

Hello! Thank you so much for being here at my thesis presentation and spending your evening here, I really appreciate it. My thesis project is titled *The Hollywood Cowgirl*, and it's a two parter project. Just to give an overview of the structure - I will talk about the thesis, reflect on it, and—sprinkled in where it is relevant—I will read excerpts from the script.

First I'll get into just some general aspects of the project, some summaries, descriptions, and then from there I will get more into my process and influences.

One aspect of this project is a film script that I wrote, which is around feature length, and the second element is the video we just watched - which is kind of a teaser/music video/character day in the life. So, I'll just get right into all of the good stuff.

The Hollywood Cowgirl is a very special way to close out my time studying writing here - I'm from LA, and it really is at the heart of everything I write. I love all the mythology surrounding Hollywood, and I really think of this screenplay as kind of a love letter to where I grew up and all of its chaotic, glamorous qualities. I also chose to write in the form of a screenplay because it's always been the medium of writing that's really clicked for me, and I think with a story about Hollywood - you really have to see it to believe it. So writing something to be produced seemed perfect.

I like to refer to this script as being kind of a feminist farce - it follows Alana Adams, who is a working, B-List actress who is roped into a lot of PR messes that she doesn't necessarily ask for. She goes to crazy parties, deals with a really intense, almost-cultish publicist, kind of becomes a method actor for a second and takes down a bunch of misogynists, and also at the same time is just navigating being in LA in her 20s with her confidant and best friend, who is also her love interest. I definitely think of this story as existing during the time of the internet - how now access to celebrities is more open than it's ever been - so I'm pondering some of the consequences of that.

The video teaser for *The Hollywood Cowgirl* is definitely an accompaniment to the script, but it also kind of exists on its own as a way to represent some of the aesthetic qualities I would imagine a produced version of the script might take on. I made use of very saturated, poppy color palettes and I used a punchy punk rock song - I love editing to the Ramones, because their songs really get to the point and have a good rhythm to follow. I think these two items work together, but also could exist in their own space and don't necessarily rely on each other.

Now, I wanted to talk about some of the cultural and creative contexts I'm coming at this project with.

I think this first topic requires its own thesis, but I really felt compelled to include it, because it has loomed large for me in how I analyze, critique, and enjoy or dislike films. We are experiencing a pandemic of sexual violence against women, 1 in 3 women report this, and at the same time, we are seeing actual graphic portrayls of violence against women in film at increased rates within the last two decades. And what many institutions like the National Health Institute and the World Health organization finds in their research is that these depictions actually

correlate to the acceptance of this violence. This highly concerns me, and it sort of unfortunately affirmed what I felt like I've empirically observed in a lot of films.

My actor and I, Chloe actually had a conversation about this a few weeks ago, begging the question of "well, who is this movie for? And if this is how you're portraying women in your movie, what do you think of the woman watching the movie?" Women are the number one consumer group in America, they make up, in a given year, 75-80% of consumer purchases and that includes entertainment. With that in mind, I am often skeptical of films claiming to tell women's stories - with a credit list full of men. And then, especially when those films win awards, I question it. Why exactly do you want me to think of women's experiences through that lens? And why aren't companies greenlighting more films actually produced by women, when they make up over 50% of film students in the US. In my opinion, it's for an element of control. A comparison that comes to mind is between *Hustlers* and *Anora*.

These two films follow some similar themes, and also have somewhat similar tones. They are very serious in some ways, and very comedic in others. I question why, *Anora*, directed by Sean Baker, was so overwhelmingly positively received, while *Hustlers* had a more mixed response. The Oscar campaign for *Anora* emphasized that it was a true portrayal of sex work, while the reviews for *Hustlers* emphasized that the story was about women who become corrupted by money through sex work. I think those semantics are very interesting to consider. I love Mikey Madison, and I have nothing bad to say about her or her performance, but I like to pay attention to these trends: not only by analyzing the film itself, but by analyzing how we as the public are influenced to think about the films. In the age of the internet, we hear people's opinions on things sometimes before we even understand what prompts the opinion, which makes it very easy for big media companies to influence public opinion algorithmically.

What I want this screenplay to do is provide a perspective that isn't so polluted by all of that. Nothing graphic is portrayed in *The Hollywood Cowgirl*, but there are many, many instances of misogyny and harassment put on display, and I think by using some satire, I want to portray how awful but also how absurd that behavior is. Everyone has some internalized misogyny, even women, but at the risk of sounding kind of trite, I think of this screenplay as a safe space. Sofia Coppola says that she always just makes movies that she would want to watch, and I take a very similar approach. This script represents, to me, the kinds of portrayals of women that I wish were more abundant.

That is some context. It's very dark, and much darker than I hope my project comes across, but I think I would be highly highly remiss not to bring it up.

Now, I'll talk a little bit about some of my technical, theoretical, and aesthetic references for this project.

