the pages out loud, by ourselves – no shared dramatic readings with Frank) he would take thoughtful pulls on his cigarette, jotting down an occasional note, putting his thoughts on little white squares of paper. Where did he get them? Who knows? I can only assume they were easy to come by; Frank wasn’t fussy that way. No doubt the papers appealed to him because they were convenient and eminently disposable.

They were strictly intended for use in the class, that day, and weren’t saved. When Frank told you something that was written on those papers, it was your job to remember what he said, or better yet, to write it down yourself. He was unlikely to repeat those special insights again.

While his little white papers might have revealed Frank’s quirky side, his approach to script analysis was deeply serious. Over the years Frank developed his own personal nomenclature – an assemblage of writing terms like “point-of-attack,” “first culmination,” “recognition,” “revelation,” “character want and need,” – the list went on and on and he compiled it carefully, the definitions of each term as precise as a principle of physics. Frank’s film analysis lectures were essential to this side of his pedagogy; they were the place where he explained the full

meaning of such terms, where he taught the elements of storytelling, the foundations of dramatic structure. Film analysis was where Frank took a film apart and put it back together again, like a professor teaching medical students anatomy. His freewheeling style was always present, but his lectures were succinct and purposeful. If Frank asked a question and a student got the answer wrong, his withering expression left no doubt about the error – and woe to the student who tried to get Frank to agree that there was, perhaps, an alternative answer. This wasn’t about interpretation, but structure, the mechanics of how a story worked. This was science.

Yet in the writing class itself, in the workshop setting, Frank knew such “science” could only help a student go so far. Writers, he understood, shouldn’t get bogged down in too much analysis; they needed room to breathe, to explore. Once a writer had the stage in one of Frank’s classes, he or she could read for as long as they wanted. The group’s discussions about a script could go on at length, too. Frank’s idea was to interfere as little as possible, to “pull from the top”; to let the best writers and most insightful commentators lead the class, letting others learn from their example. Of course, even for Frank, this was sometimes a difficult approach to follow. He didn’t suffer fools gladly – but sometimes he did let them ramble on a while!

Once the pages were read, once the discussion had ended, a significant silence settled over the room... And out came those little white papers. Frank

used them to recall different thoughts he had had, to make his comments, and more often than that, to pose questions. They weren’t always big questions. More likely they would simple, tangible questions: “Why does your character dislike his father?” “Why is it so important that she learn how to dance?” “What will happen to her if she doesn’t?” The questions at first might not have seemed so important, but on further reflection often emerged as the key to understanding the flaws in the screenplay, or the way to discover the next step it had to take.

Like most brilliant men, Frank had a strong ego, but he never let it overwhelm his work as a teacher. To Frank, less was more; it was better to tap than to shove. For those of us trying to follow in his path this is, perhaps, his most difficult lesson: working with writers is a delicate business, it’s like helping a parent learn how to raise a child. And as Frank Daniel and his little white papers showed us, it is as much of an art as a science.

David Weber



Prague, the Jewish cemetery

THE BLUEPRINT WORKSHOP at FAMU, Prague

## THE POWER AND ALLURE OF UNCERTAINTY

**TEACHERS** help guide and shape lives. Great teachers change lives. Frank Daniel changed a great many lives – as evidenced by this gathering and his name echoing in the halls of education and on film sets worldwide.

I am fortunate to be one of those whose life was not only touched and guided and shaped directly by Frank, but well beyond all that, my life was changed profoundly by that interaction. And, as with so many of the people he taught and influenced, I have found myself striving to do the same things he did for me with as many others as I can. I'm just copying the master when I teach; I'm following his lead. And I'm using what he taught me when I write, in everything I write. My daily life – teaching, writing, traveling, making films, living – has been influenced for the better in all of its aspects by the years I spent studying with, working for and working with Frank Daniel.

Another former student of Frank's, who is now a very successful producer in Hollywood, was having dinner with his wife and Frank a number of years ago. And this producer's wife, then about 30, was trying desperately to decide if she should go back to school and get her degree in psychology. She lamented that it would take about six years and by then she'd be 36 years old. Frank said that in six years, she'd be 36 anyway, so what does she want to be at that age, a psychologist? She now has a successful psychology practice in Los Angeles. She changed her perspective on the future and uncertainty about it through one dinner with Frank. She accepted the sole certainty - aging - and jumped into the uncertainty - striving to become what she wanted to be.

The essential ingredient in all drama – not being sure what will happen, but having some idea or intention about what might happen...in a word, uncertainty – is also the essential ingredient in living life successfully and fully. No one lived life more this way and no one taught it more fully, simply and comprehensibly than Frank Dan-



iel. We are all better off because of it.

Without embracing uncertainty as a given in life – living with simultaneous hope for one outcome and fear of another – we become immobilized, unable to decide on a course of action for the future. Eventually of course we all learn that not deciding is still a form of deciding. But by not deciding, we end up being stuck with whatever life delivers to our door. And not deciding is also not striving. By striving - by aiming at a goal and struggling to

make it come about - we have a chance to have some influence on what arrives at our door. We don't know for sure – we might get what we set our sights on or we might not. But as McMurphy says in ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST after attempting a seemingly impossible feat, "At least I tried, goddamnit, at least I tried." It

is striving that allows us to grow, prosper, create, experiment, discover. In short it is striving to achieve something that we are uncertain we can accomplish that is the core attribute of everyone who has built the cultures of the world - the schools, the arts, the inventions, the businesses, the nations, everything worthwhile (and some of the bad) about human life.

Telling good stories and telling them well falls entirely on the good side of the spectrum and it is here that the history of mankind is recorded - both the history of real events and the history of our greatest hopes, our most profound fears and our wildest flights of fancy. It is also here that Frank devoted his time, his energies, his life and abundance of creativity. Not only did he tell good stories well, he also taught how to tell good stories well. And he taught it well. And now a whole legion of his former students, like myself and many others who are here, are striving to do what we learned from the master. We don't always know if we'll succeed, but at least we try, goddamnit, at least we try.

Every screenwriting student starts out fearing the same thing that every successful screenwriter knows all too well – the feeling that "maybe I won't be able to make this work." Part of the genius of the approach to storytelling that Frank handed down to so many of us is that it encourages us to believe we can. By breaking a big, impossible-looking story into achievable sections,



we learn to have a greater faith in our ability to “make this work.” What Frank taught us enables striving, it makes it possible to face the uncertainty that is inevitable in any great challenge. It helps us keep going, attacking the seemingly impossible task, increment by increment, until, to our great surprise, some version of what we hoped to accomplish actually has come into existence. It probably isn't everything we hoped it would be – how many perfect screenplays are there in the world? – but it is a lot closer to our target goal than if we hadn't been striving, if we hadn't been embracing the uncertain in ourselves, in our characters and in our creation and trying to make it all work the best we can in the time we have available.

And his approach enables us to go into the rewrite with another round of hope versus fear...and into the rewrite of the rewrite and the polish of the rewrite of the rewrite and so on and on until our film is being shown to an audience.

Then at that point, we experience another whole version of hope versus fear - “I hope they like it. I fear they'll hate me for having made it. I hope they get it; I fear they'll discover I'm an idiot who shouldn't be telling stories at all.” It isn't only those just starting to become screenwriters who suffer these pangs.

What separates the professionals from the beginners is not just time, number of projects, income level or success rate. What separates them is the acquired ability to deal with and overcome the uncertainty that is at the core of every great achievement (and a lot of lesser accomplishments as well).

First timers and old pros all sometimes feel: “Maybe this time I've bitten off more than I can chew.” Some beginners will learn to deal with that uncertainty and continue to work. They will eventually have a chance at success. Some beginners will not be able to handle the uncertainty and have to find something “safer” to do. Living with uncertainty is living on the edge.

It's asking for a risk-taker's life. It isn't for everyone. But for those who have it, for those who can take artistic risks and live with the uncertainty about being able to accomplish all they set their sights on, for those who can contend with the very real and nearly inevitable failures – either partial or complete – that come with trying to extend one's own abilities, for those people, what Frank offered directly to some of us and indirectly to many more with whom we work, was a means of using the power of that uncertainty, both in the work and in ourselves.

So if you feel unsure about being

Quitting is turning the uncertainty that is the core and essence of all drama into life's only certainty – aging on the way to death. And that's going to happen anyway, no matter what you do. So you're better off to strive and be uncertain and strive anyway. When you do that, you are keeping the legacy of Frank Daniel alive and proving that the creation of good stories and the living of a good life are two parts of the same drama. And when you do that, you just have to imagine or remember that incredible smile of Frank's. You're getting it, you're understanding and using the



The Velvet Revolution, Prague, November 1989

able to make your first script work or your next script, it means you're on the right path. If you feel uncertain you'll be able to make a career for yourself in some aspect of storytelling and screenwriting and filmmaking and television, it means you're reacting rationally to the realities of these very difficult and very rewarding pastimes.

If you have doubts about your ability to tackle your next project successfully, that it is maybe too big or too tough or too little to make work, then you have given yourself a worthy challenge, one that demands the very best of your ability. It's only when you let these uncertainties stop you from trying, when you quit striving, that you fail.

lessons he spent his life learning and teaching. And no one - not even you - is more pleased about that than Frank.

David Howard

THE BLUEPRINT WORKSHOP at FAMU, Prague



While a full report on the Blueprint workshop is in preparation, here is an excerpt from Willem Capteyn's paper.

## BLUEPRINTS IN MUSIC AND CINEMA

© Willem Capteyn, NFTVA, Amsterdam

**M**y connection with the Netherlands Film and Television Academy began in September of 1989, firstly as professor of film and from 1994 to the end of 2002 as head of the scenario department. The subject hiding behind the title of this presentation nagged at me all that time and yet I was unable to find the time to delve into it deeply. However, since my duties as department head ended last January, I have been in the lucky position of being able to spend some of my time on a research project called: *comparing forms in classical music and film dramaturgy*. Or its alias for this conference: Blueprints in music and cinema.

My research subject is not new. Donald Richie's beautiful book about Kurosawa points out the similarities with both the sonata form or theme and variations. And Hannah Kodicek for instance, during one of the Arista Story Editing Workshops, gave a presentation entitled: *Story structure, Music and Chaos*. She too points out the similarities between the structure of some films and the sonata and fugue. Very recently an article appeared in *Scriptwriter* by Annabelle Pangborn called *Music or dialogue*, in which she

compares the sonata form to the three-act structure. *Blueprints in Music and Cinema* is not new either. What would be new would be a published book containing a thorough form analysis of a large number of well-known films, making apparent the similarities with forms from classical music. My first question in my research is whether this assumption is correct. Should it be correct, I will then want to know what can be learned from this, particularly for the education of young filmmakers.

### THE THREE-PART PARADIGM

We are all aware that the dynamic three-part paradigm forms a model in which a clearly defined protagonist either chooses for or is forced into a clearly defined conflict at the end of Act 1. Act 2 reveals the protagonist's struggle with the conflict, ultimately leading to the crisis, in which, after a process of escalation or intensification, the protagonist is once again confronted with the ultimate choice for conflict or once again forced into it. In Act 3, the obligatory scene takes place immediately followed by resolution and catharsis. This, of course, takes place in a great number of variations; we are concerned here with the general delineation. There are a great many books on how to write a sce-

nario, all of which see this paradigm as the alpha and omega of scenario writing. It is at its most compelling in the book *The Screenplay* by Syd Field. At the end of the first chapter, Field states categorically: *The paradigm works. It is the foundation of a good scenario.*

Luckily, in recent years, a number of different books have appeared about the technique of scenario writing that take a new look at film form. A new awareness seems to be being born that is critical of film dramaturgy dogma stating, "films are naturally written in three parts because they consist of a beginning, a middle and an end" (a dogma going back to the poetics of Aristotle). Have a look at the article *The case against Aristotle* by Steve Nallon in the January issue of *Scriptwriter*.

A type of three-part structure is also the rule in music. All works of classical music begin in the tonic key, followed by a section that deviates from this to finally return to the tonic key. This basic principle, tonic-dominant-tonic, is the foundation of all classical compositions. You could compare it to the fields of force in drama. But this basic principle does not dictate in any way whatsoever that the music must make its impact on the listener in three parts. The same is true



of how a film appears to the viewer. The underlying three dramatic parts do not dictate in any way that the form of the film must be in three parts.

### FORMS IN CLASSICAL MUSIC

(...)

One way of distinguishing principles of form is to look at whether or not a thematic development born of contrast is present. This is at its most striking in the sonata form. In this three-part form, an exposition makes two themes audible. Then comes the middle section, the development, in which the themes or parts of themes contrast with or act upon each other. When the tension is finally resolved, it is followed by a recapitulation, practically identical with the first part and often concluded with a coda. The two themes of the exposition differ in both nature and character. It is revealing for the comparison with films that the first theme was once called the masculine and the second the feminine. This reminds one of the main plot and the subplot in film dramaturgy, where the dynamic businesslike conflict of the main plot often comes into conflict with the emotional development of the subplot. Just as in the sonata form, the two themes in the middle section or development are meant to conflict with each other. Three-part dramaturgy moves the climax of the tension to the third act. It is obvious that in a work for film, mirroring as it does real stories and conflicts, it doesn't

make sense to repeat the exposition. This plan is also seen in some fugues.



The main thought in the sonata form is always the same, but of course there are great differences in the individual applications. Charles Rosen, the musician and musical theorist, called his book on the sonata form *Sonata Forms* due to the existence of these differences. You would be correct in saying that the sonata form is the most dynamic of the forms. The essence of the form is the development, based on thematic material, that takes place in the middle.

But other, more contemplative forms do exist. The best known is the theme and variations. Everyone knows this form; the primal principle is extremely simple; the name says it all. What is special here is that each variation is itself a self-contained melody. Differences in atmosphere and mood can be enormous. It is also important that the number of variations is not fixed.

Originally these variations were primarily decorative, ornamental in nature, meaning that the theme kept reappearing with little embellishments. Later on, more attention began to be paid to colour and mood changes and to psychology. The distance from the tonic increased. These variations were called character variations in contrast to the ornamental ones.

A third, more closed form, is that of the rondo. This form emerged from poetry and song to conquer its own independent place within musical forms. Its most important characteristic is that the first theme is followed by a second and then that it returns, with or without variations. The first theme is called the refrain and the new theme the couplet. What follows then often deviates. This is called the alternative and often appears in the opposing tone sort (if the rondo is written in a major key, the alternative is minor and vice versa). In the 19th-century, this alternative sometimes expanded to become a development producing variations on thematic material from the refrain and the couplets, just as the middle section of the sonata





THE BLUEPRINT WORKSHOP

Michal Bregant, Dean FAMU



Annette Funch Thomassen, North by Northwest  
Daniel Martin,  
Lubor Dohnal, Head Screenwriting, FAMU



form does. After the alternative, the refrain returns, now completely in the tonic. The basic principle of the rondo form is then: A-B-A-C-A-B-A.

