

Mateusz Budzyna-Dawidowski

Mixed Feelings

Year of Lodgment: 2022

School of Language and Culture

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

## **Abstract**

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film [or pilot for television, or play for the theatre]; plus a 6000-word essay (exegesis). A summary of the script is as follows:

*Anya and Marcel are a young couple starting work together at a company with a highly developed virtual workspace. They develop avatars there: Emma/Anya, who is trained by Jennifer to suppress her own emotions to harvest the emotional data of others, and Francis/Marcel, who is trained by Roy to have his emotional data harvested.*

*Marcel and Anya's home relationship is tarnished because of Marcel's growing avoidant nature. Anya cheats on Marcel, and when she sees that Marcel is indifferent, she leaves him. Despite Emma/Anya confessing her cheating, her and Francis/Marcel's relationship in Enigma flourishes. Momentarily suppressing her love, Emma/Anya helps Jennifer harvest Francis/Marcel's emotions. Francis/Marcel is left with no emotional memory of who Emma/Anya is to him.*

*Months later, Emma/Anya is frustrated at having to see Francis/Marcel being harvested repeatedly. Unintentionally provoked by Roy at Enigma, Emma/Anya explodes in an emotional meltdown. Her emotions are harvested.*

*After the harvesting, Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya cannot recognise each other emotionally. They use a virtual space to imagine their old apartment, and they realize who they are to each other and agree to give each other an opportunity to love again.*

The script is framed by an Exegesis which is a 6000-word essay on the subject of:

- (a) the genre of the script
- (b) the development process from synopsis to second draft

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Attestation of Authorship</b>	<b>i.</b>
<b>Script: ‘Mixed Feelings’</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Exegesis for ‘Mixed Feelings’</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Reference Texts</b>	<b>120</b>

### **Attestation of Authorship**

*“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”*

M.Dawidowski

**Exegesis for 'Mixed Feelings'**

My thesis is creative practice as research, comprising a creative artifact (a screenplay) accompanied by a critical component (an exegesis). This conforms to AUT University's guidelines for a 'Format Three' thesis, as described in the Postgraduate Handbook 2021, which states 'practice does not serve to illustrate theory but is more appropriately understood as the site of research; the exegesis relates directly to the practice-oriented work and as such does not have a research topic or question of its own; the purpose of the exegesis is to elucidate and clarify the relationship between the central concept, key contexts, relevant critical context' (pp. 109-113). Accordingly, in my exegesis, I provide a discussion which overviews the creative work, which will include:

- A synopsis of the creative component and an explanation of my intentions
- A review of key texts relevant to development of the creative work, in the form of a comparative analysis
- A detailed description of the process and methodology used, and a reflection on the outcomes of this creative practise as research
- Discussion of theoretical, historical and critical context where relevant

## Part One: Comparative Study of Central Theme

The purpose of this section is to explore and establish the central theme of 'Mixed Feelings' as it relates to other texts with similar central themes and actions. The central theme covered in 'Mixed Feelings' is as follows: *the love and understanding between individuals versus the attempts of large coercive structures to exploit those feelings*. Throughout this essay, the theme will be paraphrased as *feelings between individuals versus coercive structures*.

As a common experience in history and human life, the interaction between large coercive forces and feelings between and within individuals has been explored in many works of art, with literary authors like George Orwell and Franz Kafka being some of the foremost innovators in this area. For this analysis, I will explore five cinematic scripts which follow a similar central theme: 'Brazil' (1983), 'The Truman Show' (1998), 'American Psycho' (1998), 'Sorry to Bother You' (2017) and 'Nine Days' (2019). I will elaborate on how my script, 'Mixed Feelings', fits into the tradition of this central theme relative to these texts. In particular, I will illustrate the role of world-building in the creation of a convincing antagonistic force, the role of the relationship line in a screenplay in affecting the level of consciousness a protagonist has of the changes they might be going through or resisting, and lastly, the role of minor characters in contributing to the stakes that motivate the protagonist.

## **The role of physical and behavioral worlds in creating the antagonistic force**

Extensive world-building allows scripts that explore the theme of *individual feelings vs coercive structures* to adequately build and explain the motivations of antagonistic forces in the story. In the studied scripts, a distinction can be made between physical world-building and behavioral world-building.

In 'Brazil' and 'Sorry to Bother You', writers create fantasy-like corporate structures, where reality is bent for caricature. In 'Brazil', the writers create a dystopian world run by an assortment of automated machines. A simple malfunction of a machine can and does cause the unjustified death-by-bureaucracy of Archibald Buttle. In 'Sorry to Bother You', the corporate structure Cassius Green participates in culminates in the creation of 'Equisapiens', horse-human hybrids. These events, unique to each respective world, have a direct impact on the protagonists of each film by creating an extreme version of a coercive structure around them.