This project is a reflection of modernity. It really specifically exists as a present-day story. However, there are still several older movements which have influenced my work. I've boiled

some of my main historical references here - the neorealist film movement, the Czech new wave movement, and also the big boom of '90s independent films, particularly the comedies.

As far as the shoot goes, I take a lot of inspiration from the neorealist film movement. Some of those principles include making use of real locations as a set, using non-professional actors, and kind of collaborating with your actors to get the most out of a shot or to get the most natural shot. I watched this movie, *Bicycle Thieves*, in one of my film history classes and I loved it so much. I was so intrigued by how you could tell such a good story by simply following your subjects around - they're literally looking for a lost bike the whole time, but it is just so fun to watch anyway - and the ending is so bittersweet. When I learned about the context of neorealism, I knew that I had to take some of those cues when it came to my own shoot.

On the other hand, when it comes to editing, I take a much more theatrical approach that isn't so rooted in realism. I like to use very poppy saturated color palettes, and I like the punchiness of punk music and some of those text characteristics that are in line with that - I kind of play with them in my title cards. I wanted my edit to take some inspiration from the Czech new wave. I loooove the film *Daisies* directed by Vera Chytilova - this movement of film blends a lot of realism with absurdity - the editing is very jumpy and quick. The plots aren't necessarily fully linear and make a lot of use of montage and funky color work. I'm really intrigued by that particular kind of abstraction still being able to portray very clear themes. I also kind of took inspiration from Vera Chytilova's idea about this movie being a bit of a farce. It's dramatic and comedic and plays on its own absurdity - but that works in its favor! Me and my actor, Chloe, always say that we are the girls from *Daisies*.

I'll show you what I mean through some stills. Here, the main characters destroy a big grand dinner table and hang from the chandeliers - but there is no context at all leading up to the scene. In this clip, their bodies are completely omitted from the shot.

Chytilova also makes a lot of use out of fun color work, creating a sometimes psychedelic feel that is very in line with the wackiness of the story. Even without context, you can put yourself in the protagonists' headspace and kind of play along with their mischief.

One genre I definitely grew up on that really influenced how I write humor and comedy is the big boom of independent movies coming out in the '90s. Maybe because my parents were teenagers then, it got passed down to me and we watched a lot of them. So *Dazed and Confused*, *Clerks*, *Rushmore*, *Jawbreaker*, I love love love. Last semester I was recommended this film, *Party Girl*, starring Parker Posey and I was so disappointed that I hadn't seen it sooner! I love these comedies, and how they're able to be quite smart and witty but still funny and able to attract a big audience. *Dazed and Confused* to me is like a double period piece now - portraying the 70s in a very comedic way, but also now kind of representing the 90s when it was coming out.

[Script Reading]

When I think about this film existing in a modern context, I think of Damien Chazelle. *Babylon* is one of my most favorite movies and I think my brain was permanently altered by the its pace,

soundtrack, costumes, and elaborate sets. He really portrays Hollywood in a way that I connected with - calling out the bad in the industry itself while still appreciating all of the amazing art that came out of it! Of course, there is also La La Land, which I thought of when considering where a scene might take place in my own script. He used location really well here, showing off famous LA landmarks but also making it not too gimmicky for people who live there.

Here is an example: Griffith Park and the Observatory there is my favorite LA landmark, and Chazelle portrays it very well. The landscape is beautiful and backdrops the music in the film nicely, and at the same time, despite the singing, it's realistic because - Emma Stone's character couldn't find parking any closer to the house they were coming from. Classic LA.

I discovered a lot about wealthy people in the entertainment industry through watching a lot of Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. I learned that a lot of rich people don't live in Beverly Hills at all, but actually own homes and live in Bel Air, because it's more private - that inspired the location of this party scene I will read from.

[Script Reading]

I grew up in Manhattan Beach, so these were definitely "my" beaches. They are also the best beaches for surfing and swimming, so it was a perfect fit for the context they appear in the script.

The Chateau Marmont hotel has so much history - so many celebrities and especially rock and roll musicians lived here in the '70s. I've never been due to price, but it's always been a dream of mine to visit - I thought it would be a fittingly dreamy location to end the script, retaining a lot of aesthetics from older versions of Los Angeles.

Alana is often driving down the Sunset strip. It's a very iconic and referenced street, but also one that I find myself driving down a lot to get around. It is beautiful just around sunset time, when the sky is orange and all the neon lights start to shine.

I always must mention Sofia Coppola - it's almost hard to describe where I am directly influenced by her, because she seems to pop up everytime I'm doing anything film related and honestly just raised my consciousness to film in general. I've gotten so much from her films and her focus on women's stories - and also her attitude of not really caring how her movies are received. I think they got a lot of flack while they were coming out for not having a lot of substance, and I think people just weren't ready to admit that women's experiences are substantial. I always appreciate her blase attitude about it - she said in an interview that her only financial factor for her is making enough money to be able to produce the next movie. I just feel honestly proud for her that there's a big wave of Gen Z girls like myself who really really appreciate her work and give it the credit it deserves. I've learned so much from observing how she gets really good images - and how objects and subjects, just by being in the shot, can be really visually interesting if you catch a good angle or get the shot composition perfect. I feel like she's a little angel on my shoulder that keeps me motivated and keeps me confident in what I'm working on.