### AN ANALYSIS OF AMARCORD

I have chosen Amarcord as an example because it is one of the undisputed masterpieces of the second half of the last century. Everyone knows it and most of us know it very well. Unfortunately, for the moment, time restrictions prevent me from giving a thorough analysis of the film; please see the supplement. I'm going to jump somewhat abruptly to my conclusion, which I will support with a number of significant examples.

Amarcord lends itself excellently to comparison with a theme and variations. After several introductory bars (the *manini*), the main themes are revealed. Just as in the sonata form, these can be separated into a masculine (burgeoning fascism) and a feminine theme (burgeoning sexuality). This happens as we are introduced to all the characters, in the evening scene at the hairdressers and when the witch is burned on the town square.

Variation 1 begins immediately following. Funnily enough, this variation has the same design as the whole film. Have a look: first the group photograph with school and then per teacher and variations on this. The group photograph has the same function as the ritual around the stake in the main theme. And yes, variation 1 has the theme and variation form. See the supplement for an analysis of most of the variations.

At the end of the film, the village community gathers again in the original composition. But we are left with a fragmented and somewhat dismantled impression. The most important symbol of the feminine theme in the film, Gradisca, unites herself with (or if you will, submits to) a symbol with the masculine theme, the *carabinieri* officer. Gradisca leaves town. But time passes, the *manini* announce a new spring, the seasons will remain the same year in and year out, with or without fascism.

### THE NEXT STEPS IN THE RESEARCH

The blueprint of Amarcord is

certainly extremely convincing. This will not always be the case. Just as in music, I expect to encounter a number of hybrid forms. And sometimes the form of the film will be so diffuse that it won't make sense to compare it to an existing musical form. So be it. For that matter, diffuse forms, which do not allow themselves to be fitted into a principle of form, also exist in music. Research into form must not become compulsive; the idea behind developing form awareness is to increase creative freedom and not to limit it.

My tentative list contains a number of films by Kurosawa, including *Rashomon* and *Dodeskaden*. *Nostalgia* by Tarkowski will probably be a hard nut to crack. I want to analyse a number of French films, films reputed to have such a loose structure. These include *Un Dimanche à la Campagne* by Tavernier, which I suspect of concealing a closely-knit form. I am really looking forward to making an in-depth analysis of the films of Lubitsch, such as *To Be Or Not To Be* and *Trouble in Paradise*. Lubitsch gave form to his scenarios by already dividing them into sequences in the scenario phase. That was reinforced in the design of the film, just as in Amarcord, by the use of fade-outs.

In addition to this, I want to investigate to what extent certain sorts of content and certain form principles are connected. I will do this partially in the light of the song cycle *Das Marienleben* by Paul Hindemith, after Rilke's volume of poetry of the same name. I expand these thoughts in the supplement.

### FINALLY

The question naturally arises as to what this research will mean for film school education and thus for future filmmakers. I am completely convinced that being aware of more form principles than the three-act structure will broaden the outlook particularly of scenario students when examining existing material and quite possibly act to spark and inspire the conception of new material.

It will be obvious that this is not beginners' material. But for the interested, advanced student and the one aiming for a Master's degree, an in-depth consideration of this material should be compulsory. It could also turn out

that forms of short, independent musical works will provide new points of attack for short-film form analysis.

There have been many enthusiastic reactions to my research. Most of my film colleagues find the subject self-evident and practically everyone believes and hopes, often lovingly, that results will be forthcoming. Why is that? I think because films deviating in form from the three-act structure have never been described as to form. We have no literature in this area. A lecture here, a talk there, an article appearing in one magazine or another, they remain random occurrences.

No books about the teachings of form in cinema exist that have earned a place alongside the many works written by Americans singing the praises of the three-act structure. It is our omission that these books do not exist. It is our task to produce them. And it is important that they be published in English. Because it is only then that a meaningful, trans-atlantic dialogue can take place. If there is one thing the European MEDIA programme can invest in meaningfully, then it is the publication of books on this subject under these conditions.

But first we have to get down to work. My privilege is being able to work on this in the near future. And with help, the work will go faster. I hope that an exchange of thoughts on this subject will be possible, one that will also continue after this conference. Should you know of pertinent articles or have your own thoughts on this matter, should you suspect that this or that film is deserving of further form analysis, should you disagree with me entirely and want to tell me so, please let me know. I will be glad to place any of you who delight me with your comments on an e-mail group list and I promise that I will keep you up-to-date on my progress regularly, at least once every three months.

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(under construction)





**Nik Powell appointed Director of the National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield, UK**

Nik Powell has been appointed to be the new Director of the National Film and Television School with effect from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

It was founded in 1971 and Nik Powell will be the fourth Director.

Nik Powell said 'This is an exceptional opportunity for me to play a major direct role in the laying of the foundations of the film and television industries of tomorrow. (...) We have the advantage of being able to build on the foundations laid down over the last thirty plus years by Colin Young, Henning Camre and Stephen Bayly and the great teaching and administration staff led by Roger Crittenden and Jim Rodda.

There is however much work to be done to keep the School abreast of the ever changing film and television industries, especially with the fast developing digital technologies that are having such an impact on both industries. Nevertheless, the need for the development of creative people is as fundamental today as it ever was. I am committed to providing the education and training in the creative areas so that the Film and Television School can achieve its original remit of delivering 'the best of the best'."

Powell will give up producing pictures and any active role in his production company Scala Productions, although he will retain an executive producer credit on the pictures already committed to production.

Nik Powell is also the non-executive Chairman of the European Film Academy and on the board of the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission. He is a member of the British Screen Advisory Council and BAFTA, of the American Academy (AMPAS) and the European Producers

CILECT was organized to promote informal networking, which frequently leads to teachers being invited to be guest lecturers at other CILECT schools.

Corresponding member *Alan Rosenthal* of the Hebrew University reports that a significant portion of 2003 was spent in Asia. In July and August of this year Alan gave week long workshops in script writing and documentary at Griffith University, Brisbane, AFTRS Sydney, and AFTRS Melbourne. In September, he was in Singapore to give similar professional workshops to the Singaporean

**Enabling Scholarships" for European Film Schools  
Graduates eligible for free internships**

In order to enable European film schools to offer internships to their graduates, the European Film Institute (EIKK) has announced new grants.

Co-financed by the Allianz Culture Foundation of Munich, the grants, named "ESP Internships Type A", are available to GEECT-member-schools in order to finance internships which they procure for those of their

students chosen by the school as especially-promising young film makers.

The grants cover travel and living expenses for the chosen candidates, who will work as professional assistants to well-known film makers during a commercial film shoot. The duration of the internships varies and depends on the requirements of the film production company, the cost of living in the country where the shoot takes place and the degree to which the intern makes himself useful on the set.

The grants are distributed within the framework of the ESP program of the European Film Institute. ESP stands for European Subsidy Program for Young Film Professionals. The European Film Institute was founded by Edgar Reitz in 1996 in order to assist young film makers within the European framework to make the difficult step from the school environment to the commercial industry.

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**WE NEED YOUR FOOTAGE!!!**

**FOR THE NEXT CONGRESS, AS A PART OF THE CELEBRATION OF CILECT'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY, WE ARE PREPARING A VIDEO DEALING WITH ITS HISTORY. FOOTAGE TAKEN AT ANY OF VIDEO CONGRESSES, CONFERENCES OR OTHER EVENTS PLEASE CONTACT: NENAD.PUHOVSKI@ZG.HINET.HR**

European Media Development Association.

He also completed a new edition of his book "New Challenges in Documentary" which is due out in February, and began production on a new documentary "Stalin's Last Crime."

His most recent film "Adolph Eichmann: The Secret Memoirs, a feature-length documentary has been shown at the Jerusalem, Singapore, and Taipei Film festivals, as well as throughout Europe.