The writers of 'The Truman Show' and 'American Psycho' are similarly adept at making the setting of the story a key element that drives the character. Though both worlds are set in at first seemingly realistic environments, it is the behavior of people in these settings that drives the story. In 'The Truman Show' all the minor characters that Truman interacts with are actors, which makes them behave in a way that hides their true identities and keeps the show going for viewers. Truman's best friend, Marlon, for example, conveniently turns up at Truman's doorstep at climactic moments, like when Truman is fighting with Meryl. This convenience is a fundamental and unique element of the coercive structure that dominates Truman's world – the

way people behave is to hide from him. The world of ‘American Psycho’ is also a behaviorally unique world, like ‘The Truman Show’, rather than a physically unique world, like ‘Sorry to Bother You’ and ‘Brazil’. Patrick Bateman imitates the behavior of many of his colleagues, displaying tendencies like posturing, gossiping, lying and cheating. He interacts with shells of human beings, and is one himself, describing himself as being “not really here”. The antagonism surrounding Patrick Bateman in the coercive structure of toxic social rules pushes Bateman to act out in the extreme as he conforms to it, culminating in a bloodthirsty fantasy.

The behaviorally and physically abstracted worlds of ‘Sorry to Bother You’, ‘Brazil’, ‘The Truman Show’ and ‘American Psycho’ are key to creating the theme of *individual feelings versus coercive structures* because they are the coercive structures that the individual feelings between and within individuals have to fight against. Sam Lowry, Cassius Green and Truman Burbank all have to fight an oppressive external world over which they have limited influence to reunite with their loved ones and be able to express their feelings to them. In Patrick Bateman’s case, a crucial factor in the journey is the fact that he replicates and expands the already extreme behavioral world in his mind, making his end goal of expressing his feelings to someone he trusts seem impossible.

In ‘Mixed Feelings’, Anya, with Marcel, is launched into the world of Enigma, which is abstracted in the physical sense, with the ability to create imagined worlds within the virtual world. It is also abstracted in the behavioral and emotional sense. Anya is forced to manipulate her own emotions, as well as exploit the abstracted emotions of others. Like Truman Burbank, her emotions are expected to fit in a certain box, to be ‘scripted’. This is well displayed when she

has a conversation with and then makes love to Francis/Marcel, at the same time helping Enigma to harvest Francis/Marcel's emotions. Emma/Anya's behavioral world is better compared to that of Patrick Bateman. Both desire to express their emotions with their loved ones freely, but both are expected to show little or no emotion in their very ruthless corporate environments. For Emma/Anya, imagery closer to the end of the script rings true here, when she is trying to render an environment in the meeting room but cannot because she is emotionally dead. This scene can be compared to one of the ending scenes of 'American Psycho', where Patrick Bateman tries to confess his crimes so that he can finally express his feelings, but he isn't believed because his own lawyer mistakes him for someone else. Emma/Anya has become emotionally dead due to her playing by the behavioral rules of Enigma, while Patrick Bateman is coerced once again into conformity by being ignored by the corporate social structure in which he lives.

The powers of world-building to create a convincing antagonistic context show their limits with the supernatural piece, 'Nine Days'. The script contains a physical world which is an abstraction from day-to-day reality. As the world contains mostly new souls that have never been alive, they will not behave the same way as souls which have been alive. Therefore, there is a strong behavioral world present in the script. However, the rules of this physical world and the behavior of its people are less fantastical and extreme than that of 'Sorry to Bother You', 'American Psycho' and the other scripts discussed. This is a good example of a script where, while the rules of the world play a very important part in creating the context around the protagonist, they are not the primary drivers of his action, and are overpowered by other elements.

### **The relationship line, the dramatic question and the consciousness of the protagonist**

The dramatic question is a key way in which writers build the central theme of individual feelings versus coercive corporate structures. The weighting the relationship line has in the dramatic question contributes to the level of consciousness of the protagonist in terms of the conflict arising between their individual feelings and the coercive structures which are trying to exploit them.

The dramatic question in 'Brazil' is established when the character of Jill is introduced in Sam's dreams, and his feelings for her drive him to try to get close to her. It is highly focused on the relationship line: 'Will Sam succeed in having a relationship with Jill?' As he pursues Jill, Sam progressively becomes more aware of his surroundings and the injustice of the system in which he lives, because the relationship goes against what is acceptable to the authorities. 'Nine Days' is also highly focused on the relationship line between Will as the protagonist and Emma and all the candidates he comes across. Will's attitude toward candidates has been affected by his personal circumstances, triggered by the death of Amanda, one of his previous selections. Will has succumbed to the prevalent belief in his line of work and the unseen, corporate-seeming structure for which he works: selected candidates should be prepared for a tough world so that they can avoid Amanda's fate. Emma challenges this. When he first meets Emma, the dramatic question becomes: 'Will Will return to his own sensitive soul and express himself in front of his loved ones?'. Emma's behavior, like refusing to answer the questions Will asks her and subsequently asking him about his past life, demands Will change his attitude toward candidates and the social contract of 'sending the toughest ones' by which he does his work. This strong

relationship line relates to the level of consciousness Will has about his own change of character. He knows that he is changing because of the way his relationship with Emma helps him reject the cynical beliefs which he has held, and to learn to express his feelings.

‘The Truman Show’ is less focused on the relationship line than ‘Nine Days’ and ‘Brazil’.

Truman’s line between himself and Sylvia doesn’t develop further than his urgent need to get out of Seahaven to go out and find her. As the audience, we don’t get glimpses of what their potential relationship might look like. This is because Sylvia has no access to Truman due to the very strict policies as to who is allowed to interact with him, implemented by Christof and the TV network. These strict policies also affect how much Truman knows about the oppressive structure he lives in, which, at the beginning, is nothing. Though his goal is to express his feelings to Sylvia, he doesn’t know the full nature of the oppressive system that is stopping him from doing so until the end of the script.

‘Sorry to Bother You’ and ‘American Psycho’ both focus on the inner line of the protagonist and both scripts’ protagonists suffer from a lack of knowledge about the coercive system in which they live. Dramatically, they ask ‘Will Cassius Green choose money and power over his friends?’ and ‘Will Patrick Bateman open up and express his true feelings to people that love him?’, respectively. Patrick Bateman’s line requires a much larger internal change to his character. He is more reliant on himself to change because he is so self-involved that any real relationships with Luis or Jean are quickly rejected by Bateman. His self-involvement means that he has a complete lack of consciousness as to how he is affected by the toxic world in which he lives, driving him to a point of insanity at the script’s conclusion. Cassius’ relationship lines with his friends are

stronger than Bateman's, but for much of the script, the battle of his internal morals and ethics overpowers those lines. Interestingly, as his knowledge of the WorryFree company grows, Cassius becomes more reliant on the friends that he previously rejected. His relationship lines become more important to him as his knowledge of the oppressive system grows.

In 'Mixed Feelings', the dramatic question is placed in the relationship line: 'Will Marcel and Anya have a successful relationship?'. This links directly into the central theme as it establishes the force of individual feelings and their romantic nature. The pursuit by Anya of this relationship throughout the story drives her to gain knowledge about Enigma. She first uses her knowledge to maintain her position at the expense of her relationship with Francis/Marcel. Later she redeems herself, by using her knowledge to give them a chance at love again. Her level of consciousness about her relationship line is at a similar level to Sam Lowry's in 'Brazil'. She knows what she wants in the relationship and gains knowledge to beat the system to develop her feelings for the person she loves.

### **Relationships between minor characters and the protagonist in the central theme**

Scripts that explore the central theme of *individual feelings versus large coercive structures* build strong relationships between the protagonist and the minor characters for two aims. Firstly, writers need minor characters to contrast the behavior of the protagonist, whether they are rebelling against or conforming with the behavioral world of the antagonistic coercive structure. This also serves as a way to illustrate the consequences of pursuing individual feelings against the wishes of the coercive structure. Secondly, relationships with minor characters are used to

build the stakes involved for the protagonist in terms of their individual feelings for the minor character(s), giving the protagonist a strong motivation.

### **A. Minor characters are contrasting elements to the protagonist**

‘Mixed Feelings’ uses minor characters to encourage Emma/Anya to become part of the behavioral world in which they live, in a similar way to ‘Brazil’, ‘American Psycho’, and ‘Sorry to Bother You’. While Roy and Jennifer in ‘Mixed Feelings’ form part of the main antagonistic force in the script, pushing Emma/Anya to conform with the corporate structure, other characters add more texture to the cost of the decision to conform or not. Steven, for example, is in a similar situation as Emma/Anya, having to suppress his feelings for the sake of the company. When he fails, his emotions are harvested and his emotional memory is wiped, highlighting the dangerous territory that Emma/Anya is stepping on. In a similar vein, Luis and Jean in ‘American Psycho’ push Patrick Bateman to change for the better - attempts which Patrick ignores. Detroit, Squeeze, Sal and others also try to change Cassius for the better in ‘Sorry to Bother You’. Instead, Cassius follows the temptations of money and power, that he sees Detroit and the others shut out of. For at least part of the story, Detroit, Squeeze, Luis and Jean, all symbolize what Patrick and Cassius don’t want to become – outcasts from the coercive structure that the protagonists idolize.

In ‘Mixed Feelings’, Clyde is in a different position. Like Francis/Marcel he seems likely to have his emotions harvested. Due to his ability to function in the corporate workspace, he is instead promoted and becomes an unfeeling colleague of Emma/Anya. He is the representation of what Roy and Jennifer demand Emma/Anya to be. In ‘Brazil’, a similar role is fulfilled by

Jack Lint, who is the ultimate functionary of the system. Jack, being desperate to hold on to his position of power, calls his own wife by the wrong name because that was the name his boss used for her. Later, he completely disregards his friend Sam by being indifferent when Sam goes insane due to the system's actions. Like Jack Lint, Clyde in 'Mixed Feelings' serves to show who Emma/Anya would be if she'd just conform.

### **B. Minor characters as relationships at stake for the protagonist**

Crucially, minor characters have a part in forming the *individual feelings* aspect of the theme by giving the protagonist strong stakes. In 'Mixed Feelings', Emma/Anya's stake is her feelings for Francis/Marcel, which she eventually risks for the sake of him being able to have feelings for her again. She is also willing to go into a completely unknown state of being to get what she wants. In this way, she is much like Truman, whose feelings for Sylvia help him defeat his imprisonment and his fears when he sails out of Seahaven Island.

The minor character of Amanda is key to providing the stakes for Will in 'Nine Days'. After she dies and is revealed to have committed suicide, Will is desperate not to choose a candidate that is 'too vulnerable'. He doubles down on a cynical attitude that is pervasive in the inhumane system in which he works, not wanting to feel the pain of Amanda's death again. Emma, Kane, Alex, Mike and Maria, are all relationships that Will has, most of which he has to sacrifice. His job is to choose which candidate he'd like to see develop. If he chooses poorly, the chance of a better choice is already gone. The relationships he has with the characters are crucial in building his fear that he will choose another soul like Amanda's.

In ‘American Psycho’, Patrick Bateman’s primary relationships are all toxic interactions with minor characters like Paul Allen and Craig McDermott. In addition to helping create the behavioral world, they also illustrate the level of prestige that Patrick Bateman aspires to keep. Like Will’s relationship with Emma in ‘Nine Days’, Luis and Jean illustrate the personal relationships Patrick Bateman could have, or the stakes that he could lose if he doesn’t change.

‘Sorry to Bother You’ uses a similar formula, but it is set up differently. While Will and Patrick Bateman’s stakes are something they could gain, Cassius’ stakes are painted as something that he could lose. The writer establishes the stakes early on in the script, highlighting the financial troubles of Cassius’ uncle and Cassius’ strong relationship with his girlfriend, Detroit, despite their difficult financial situation. When Cassius is hired by RegalView, he quickly develops strong relationships with his co-workers, Squeeze, Sal and Langston. Throughout this ‘set-up’ section of the script, the writer shows that Cassius has a lot to lose in terms of his relationship with all these minor characters.

The theme of *the love and understanding between individuals versus the attempts of large coercive structures to exploit those feelings* is an extensive topic that has been covered by many works of art, including scripted cinema. In this study, I explored the role of world-building in the creation of coercive structures present in the theme, specifically differentiating between physical and behavioral world-building. Next, I discussed the relationship to the level of consciousness that the protagonist has in terms of their struggle and the prevalence of the relationship line in the dramatic question. Finally, I examined how the relationships between the protagonist and minor

characters contribute to creating contrast with the way a protagonist treats a coercive structure, and the risks that they take with the emotional bonds they have with their loved ones.

## Part Two: Reflections on Creative Output

In this section of my exegesis, I aim to provide the creative context to my written work, ‘Mixed Feelings’. I will first provide a synopsis of the script and an explanation of my intentions in writing it. I will then delve into a detailed reflection of the creative outcomes of my research, specifically concerning story elements like world-building, theme, protagonist, antagonist and sources of dramatic tension.

### 1. Synopsis

*“The generally accepted idea of a synopsis... deals in WHO, WHAT and HOW, but also establishes the other major characters and their lines of conflict, what is at stake for these characters, the setting in time and space, and the major turning points of the story. The last is crucial; the key element of any synopsis is a clear indication of the story’s structure. That is, how the story begins, develops and ends.”*

Brindley, M. (2009). *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?* Screen Australia. (p.4).

<https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/ae5708a4-05d9-4db0-b5fb-4f999fdfed57/What-is-a-synopsis.pdf>

Anya and Marcel are a young couple starting work together at a company with a highly developed virtual workspace. They develop avatars there: Emma/Anya, who is trained by Jennifer to suppress her own emotions to harvest the emotional data of others, and

Francis/Marcel, who is trained by Roy to express his emotions and have his emotional data harvested.

Marcel and Anya's home relationship is tarnished because of Marcel's growing avoidant nature. Anya cheats on Marcel, and when she sees that Marcel is indifferent, she leaves the apartment. Despite Emma/Anya confessing her cheating, her and Francis/Marcel's relationship in Enigma flourishes, and they go to virtual spaces that they imagine together. Momentarily suppressing her love, Emma/Anya helps Jennifer harvest Francis/Marcel's emotions. Francis/Marcel is left with no emotional memory of who Emma/Anya is to him.

Months later, Emma/Anya is frustrated at having to see Francis/Marcel being harvested repeatedly. Anya visits Marcel in the real world. Remembering the harvesting, Marcel asks Anya to make his avatar in Enigma remember somehow too, so they can be together again. At Enigma, Roy expresses his admiration for her ability to make Francis/Marcel fall in love with her, and Emma/Anya explodes in an emotional meltdown. Her emotions are harvested.

When they first interact after the harvesting, Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya cannot recognise each other emotionally. After they use a virtual space to imagine their old apartment, they realise who they are to each other and agree to give each other an opportunity to love again.

## 2. The World of the Story

*“Creating a unique world for the story — and organically connecting it to the characters — is as essential to great storytelling as character, plot, theme, and dialogue.”*

Truby, J. (2007). *The Anatomy of Story*. Faber & Faber. (p145).

‘Mixed Feelings’ is set in a world of the not-so-distant future, where many companies are using and constantly developing virtual spaces for their employees to use. In virtual workspaces, companies are finding more and more opportunities to collect data on employees themselves. Enigma, for example, regularly ‘trains’ some groups of employees (‘subjects’) to maximize their emotional output, and then sells the data from that output to customers. Other employees, which have predispositions that make them more decisive in a virtual corporate workspace (e.g. in choosing an avatar), are trained as the operators of emotional harvesting (‘harvesters’) and have to know when the best time to harvest emotions is, so they can maximize the quality of the data.

A harvesting subject is taken through a programme where they explore different emotions, like fear, love, hurt and anger. The data from these emotions culminate and are saved in the virtual body of the avatar, the same way as in a file. The subject must go through an emotional journey before the emotions are harvested so that the data is as close to a complete data set as possible. The subjects develop relationships between each other very often as this raises their emotional potential. Often, this process can take many months. In many cases it is much shorter as the emotional potential of subjects is higher in some situations than in others.

The job of a harvester is to decide when an emotional harvest should occur. The harvester will decide at a particular point in time that the emotional situation will not yield more significant data, and it is more valuable to put the subject in a different emotional situation. They will then harvest the emotional data and extract it from the subject. In the virtual workspace, the subject will have a logical memory of what happened, but the emotions are gone. The emotional data must be wiped because Enigma sells it to their customers, at which point Enigma will not own it anymore. After harvesting, the subject is emotionally clean. They are friendly and professional, and ready to go through the training programme again.

Emotional harvesters have the opposite training to subjects. They need to be taught emotional discipline, and must completely shut off their emotions or any attachment to individuals when they are harvesting. The dominant belief is that emotional attachment causes a bias when the emotions are harvested, due to a desire to preserve the emotions that a subject displays.

The effects of emotional harvesting are yet unknown, as are the effects of working in a virtual workspace on an individual in the real world. From preliminary studies, there are indications that workers in virtual environments often seek to fill needs that are denied in the workplace with emotions in the real world. So if a worker, such as a harvester, is denied the opportunity to be angry at something in the workplace, it comes out in the real world. Likewise, if a subject is artificially encouraged to be angry, they'll become shut off from that emotion in the real world.

Enigma's virtual workplace is entered through a mobile phone doing a hypnosis mechanism on employees, which appears as a red 'scan' of the eyes. Because being in the virtual workplace

takes up energy, employees must insert ‘nutrition packs’ into their mouths before they begin each working session.

Meeting rooms in the virtual workplace are reserved for the use of subjects under training to become harvested. In those rooms, subjects can imagine any environment they want and the room will ‘render’ it for them and any other occupants of the room. Usually, only one subject ‘renders’ the environment at a time. Subjects are encouraged to render environments that trigger extreme and vulnerable emotions, to maximize their emotional yield later on. The ability of employees to render environments is tied to their emotional capabilities, and emotionally suppressed employees, like harvesters, often find it difficult to render environments.

### 3. Theme

*“The theme is the central conflict in your story. It’s what the story is about... What it’s about is not what happens... What it’s about is the emotional issue –the theme... The plot (what happens) is the unique way you have chosen to illustrate the theme (what it’s about).”*

Sandler, E. (2007). *The TV writer’s workbook*. Bantam Dell. (p61).

The theme of ‘Mixed Feelings’ is as follows: *The real love and understanding between individuals versus the attempts of large coercive structures to exploit those feelings.*

Social media has an ever-growing presence in our society, and a large part of it concerns the ‘performance of life’. People often post their life experiences on social media to gain attention

and feel valuable in their social and professional circles. Simultaneously, social media companies have become some of the most valuable companies in the world, due to exploiting the emotional data of users. My intention in writing 'Mixed Feelings' was to explore how the feelings of a couple in a relationship are affected by an environment that feeds off feelings in a similar way to social media companies currently.

The more intellectual part of the story focuses on the juxtaposition between the idea of emotions being a means to an end versus emotions being an end unto themselves.

Enigma needs to extract the maximum amount of emotional yield to create the most 'value', using the emotions as a means to a profitable end. This attitude is embodied with images from the very beginning of the script, with Jennifer and Roy walking down the hallway at the beginning, harvesting the emotions of the subjects. Later, Roy and Clyde rile Francis/Marcel to maximize emotional yield, bringing into play Francis/Marcel's personal memories and feelings. This culminates in the image of Lover's Hill engulfed in flames, later becoming scorched earth. Francis/Marcel lies there defeated, showing the exhausting effects that having his emotions developed for harvesting is having on him.

Enigma's attitude of using emotions as a means to an end contrasts sharply with the idea of emotions being an end unto themselves, displayed by the way Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya behave in both the real world and Enigma. When they are together, their emotions serve only for that moment. This is true whether they are fighting with each other in the real world, or on their romantic dates at Enigma.

The attitude of letting emotions exist without a goal grows into the key emotional takeaway of the script: *just because a relationship doesn't work out in one context, it could work out in another*. Many audience members will feel like something hasn't worked out because it was 'never meant to be'. I aim to illustrate that often it has more to do with context or timing than the nature of the people themselves. The juxtaposition of Emma/Anya and Francis/Marcel's relationship in the real world versus the virtual world drives this. After Marcel and Anya have a fight in the real world, and it seems certain that their relationship is going to fail, they confess their love for each other in Enigma. Even though their relationship is failing in one context, it is thriving in another.

#### **4. The Protagonist: Motivation, Stakes and Arc**

Aronson (2010) writes that '*Conventional narrative is all about the protagonist's journey*' (p78) and goes on to list these identifying markers of the protagonist: *The film is the protagonist's story, the protagonist is who the 'film is about'... The protagonist drives the action that makes the decisions. The protagonist is not passive and reactive... The protagonist is the person whose head we are inside, whose shoes we are in and with whom we identify... The protagonist is central to the film's dramatic high points...*

Aronson, L. (2010). *The 21st Century Screenplay*. Silman-James Press. (p.79) 7.

As the main protagonist of the story, Anya's initial objective is to get Marcel to say that he loves her, without her having to say it first. At first, her strategy for this was to move in with him and agree to work at Enigma together.

At this point, Anya sees having a boyfriend and having a job as essential to her stability. She has been written as someone who has attachment problems, and believes that her value is derived from being accepted by Marcel and her workplace at Enigma. When Francis/Marcel's behavior starts to contrast wildly between the virtual and real worlds, Anya decides that this isn't fixable, so she entirely disposes of the real world relationship with him. This is a key change in her character, as she has made the hard decision of detaching herself from someone she used to love.

At Enigma, she becomes open to new experiences with Francis/Marcel. However, another other big obstacle emerges. She needs validation from her workplace. The story focuses on the stakes of Emma/Anya's acceptance at Enigma from Roy and Jennifer, as well as Francis/Marcel's romantic acceptance of Emma/Anya in the virtual world. The latter seems guaranteed to Emma/Anya, so Emma/Anya becomes focused on achieving acceptance from her boss, Jennifer. When Jennifer tells her to harvest Francis/Marcel's emotions, Emma/Anya chooses Jennifer's acceptance over Francis/Marcel's love. The need for workplace validation momentarily overpowers her need for love from Francis/Marcel. Again, Emma/Anya's character dives deeper into detaching herself from romantic love, making her ultimate goal of love and acceptance all the more difficult.

When Francis/Marcel's love is gone, the stakes of that love again become important to Emma/Anya. So much so, that she goes through the painful step of rekindling a friendship with Marcel in the real world. Her need for love from Francis/Marcel also becomes an obstacle as she becomes disenchanted with her work. Eventually, she intentionally has an emotional meltdown, causing her to have her emotions harvested. She gives up the power that came along with Jennifer's approval, for the chance to have Francis/Marcel's love again. It is important to note that she does not know for sure if Francis/Marcel will love her after they both have their emotions wiped, but she is willing to risk it. She is now a far cry from the nervous Emma/Anya at the beginning of the script, who suffocated Francis/Marcel with her love for fear of losing him.

## 5. Antagonist

*“Forces of antagonism” doesn't necessarily refer to a specific antagonist or villain. In appropriate genres arch-villains, like the Terminator, are a delight, but by “forces of antagonism” we mean the sum total of all forces that oppose the character's will and desire.*

McKee, R. (1998). *Story*. Regan Books. (p.318).

The force of antagonism in 'Mixed Feelings' is represented by Enigma, which forces Emma/Anya to suppress her emotions and eventually destroy the one thing that she holds most dear, Francis/Marcel's love. Enigma is represented by multiple characters in the script, all trying, in varying levels of conscience, to block Emma/Anya from gaining what she needs most, love and acceptance.

Initially, 'Enigma' is represented by Marcel, who is the one who convinces Anya to work there. After starting virtual work, Marcel shuts off from the real world and undermines Emma/Anya's efforts to make the relationship work. She looks for love, or a shallow version of it, with Daniel. Marcel's indifference to her cheating makes Anya decide that pursuing a good relationship in the real world is not worth it. Marcel compels Anya to become less dependent on him to meet her emotional needs. She realizes that she is happy in keeping the relationship virtual, and comes to let go of her need for attachment.

In the virtual world of Enigma, the Francis/Marcel character is not as obvious an antagonist as Marcel is in the real world. He opens up emotionally and they fall in love in the virtual world, which plays nicely into Emma/Anya's end goal, both in the real world and at Enigma. However, the emotions that Francis/Marcel is displaying are treated as products to be sold by Roy and Jennifer. By feeling greater emotions and falling deeper in love with Emma/Anya, Francis/Marcel is unconsciously bringing himself as a more appetizing prospect for Roy and Jennifer to harvest. When the harvesting does happen, the feelings Francis/Marcel had for Emma/Anya disappear, again thwarting her progress toward her goal of having a relationship with him.

Roy and Jennifer play as main antagonists in the virtual world and represent Enigma's aspirations to the fullest as shallow, emotionless cogs in the system. They consciously work to change Emma/Anya from someone with deep emotional needs to someone who must hide those emotional needs to prevent them from being harvested. This forces Emma/Anya to hide her love for Francis/Marcel and block her from moving toward her goal. When Roy and Jennifer realize

the value of having Emma/Anya interact with Francis/Marcel, their antagonism and their awareness of their actions grow. They successfully change her into someone who uses her loved one to keep her position of power.

Emma/Anya fights back against these antagonistic forces when she becomes upset at the fact Francis/Marcel is going through a cycle of harvesting. She soon realizes that Francis/Marcel can only have another emotional relationship with her if she has her emotions harvested. When she has her emotional meltdown, the desires of Roy, Jennifer, and Emma/Anya converge. Roy and Jennifer get a good emotional yield from her harvesting, and she gets a chance at Francis/Marcel's love again.

## **6. Dramatic Tension**

*A relationship cannot change until events force it to change, so you need to create a strong action line: a series of events that force change on your characters. If your action line does not provide events that can change the relationship, all your characters can do is bicker unproductively.... The action line permits, indeed causes, the relationship line to happen.*

Aronson, L. (2010). *The 21st Century Screenplay*. Silman-James Press. (p.73).

Dramatic tension in 'Mixed Feelings' comes from the relationship line between Marcel/Francis and Emma/Anya. The audience is looking for clues whether this love can survive the trials it is put through.

In the first scene between Marcel and Anya, Anya says “I love you” to Marcel, but she doesn’t allow Marcel to say it back, even though he clearly wants to. The first half of the script, particularly when they are in the real world, focuses the attention of the audience on the potential image of Marcel saying “I love you”, to Anya in the real world. This moment signifies the end of the setting-up section of the story, and the beginning of the story proper. Crucially, at the beginning moment of the script, Anya and Marcel do not recognise each other's feelings and are unwilling to express their own feelings. The audience’s question becomes: will Marcel and Anya be able to accept and recognise their feelings towards each other?

The two characters change on entering the virtual world of Enigma. Francis/Marcel changes in the fact that he is more open and vulnerable in the virtual world than he ever could be in the real world. Emma/Anya, on the other hand, slowly becomes more emotionally suppressed in Enigma. This quickly affects Anya and Marcel’s lives in the real world. Marcel’s inner conflict develops into a battle between the impulses of asserting his love in his relationship versus continuing in a passive mode and leaving emotional work to Anya. Anya’s conflict develops to being torn between pushing Marcel harder in the relationship so that he provides for her needs versus leaving the relationship in search of something better. As Marcel grows more indifferent to their relationship, Anya turns to other places for affection, fuelling tension in the first half of the script.

At the midpoint of the film, after a fight, Anya again says “I love you” to Marcel again. This time, she demands he says it back, saying it repeatedly and never getting an answer. It is clear that, in the real world, he’s not going to say that he loves her. This is confirmed when Marcel is

indifferent to Anya cheating on him with Daniel and Anya decides to move out of the apartment. This is a key turning point in the script, where Marcel and Anya's inability to express love in the real world is confirmed. It can be seen as a point of no return because the relationship is definitely over. If Marcel doesn't care about Anya cheating on him, there is no way for them to have a proper relationship in the real world.

From the midpoint, the dramatic focus on the relationship moves to Enigma, where the couple seems very much in love. Francis/Marcel professes his love to Emma/Anya in the virtual world of Enigma. She says she loves him too. The source of tension comes from the inner conflict between Francis/Marcel's need to impress his bosses through providing emotions for their harvests versus his need to love Emma/Anya without that love being a means to an end. This is not something that he is conscious of. For Emma/Anya, the source of tension is very much conscious. She is torn between her need to be accepted by her workplace and her need for romantic love with Francis/Marcel.

When Jennifer informs Emma/Anya that her relationship with Francis/Marcel is not useful to Enigma anymore, she suppresses her love, so that she can keep her position at Enigma. She then helps harvest Francis/Marcel's emotions, thereby destroying any love that she had for him. Quite late in the script, this comes as a moment of truth for the script – a point where both the relationship in the real world and the relationship in the virtual world have been destroyed. Francis/Marcel lacks any emotional memory of how he feels about Emma/Anya, making a relationship like they had before, even in the virtual world, seemingly impossible. The audience

question becomes: will Anya be able to revive Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya's relationship in the virtual world of Enigma?

The question of the status of Marcel and Anya's real-world relationship is revisited when Marcel and Anya meet at their old apartment later on in the script. They are at first cold toward each other, but when they realize they have the common goal of Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya's relationship succeeding in Enigma, they become friends who comfort each other.

Another key turning point of the script begins when Emma/Anya enters Enigma again after talking to Marcel in the real world. When she builds into a deliberate emotional breakdown in front of Roy and Jennifer, she rejects the power she has from Enigma's acceptance of her, in favor of a chance at Francis/Marcel's love again. After Roy and Jennifer harvest both her and Francis/Marcel's emotions, the character question of her 'selling out' her love for Francis/Marcel is answered. She chooses Francis/Marcel.

The end section and climax begin after the couple's emotional harvesting. The answer to the original question of Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya's love persevering comes from a final sequence. First, when they can recognise each other after they have their emotions harvested, they render their apartment together, proving that they can start growing their love again. They also have a conversation where Emma/Anya says that she is okay with not understanding her feelings, but just feeling them, and Francis/Marcel agrees with her. They're both in a place where they can accept each other, and themselves, just for their feelings. Finally, in the real world, the sleeping Marcel and Anya both smile at having rekindled their relationship in the virtual world.

The initial dramatic question is answered: Francis/Marcel and Emma/Anya can accept and recognise each other's love and their own feelings towards each other.

## Reference Texts

Aronson, L. (2010). *The 21st Century Screenplay*. United States: Silman-James Press.

Brindley, M. (2009). *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?* Australia: Screen Australia.

<https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/ae5708a4-05d9-4db0-b5fb-4f999fdfed57/What-is-a-synopsis.pdf>

Gilliam, T., McKeown, C., & Stoppard, C. (Writers). (1983). *Brazil* [Motion Picture Screenplay].

United States & United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox & Universal Pictures.

<http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/brazil.html>

Harron, M. & Turner, G. (Writers). (1998). *American Psycho* [Motion Picture Screenplay].

United States: Lions Gate Films & Columbia Pictures.

[https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/American\\_Psycho\\_Harron\\_Turner.html](https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/American_Psycho_Harron_Turner.html)

McKee, R. (1998). *Story*. United Kingdom: Regan Books.

Niccol, A. (Writer). (1998). *The Truman Show* [Motion Picture Screenplay]. United States:

Paramount Pictures Studios. [http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/the-truman-show\\_shooting.html](http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/the-truman-show_shooting.html)

Oda, E. (Writer). (2019). *Nine Days* [Motion Picture Screenplay]. United States: Sony Picture

Classics. <https://www.sonyclassics.com/assets/screenplays/ninedays/ninedays-screenplay.pdf>

Riley, B. (Writer). (2017). *Sorry to Bother You* [Motion Picture Screenplay]. United States: Mirror Releasing, Focus Features, & Universal Pictures.

<https://www.scriptslug.com/assets/scripts/sorry-to-bother-you-2018.pdf>

Sandler, E. (2007). *The TV writer's workbook*. United States: Bantam Dell.

Truby, J. (2007). *The Anatomy of Story*. United States: Faber & Faber.