Especially when focusing on a famous figure, her attention to detail really adds a lot of visual

information.

Now, I'll talk about my experience making this project, some of my intentions, and how my project has shifted since i proposed it in the spring.

This project changed quite a bit since the proposal. Although the concept remained somewhat similar, I was originally going to a big music video shoot and have that be the primary project. What I realized after proposing pretty simply was that I wanted to write more! I think because the creative writing student population is just me here at PNCA, there was always a big emphasis on all the other mediums I was working with besides writing - not due to the fault of anyone, but just how it is. I did work with another medium here in the form of video; it has definitely been my most favorite of all other mediums I worked with! I find making music videos and editing to a beat really really fun and kind of like a puzzle.

At the same time, my strongest skills are in writing, and I wanted to write a lot more than the project I proposed would have allowed me to do. So that's what I did, and I was very happy with the choice I made.

So, what were the roles I took on? For this project, I was the scriptwriter, director, costume designer, editor, and administrator - I wore many hats. However, working with my actor Chloe sparked a lot of new interesting ideas. We had a shot list, but also ended up shooting more takes or angles on the spot as it seemed fit. Sometimes, improv can bring you some of your best shots. This can be especially true when you work with a close friend, where any barrier of awkwardness and formality are gone.

Now, I'll talk a little bit about how I evaluate my own work and my revision process - how do I know when it's done, how do I know what to include or remove? For the scriptwriting process, I think of it as both a creative and technical process. Creativity comes in when you are building the story - creating characters, coming up with situations and scenes, and pacing the plot well. One of the best writing pieces of advice I got was to get your characters in and out of places fast, and to not drag anything out too long - unless there's really a reason for it. And that has been endlessly helpful advice. However, there is a second function of the script and that is as a production document, meaning that it is a tool for the film at large. If you also have a vision for what the film might look like, that can be really hard. With typical script conventions, you're not really meant to include descriptions of framing or angles, you're not really meant to describe anything about the soundtrack unless the characters are also hearing the music. And that's because, hypothetically, that's not your job as the scriptwriter, there are other creative people who take on that role. But, like I said, that gets really hard when you're thinking, "I want to produce it! I'll play all the parts!"

That brings me to the video element of the project. It was really a way for me to be able to express what I didn't in the script - so focusing a lot on the aesthetic qualities of the film - the clothes, the music, and color palettes. I learned during the shoot process that you may have some clips you think you're definitely going to use, and ones you think you're definitely going to

scrap, but it's always best to just keep them all on your radar, because that can change so easily in the edit process. Editing to music is kind of a puzzle in a similar way, where you're placing clips in different places, trying to see where everything clicks together the best.

[SCRIPT READING]

There was originally no Oscar night scene in the script. I figured it would be satisfying for Alana not to attend, but only if there was a glimpse of the reaction that ensued. I decided it might be fun if someone accepted the award for her and denounced it on her behalf.

I think, because going to the movies is kind of a common, universal activity, films are "marketed" to certain demographic groups. This isn't really something I care to contribute much to. Whoever sees it, is meant to see it. But I would say that I imagine this movie to live in the world of independent cinema - and will probably hit the hardest and be more well understood by other younger audiences. Because the internet is almost its own character in this movie, I think understanding the inner workings of how social media works these days is probably helpful.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, I kind of made this film an homage to Gen Z girls. I'm not trying to in any way cut off any audiences, and I want everyone to see it and enjoy it! It's not a diss against a gender. But really my deepest hope is that girls around my age or older or younger see this and really feel seen, and feel like they can relax in their seats and not worry about if the female characters are going to be randomly objectified or not.

To get a better understanding of what I mean by the internet being a character in my film, I will read a small excerpt from a scene in the first act. As I read earlier, our protagonist anonymously defaced her coworkers' dressing room. Later, in an Instagram Reel, her co-star reacts to this. Randomly enough, one of my references for this scene was a hilarious video, back in 2020, right when lockdown had started, a big group of celebrities made videos from their mansions singing lines from Imagine by John Lennon - as a way to express how they were feeling about having to stay home. I just found it so tone deaf, that it kind of became hilarious to me, and a genuine comedic reference, and that's part of what I mean when I say this film references internet culture. So, I'll just read you that bit from the script.

[SCRIPT READING]

Writing is a compulsion that I will never stop having! It keeps me grounded, helps me to express myself, and gives me a way to work out my thoughts creatively. Although I am off to a new adventure and not necessarily in the immediate pursuit of a writing career at the moment, I can't see my life without it, so I will always keep it as a personal practice regardless of where life takes me.

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS]