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'A Film-maker Not A Note-Taker': A Roundtable Discussion on the Craft Of Script Supervision edited by Melanie Williams

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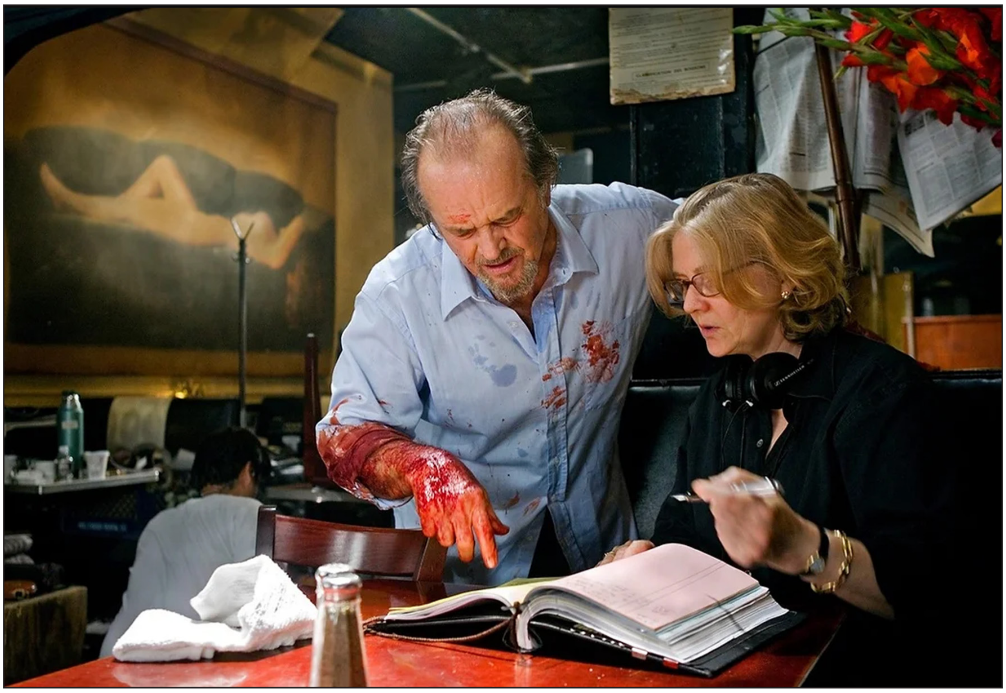
Script supervision is a vitally important but often unheralded or misunderstood area of work within film and television production. This discussion among seven exponents of the craft (six women and one man, reflecting the role's broader gender ratio) provides new insights into many different aspects of their work as well as the particular challenges their profession faces in the current moment.



Martha Pinson working on *The Departed* (2006). Taken from New York Script Supervisors Network website gallery https://www.nyssn.org/gallerymembers

Sharon Watt (centre) working on *The Night Of* (2016). Taken from New York Script Supervisors Network website gallery https://www.nyssn.org/gallerymembers

Script supervision is one of the most crucial yet least thoroughly understood roles in film and television production. It involves keeping meticulous records of the progression of a production, working through all the necessary scenes outlined in the script, ensuring that shots have adequate coverage and will cut together with impeccable continuity (in the UK, the job was traditionally known as continuity supervisor), and undertaking a myriad of tasks that ensure everything runs smoothly and the post-production departments get sufficient material they can work with to create the desired final result. Legendary script supervisor Angela Allen, who collaborated over several decades with director John Huston, describes the role's function as a kind of 'on-set memory bank', serving as the essential repository of all the information necessary for making a production function efficiently and effectively.[1] Meanwhile, Martha Pinson's 2018 video for *Vanity Fair,* titled 'What happens when a movie has no script supervisor?', clearly outlines the multitude of things that have to be watched over and kept in check in order to ensure coherent filmmaking – and it is a staggering amount.[2]

Script supervision is also profoundly gendered labour, not only primarily undertaken by women but also conceptualised as feminine or feminised in the kinds of skillsets and behaviours it entails. As I wrote in a previous article, this job:

> '[H]inges on invisibility, noticed only if it is not done properly via continuity errors which render visible the processes of film-making that should ordinarily be invisible. It is thus very similar to the way that housework was conceptualised by feminists, as work that must be done but is noticed only in the breach rather than the observance. The role requires near-omniscient levels of vigilance [...] but rather than being singled out for admiration, this feat has often been taken for granted as simply a more pronounced example of that supposedly feminine competence of "multi-tasking".'[3]

Sharon Watt, a script supervisor based in New York and Admin for the New York Script Supervisors Network, got in touch with me in connection with that article, which despite being historically based, nonetheless had plenty of present-day resonances, and we realised our common cause in wanting to raise the profile and boost greater awareness of this intricate and essential filmmaking craft. Sharon was kind enough to convene a special discussion with script supervisors, exploring the past, present and future of their craft. In the discussion, produced in edited form here, the discussants provide fascinating insights into their own experiences of doing script supervision across television and film production, the challenges they have faced, how their work is

1 Jasper Rees, 'Q&A: script supervisor Angela Allen', *the arts desk.com*, 5 March 2011, available at https://theartsdesk.com/film/theartsdesk-qa-script-supervisor-angela-allen.

2 https://www.vanityfair.com/video/watch/what-happens-when-a-movie-has-no-script-supervisor.

3 Melanie Williams, 'The Continuity Girl: Ice in the Middle of Fire', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (2013) Vol 10, No. 3, 603–617. Available at https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/epub/10.3366/jbctv.2013.0160.

changing (not necessarily always for the better), their survival tactics and professional strategies, and their thoughts about where the profession might be heading. The discussion took place in Fall 2023, just before a union meeting, and during a time when the knock-on effects of widespread strike action in the entertainment industries were very much clear and present. Finding a way to 'grow the craft', so that script supervision has a chance to function properly without the inevitable burnout that comes with being a one-person department, was one of the central issues up for discussion. Making a case for the grounding provided by the human touch, rather than assuming the job's objectives can be achieved solely by digital means, was another.

The ratio of six women to one man among the participants echoes the real-life gender balance in the profession. According to rough calculations, women constitute around 85% of the membership of the NY Script Supervisors network. This percentage is near-identical in the script supervisor section of the labour union IATSE Local 161 (covering Script Supervisors/Continuity Coordinators, Production Office Coordinators, and Production Accountants across the East Coast). The equation could be extrapolated unaltered across other national and regional contexts: it is fair to say that script supervision has always been a female-dominated craft and remains so to this day.

While their work is often overlooked and little understood, it is no exaggeration to say that script supervisors make the (filmmaking) world go round. Let's take this opportunity, from this snapshot of one specific group of these highly skilled workers at a particular time and place, to learn more about what they do, how they do it, and how they see their role, thereby making visible their artfully invisible but very complex labour.

Many thanks to the participants in the discussion who gave up their valuable time to discuss their craft, and especially to Sharon Watt for instigating and organising the discussion.

Participants

Kim Berner worked as script supervisor on several films directed by Roland Emmerich including *Godzilla* (1998) *The Patriot* (2000) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). Other films she has provided script supervision for include *Mr and Mrs Smith* (2005) *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), *Tropic Thunder* (2008), *Immortals* (2011), *Zoolander No. 2* (2016) and *Free Guy* (2021). For television, she has script supervised on episodes of *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005), *The Newsroom* (2012–2014), *Castle Rock* (2018–2019) and *Dexter: New Blood* (2021–2022).

Jodi Domanic has been a script supervisor across film and television. Her credits include *Keane* (2004), *Definitely, Maybe* (2008), *Blue Bloods* (2010–2015), *Marshall* (2017), *Tales of the City* (2019), *The Affair* (2014–2019), *American Horror Story* (2011-), and *The Crowded Room* (2023).

Andrea Greer has script supervised on several Spike Lee projects, including *Girl 6* (1996), *Summer of Sam* (1999), and *A Huey P. Newton Story* (2001). Among her other credits are episodes of *Oz* (1997–2003), *The Wire* (2002–2008), *The Jury* (2004), *Law and Order: Trial by Jury* (2005), and *Damages* (2007–2012), and *Step Up 3D* (2010), *Top Five* (2014), and *The Slap* (2015).

Julie Robinson worked in the UK film industry as a script supervisor on films including *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Memphis Belle* (1990), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Jude* (1996), and *Rogue Trader* (1999). After a career break, she returned to work on television and film in the US, including on *Olive Kitteridge* (2014), *The Intern* (2015), *Elementary* (2012–2019), *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again!* (2018), *Quantico* (2016–2018), *The 355* (2022), *WeCrashed* (2022), and *Manifest* (2018–2023).

Sean Pollock has script supervised on numerous television series including *Elementary* (2017–2019), *The Good Fight* (2017–2022), *Love Life* (2020–2021), *American Horror Story* (2011-), *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel* (2017–2023), *Manifest* (2018–2023), and most recently *The Girls on the Bus* (2024)

Martha Pinson is particularly known for her script supervision for Sidney Lumet and Martin Scorsese on films including *Prince of the City* (1981), *Power* (1986), *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1996), and *The Aviator* (2004), *The Departed* (2006), *Shutter Island* (2010), and *Hugo* (2011). She also worked on films including *Ragtime* (1981), *Wall Street* (1987), as well as the opening episodes of the HBO series *Sex and the City* (1998) and *Boardwalk Empire* (2010). She is the director of several short films and the award-winning feature *Tomorrow* (2018).

Sharon Watt has acted as script supervisor on features *Stoker* (2013), *Café Society* (2016), *Lost Girls* (2020), *Mothering Sunday* (2021), and on numerous television series including *How to Make it in America* (2010), *Boardwalk Empire* (2011–2014), *The Night Of* (2016), *Mr Robot* (2016–2019), *Pose* (2018), *When They See Us* (2019), *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2022), *The Watcher* (2022), and *Lady in the Lake* (2024).

Martha Pinson: I have been retired for quite a while. The last movie I did was *Hugo* in 2010. Before I was a script supervisor, I worked as the PR director at the Orson Welles Theatre in Cambridge, Mass., and met lots of directors. The film-maker Joan Silver said to me, 'I made money because of what you did. You have to work for me'. So, I did. This was back in the late 70s, and I noticed that script supervising was pretty much *the* job for a woman on set. I was able to observe and get training. Compared to a regular job, which back in the day was like three bucks an hour, the contract and the wages were just amazing. So, I love the union.

I was very fortunate in my timing and location because New York was just starting to get really popular and busy. My first job was a miniseries and the director was very impressed with my contribution and invited me to stay with them in post-production. I realised that it would be smart to move to New York, and I was very fortunate to work with Sidney Lumet and then with Martin Scorsese. I was just doing wonderful films and learning to use my discretion and my brain to do the job the way they wanted. And each one was a little bit different. Lumet was great in that he had a two or three-week rehearsal session prior to shooting, so the plans were well in place. Then Scorsese was amazing and I just hit it off with him and, I'm not exactly sure why, but he thought I was smart and I helped him a lot.

Kim Berner: I've been a script supervisor since 1996. I got lucky in that I had done a small picture in LA with someone who knew someone who knew Roland Emmerich and he arranged a meeting with him. We spoke German the entire time – in a previous life I had lived in Germany – and then he hired me. I don't know why, because I was not experienced enough really to be doing *Godzilla*, but I did, and that then put me in at a different level.

I would definitely say I've had ups and downs in the business. Busy times. Not busy times. I've taken breaks from it twice when I just was like, 'I just need to walk away for a little bit'.

Andrea Greer: I was in insurance, and I visited my husband on set when he was a grip trainee. I met the script supervisor Nini Rogan and Shari Carpenter, who was the script supervisor trainee, and I thought it was the most fascinating job. Plus, I hated my job in insurance, so I was like, 'hmm, let me investigate this further'. I took a class from Barbara Robinson, who was the president of Local 161 at the time, and Cynthia Balfour was in that class too. We both worked for *years* on student films, low-budget stuff, and then I went into commercials. Shari Carpenter was doing Spike Lee's films, and I did all of his commercials. When she decided that she wanted to move into directing, I started doing his films. Then I went into TV through HBO and Tom Fontana shows, like *Oz*, and started working on a lot of his projects. But I've taken breaks to raise my two kids. So, back and forth, back and forth, a little bit of everything. I strive to do a pilot a year and one show and that's it. The burnout is real. The way they're shooting now is ridiculous. So, I only like to alternate.

Sharon Watt: Alternating means when two script supervisors share an episodic television show (like, one doing odd episodes and another doing evens). It allows you to take an episode 'off' and have the time to prep the next episode in your rotation.

Otherwise, you would be in a situation where you have to continually work the weekends to prep, which – if it's a shoot that goes on for several months for many episodes – is not a sustainable way of working. Productions can be resistant because they like having one person in the position of script supervisor, but quality shows will recognize that frying one brain is not the smart choice in the long run. For many script supervisors, it's a quality-of-life issue and a good option for those who can't or don't want to work full-time.

Sean Pollock: I've been a script supervisor for about sixteen years now, but I have been in the entertainment business for a very long time. I started as a child actor then got my degree in theatre from the Boston Conservatory, and I was definitely on the trajectory of theatre, including being artistic director of an arts centre. But with some bumps in the road, I decided I wanted to be in film. When I started script supervising, I mostly did commercials, around 300, if not more. I would do a tier film, because commercials started to go non-union, and I could only keep my benefits by doing one every six months.[4] I kicked and fought about doing television, but now I love it.

I prefer to alternate, just because it suits my lifestyle a lot better and I'm fortunate that I can. You definitely have to sell alternating as a possibility because some people have doubts. We still read the scripts, we watch the dailies, things like that, but we are just able to switch it off. It's different from doing a feature film where you really do need to be there for everything.

Sharon Watt: I started script supervising in the 2000s, started working on short films, low-budget stuff, and then, after a few years, joined the Union. As I'm sure everyone in New York has seen, it's become very much a television town. So, in the past ten years, I've mostly been working in television and a lot of limited series.

Jodi Domanic: In my previous life I worked as a clinical psychologist primarily with traumatic brain injury victims and their families, at a rehab hospital in Connecticut. I did that for a decade and loved it most of that time, but came to a point in my life where I really wanted to do something different. And I loved films, so I took a couple of courses at a local university and decided to make the jump. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, didn't know what a script supervisor was, but was lucky enough to end up PA-ing

[4] A tier film is a low-budget Union film; they are usually classified in different tiers according to budget from 3–15 million dollars. Anything larger usually comes under the 'majors' contract where Hollywood studios and streamers are the producers. Thanks to Sharon Watt for clarifying.

on this short film that Tony Pettine, who's a long-time script supervisor in New York, happened to be working on, to help out a friend. When I saw what he was doing, I just knew instantly this was the position for me. It was the way that my mind thought, and I loved being in the middle of everything. So, I got to know Tony, I took some courses, including one from Julie [Robinson], and then worked my way up the ladder doing non-paying gigs and then independent films primarily in New York, even though I was living in Connecticut. Then, eventually I got into television in New York and started alternating on the TV series *Blue Bloods*, which worked out really well because it allowed me to do a week and a half in New York and go back to Connecticut and be with my husband and son for a week and a half. When I was ready to leave that show, I went into doing more television and also features, working primarily in New York, but one of my shows was pulling out of New York and moving to LA, so essentially, I moved with the show, came out here, loved it, and decided to stay. Now I'm a member of both [IATSE] 161 in New York and 871 out here in LA, although actually I still work primarily on the East Coast. At this point, I consider myself a script supervisor who will travel and work anywhere in the country.

Julie Robinson: I started my career in England. I knew I wanted to be a script supervisor while I was still at school because *Chariots of Fire* was filming at the town hall in the city where I was born, Liverpool, and they invited the general public to go and view and sit in the stands where they were filming. So, I went along, just to watch. And I saw this woman going from the actors to the director to the crew and I didn't have a clue who she was or what she did or who she was talking to, all I knew was that she seemed like she was into everything. And I thought 'that looks like a really interesting job'. So that was the beginning of me trying to figure out who she was, and how could I do it. And so fast forward, and I ended up living in London, working for a magazine called *Screen International*. From there I started looking around, trying to do script supervising, and at the time, the easiest way in was to become part of a production company, as a production coordinator. The UK Union, BECTU (Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union) was strong, and you had to serve in a particular role for four years before you could advance onto anything else. So, I became a production coordinator in a small company making TV commercials as well as documentaries. The producer, the director, the editor, and myself, we basically ran the entire show, doing everything, and so it was a huge learning curve for me. I think having that four-year minimum of learning a craft hands-on was crucial for me to get a good grounding in what happened on the film set, what happened in pre-production, what happened in post-production. I still had the desire to become a film script supervisor and the production company above us, Eyeline Films, were making a feature film, low budget, working with animals and children. Of course, they couldn't find anybody in the Union who wanted to do it, but I said I would. The director said, 'You'll be fine, I'll help you, don't worry about anything, I'll teach you along the way.' But my main thought was 'what have I let myself in for?' It's one of those things where you sink or swim. Luckily, I was able to swim my way out of it. But it was four weeks of solid torture, and it was only at the end of the fourth week that I started to enjoy a little bit of it. But the weeks leading up to that were pure hell. I realised, 'God, this is bigger than I thought.' Even with all that filmmaking knowledge I had, this was *something else* I had ventured into. There was a lady called Kay Mander, whom I got to know, and she took me under her wing and showed me everything that she did, all her tips. With that, I started to like what I was doing, and I thought I might have a career in it.

I worked in London for about 12 years doing everything from commercials to feature films, being flown all over the world, which was amazing. I've worked in deserts, up mountains, in ten feet of snow and minus thirty degrees; all kinds of temperatures and terrain, which I found very exciting. I really miss the days of being ferried around different places. To me, it feels like the industry is changing rapidly in the last few years to the point that I do question where it's going to end in terms of units being able to travel. More and more people are in the industry worldwide and it's easier to pick up units wherever you go. I loved that part of my job, being able to travel, but nevertheless, it's an industry where you roll with the punches and adapt and that's part and parcel of being in the business. There's always something new and exciting around the corner.

Kim Berner: As Julie said, script supervision is a sink-or-swim situation, and I think if you survive it, then you keep going. Oftentimes it's about taking control and just having an answer. Once you know a group well, you can say, 'hold on a second, let me double-check that.' But a lot of times, in the beginning, you just need to have an answer. And then you have to be big enough, if you were wrong, to say, 'I'm so sorry, I went and checked; I was wrong'. It takes a certain personality to be able to have that answer right away. You have to be assertive. If you're a wallflower, you're never going to survive as a script supervisor because you'll just get run over.

Julie Robinson: More often than not, it's the script supervisor that everyone turns to: 'Well, nobody else can answer this question, so let's ask our script supervisor.' You're there; you've got to know what the answer is. But is this what they do in brain surgery, have the nurse rather than the surgeon deciding how many stitches are needed? You're expected to know *so much*. You're meant to be the Oxford English Dictionary at any time of the day or night, and to be able to come up with all the answers. Sometimes you think, 'Isn't this really part of the writer's job, or the researcher's, or whoever? You could have asked them. Why didn't you ask them?' It always falls back on the script supervisor. You have to be on top of things more than any other job. And if you're not on top of it, they will come down on top of you 100%, with hammers. Then you retreat and feel like a complete failure. So, you've got to think ahead of everybody else, always be one step ahead of the game, and have all of these ridiculous answers for them.

Andrea Greer: Almost like you're this mystical being, not a human person.

Jodi Domanic: Omniscient.

Sharon Watt: Omnipotent.

Julie Robinson: All you have to be is one step ahead of everybody else, and everyone thinks you're a genius.

Sharon Watt: But if we make one mistake—

Andrea Greer: I also believe that a lot of departments use it so that they don't have to take responsibility for the things that they should know. They pass it on to us.

Julie Robinson: Yes, and you have to be gracious enough to be able to give them the answer. You've got to be everything to everybody and yet still be able to do your own job.

Sharon Watt: What really shocked me about your article, Melanie, is that you're quoting script supervisors from the 1930s, and I'm like, 'this is me yesterday'. This is me struggling to finish my notes when everyone's gone home and I'm still working two hours afterwards because we had a three-camera day and then there was this stunt that didn't go as planned and then we had to do all this extra coverage and problem-solving and because of that I couldn't keep on top of my work. And me trying to get it done because tomorrow's another day and it's going to be another wave coming on top of me. That made me kind of laugh but also cry.

Andrea Greer: Something in the article I thought was interesting was the idea that the 'script girl' is often her own worst enemy. I believe that sometimes we have a Madonna complex that only we can do it, and so we have to be everywhere for everyone. And sometimes we're the ones who blur the boundaries of what we should and should not do in other departments. You can't have it both ways. We have to allow the other department to step up and have responsibility. I remember when I first came into the Union, we did not take the camera reports and circle them. They were the responsibility of the camera department. But we've now taken on that responsibility. I have to tell some of them I won't do it. I'm not Sherlock Holmes, I cannot keep asking 'Did we have this?' because their reports are so messy. I think that we have to start saying we have our job to do. I can't do your job as well and do *my* job to the best of my ability. It's too much.

Jodi Domanic: And it's gotten even more complicated now that we're crossboarding.[5] In television series, it used to be that you did, like, one episode at a time. But now in order to save money, most television productions are shooting across episodes at once. I've done days where we've shot across five or six episodes, and I've had five different directors come in for the day and that makes it more complicated.

Sharon Watt: In an ideal world, all the scripts would already be written which allows time for everyone to prep adequately. Now, with the demand to deliver content, this model is employed even when multiple directors are in the mix, and the scripts are rushed into production. This creates situations where you're prepping for the unknown with a more intense and chaotic workload from constant script revisions, trying to keep on top of a story that is constantly in flux. Departments have to react quickly to new demands, often without fully processing what is changing, so there is even more reliance on the script supervisor to be the on-point person keeping everything together amid all the confusion.

The result is that a script supervisor is stretched to the limit on these kinds of projects and is at capacity in terms of memory and capability, supervising multiple cameras, multiple episodes. The workload and the hours become untenable, expectations unrealistic, and you may never feel fully on top of the material. There are many landmines of opportunity to lose continuity, make mistakes, and have details slip through the gaps.

Jodi Domanic: The day when you only work with one camera hardly ever happens anymore; you're shooting with at least two cameras, if not more, which really doubles your work. And while it doubles everybody's work, they don't think about the fact that we're still just one person. With the camera departments they hire a whole new crew to do the other camera, but for us, you know, we get a little extra money, but nobody to help us do this extra work.

Andrea Greer: But that's the thing about being our own worst enemy. A lot of people don't want to expand the department.

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5 Crossboarding is an increasingly common model in episodic TV production, shooting multiple episodes at the same time in order to be more efficient by consolidating locations and condensing actors' schedules. Thanks to Sharon Watt for clarifying.

Sharon Watt: It's also a cultural difference. In America, the script supervisor has always been known as a one-person department as opposed to the UK where there has been a system of training people to be assistant script supervisors. Here we have less of a history of that. Assistant is not a formal union job.

Andrea Greer: There used to be trainees but when NABET [National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians] and IATSE combined, that's when they got rid of it. With NABET, every department had training.

Martha Pinson: I don't recall having formal trainees in film production. I would get permission to have a newcomer come to set so that she could study the job, but they weren't working, they were just learning. Somebody once said to me, 'I don't know why you trained so many people. They're just going to take your job.'

Andrea Greer: I think that's been the pervasive thought, and why we haven't expanded as opposed to other departments. But it's not true that they're going to take your job, it gives you more opportunity to work because we become a department. If my husband, who's a key grip, is not on a show and he wants to work, he'll just jump on a friend's show because he has a department. Whereas we don't have that same opportunity. And I think that what's needed is a mind shift. There's enough work to go around in our particular category. You don't see the cinematographer also pulling focus, because they found a way to share that particular craft, and I think that we have more than enough work so that more than one person can do it.

Sharon Watt: The industry is changing, especially with television, which has transformed the business model in terms of the pace of content being produced, and the schedules we're working to. Working on feature films, you used to shoot about three pages of work a day with one camera. But now, like Jodi was saying, on a television show, you would just expect multiple cameras as normal. Whenever you're looking at a schedule and, with a location that you only have for one day, suddenly you're shooting nine pages of work. Their solution to that is not to add another day, it's to add another camera, to get more shots within that time. So, you have another camera, another whole camera team, and a production is happy to pay for another camera, another operator, focus puller, clapper loader, dolly grip, whatever's needed. But they expect a script supervisor to just absorb everything, alone, even though their work is doubled, tripled, quadrupled.

In the US, people can join the Union a lot faster now than in the past, maybe after just a couple of years of experience, because there are so many television projects with multiple units, and emergency second units, and insert units, which provide opportunities and entry into union experience, a few days here and there. But then suddenly you may find yourself landing a job supervising a television show for a network as a new script supervisor but without having the depth of experience, where you've worked on low-budget projects for five years and been able to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Now you are just thrown into the deep end in a fast-paced, high volume, high-stakes environment you may not be prepared for. It's less sink or swim than trial by fire. The wage is great if you can go with it and stay motivated and not get burned out, then you can move on to the next show. But I feel that there are a lot of script supervisors who get burned out after a couple of shows, working back-to-back, perhaps because they're not equipped to look out for themselves and are not able to negotiate the situation where they could maybe alternate, because they don't have the experience to set up that work structure.

Kim Berner: I couldn't ever do back-to-back. I always took a break. God bless those of you who could. I couldn't. I had to sit down and come inside and close the door and not talk to anybody for a couple of weeks at the end, whether it was a series or a big movie. I had to be quiet for a couple of weeks and I've lost work. Right now, with the strike, I wish I had taken something right after I got off my last job. But I've always had to break.

Sean Pollock: I have a few people that I really like alternating with because we can do the continuity together. With my alternate, I'm texting her constantly, saying 'When you get to this scene, you know she's not going to wear her wedding ring', that kind of thing. You can make sure that continuity does stay correct across different episodes. But if it's somebody that you do not get along with, or somebody who doesn't share your way of working, it can make it very difficult. You've got to be able to share information to make it work. You come to trust people. With so many people in the industry now being able to join very quickly, you have to be a little bit careful. You can't just have somebody who the production calls off of the Union availability list, because sometimes it's not somebody who is really ready to do it. You don't want to make more work for yourself because somebody came in and didn't know what they were doing.

Kim Berner: I got COVID on a show last year and I missed a whole episode, seven days' filming. I could have gone back but I was coughing so much it made no sense. I didn't feel well yet, but they couldn't find anybody and I was like 'call New York and bring someone down right away.' But the office was calling me every night. Because part of our job is being on set and the continuity and the filmmaking, but the other part of our job is taking all the information and putting it in the form that the office can then take and shove up the line to prove to the executives that we're doing something every day. Me trying to help with that took three times as long as it should have, because I was sick. Having a group of people that you trust who can step in and cover makes a big difference.

I would say a big issue for script supervisors is the people, particularly producers and directors, who don't understand what we do. I was crossboarding a ten-episode miniseries and I was given rewrites for three different episodes at the end of a shooting day. And the producer was like, 'why do you have to deal with it now? We're not shooting those episodes tomorrow.' And I was like, 'yes, but I need to look at it, in order to know whether what's being written is going adjust the whole thing. We're shooting all ten episodes. I have to read them, at least.' And that alone, just reading, takes time. But he literally didn't get it and was screaming at me about working for three hours on this. So, I wrote him this long, detailed, really obnoxious email the next morning, going through it step by step. And he did write back and say, 'oh, I didn't realise.' And I was like, 'dude, you've been in the business way too long not to know'.

Because I'm digital, working on an iPad, it seems to them like, 'well, it's all there, what are you doing?' But for every episode, I've got a document that's a script, I've got a document for each episode, I've got a document that's facing pages for the episode, and so on. I have to open them all up, I have to adjust them all out, I have to... you know? And he's like, 'oh.' But it means more explaining which we shouldn't have to do, and yet it's very, very common.

Jodi Domanic: There's a number of software systems now for script supervisors and they've got their good points. I've been digital for a long time, and I love it. It reduces the amount of time I need to spend doing paperwork, and there are a lot of other advantages. But I think one of the disadvantages has been that sometimes people think that if they learn the software then that makes them a script supervisor. They end up going on set and really are just note-takers and not doing the other elements of the job. Then directors and producers start looking at the script supervisor as just a note-taker instead of a film-maker, and I think that's become a problem within our craft. We have new people who aren't getting the full training that they need to *really* do the full job. For me, the note-taking is my least favourite part of the job. I love doing all of the other stuff; the note-taking stuff I have to do, and I do it, and I'm glad I can do it faster now. But that's the ancillary stuff that I just want to get done and send off.

Sharon Watt: There's a lot of invisible work that's part of our craft, and it's not only invisible because we're hiding the mistakes and making sure that things cut and helping the film-maker create the illusion of continuity. It's also that the actual work that we do is invisible. We could spend a whole week prepping for a movie and at the end of it, we produce a script breakdown, which is a huge reference point for all the other departments to then prepare for their work. But if you've spent a whole week doing that and you produce this one document, then somebody who doesn't understand our job just thinks 'I've paid you a whole week and you produce one document.' They don't realise that it's taken a week of study to produce that and that is the essential work that we do mentally to get the story into our head. I see it as similar to studying for an exam, where the exam is being on set when anyone can ask you any question about any scene at any moment, and you have to know the answer. But in order to know the answer, you need to study to get that knowledge into your brain.

As Jodi was saying, in terms of the industry now, the main challenge with all these multiple cameras, with the pace that you're shooting at, especially if you're shooting multiple episodes in one day, is that it's just a constant struggle to stay on top of that work. If I'm supervising twenty to thirty set-ups a day, I have time to process that, do the notes, and also do all the other things and think about what's going on and have conversations about things in between set-ups. But if I'm supervising thirty to sixty, I don't have time. I just make sure every shot is accounted for, so that nothing is missing – that's one of our main responsibilities: to account for everything so that everyone knows where everything is – but that becomes your main focus, doing those notes.

When a producer sees a script supervisor who has, you know, a computer with wires and screen capture and all the bells and whistles, they feel 'that's a script supervisor who knows what they're doing', because they've got all the gear. People coming into the craft now, they want to know when the next workshop is so they can take on Script-E.[6] They want to be able to learn all these programmes and be the person who knows all these different platforms and be very adaptable so that they can sort of work on any show with any system. They can do the notes, but they spend all their time concentrating on filling in a database, and so they missed this whole shot because they didn't realise that that camera splintered off to shoot something else, you know? Thinking it's all about the notes really skews people's perspective on the job. Not just how other people view our job, but also the people coming into the craft thinking that it's all about the notes, which are just one element.

Andrea Greer: I think sometimes they're over-reliant on the screen capture. Some of these big conversations in online groups for script supervisors are about how they can capture all these screens, all this video stuff. But if you're going to be so busy trying to capture it, looking down, are you looking at what's actually happening? Are you seeing the continuity? Are you seeing the screen direction? Because if you're so busy trying to capture it, you're not available if there are any questions.

[6] Software programme for script supervisors: https://www.scriptesystems.com/scripte.

Sean Pollock: If you start off with pen and paper, you find the way you work and how to do your forms. Even though all script supervisors have the same deliverables, so we all have to send in a progress report and so on, something personal comes through in the way you do it, it becomes like your dialect, and it shows that you know how the job works. Whereas these digital programmes somebody else designed may not be the way that you think about things. But you just accept 'well, this is the way it looks' even though it's not organic to the way you came to that information. I think that the job hasn't changed, but the methodologies have overshadowed what the job is and that becomes very frustrating. Like, when I look at my lined pages, they're *my* lined pages, that it is my handwriting on them. And I draw like crazy. Even though I'm a script supervisor and I should notice things, one thing I never ever notice is hair, where it was, how it was falling onto the shoulder, etc... You wouldn't believe how many drawings of hair I have on my scripts! Because I will not remember and it's not going to happen by me just taking photos. It has to be that I'm actually in there watching the action. I may glance over at a monitor just to make sure I have the composition, but I'm often just watching the action, right there. I want to see what they are really doing because that's what I'm going to have to pay attention to the next time, regardless of what the frame size is.

Kim Berner: It's so funny because I resisted digital for years, as Martha certainly heard from me, but the biggest benefit to me, now I'm in TV, is that when you are crossboarding you would have to carry around ten notebooks filled with the scripts. Having them all on an iPad or computer is much easier.

Hearing from editors, it seemed that most of the assistant editors wanted digital because it makes their job easier – they can cut and paste and sometimes directly import into Avid – but the editors themselves were more varied. Some loved it, some hated it. I spoke to a bunch of editors before I did a job a couple of years ago because I wasn't digital yet and they didn't care. They just wanted notes that said something. I know two editors who have basically stopped using script supervisor notes because they feel like they're not getting any information from them. So, they look at the notes for two or three days, maybe that first week, and then if there's nothing there that's helping them, they stop. Which is truly, truly sad.

When I first started out, I went to editing rooms after I finished the film. If you were shooting a studio picture, on the studio lot, the editing rooms were there so you could run by. I learned a lot from spending time just sitting in the back of the edit suite after we wrapped, not talking to anybody, just watching. It's impossible to do that anymore – usually, I'm shooting on the East Coast though editing is back on the West Coast – but that was a great learning tool and I miss it.

Andrea Greer: On Spike's films you have to go to dailies. After I typed my notes, then I would go and sit next to Spike. All the heads of departments would have to go. At certain times, you could see there was stress because everyone's looking at their own particular thing and checking if it's okay. But it kind of bonded us all together, which is what I like.

Martha Pinson: When I started out, and for many years after, everything was pen and paper. Mostly single camera. But the thing is there was no playback. You would just have to take notes and know that there was no ring on her finger or whatever it was. My notes and my memory were pretty much all we had when I started. I guess things got easier when there was playback and a monitor. But then again, with what I'm hearing today, it's like they've gotten harder and much more complicated because of so many cameras and so much shooting, and there's basically still one person. That made sense when I was shooting with much smaller crews. You had to know everything. But now with all the tools, although in a way they help, I get the feeling that the tools can be another nightmare unto themselves.

Sharon Watt: I think the biggest difference now is due to how much work you have to cover in a day. We're not shooting on actual film anymore where every ten minutes you had to change the mag. We're shooting digitally with a forty-minute roll and they often don't cut because there seems to be this sort of creative fear of cutting and not capturing the magic. And it doesn't cost as much anymore so let's just keep it rolling. Therefore, we're doing twenty-minute takes and going through the script like ten times and then just doing a pickup of this and maybe let's go back to the beginning and do the first half again, you know: this is all without cutting. Then on top of that, there's the style of shooting, handheld, moving from person to person and constantly reframing. You're just trying to keep on top of the media. If a director says 'did we get that line?' then I can say 'we got it three times, twice in the close up but I don't think we ever got it on the response, but we definitely got that two-shot because I know that the other cameras swung around and went for it...' But it's a big media mess and you're just racing to stay on top of it. You don't have time to convey everything to the editor and write all these notes because it's just about getting as much coverage as possible, in all its forms while the camera is rolling.

Kim Berner: Just listening to what you're saying is giving me a stomach ache! It's just the worst. I hate that question: 'Did we get that line? Do we have it all?' Fine if you have two people but if you've got four or five people and one poor schmuck's only saying one line and you're thinking 'did one of the camera operators swing there?' Maybe we did get it but if that was on the other side of the line [shooting axis] we can't use that.

Jodi Domanic: Our job has become so much more difficult. And yet producers, I don't think, would ever think of us being a two-person department, or increasing our department, even though other departments have changed over time and have added personnel to them. Part of this is our own thinking, that we see ourselves as a department of one. But when you think about how much more work we do than we used to, you would think that the department would expand, and yet it hasn't as yet.

Sharon Watt: I think the main reason is because we don't have formal categories with different wage scales. In rare situations when I've brought in someone to assist me, they have to get paid as a full script supervisor. I was working on a TV show that was very complicated, very fast-paced, visual effects, multiple cameras, all of that, and I campaigned very hard to get help because I felt that I was not capable of supervising everything under those circumstances. I found ways I could delegate, where someone could help me. I think some script supervisors feel, 'I don't know how to break apart my job. I keep everything together. I keep everything in my head.' It's like what Andrea was talking about, that sense of being the one in control, the martyr, even though everything is raining down on you. Some of us can't conceive of how to break our work apart but I realised I had to find a way. But when I brought in an assistant, she had to be paid as a full script supervisor, and, ultimately, I think she did 20% of the job, which was a huge help to me. But it doesn't set up a good system to have a script supervisor with an assistant script supervisor both paid at the same rate but one only doing 20% of the job. I think we need to officially create a separate category with a formal title and a separate scale, because as it stands, production companies would rather pay for the overtime and the penalties or whatever it takes and have all the responsibility come down on this one script supervisor's shoulders, than to have to pay for two. The job infrastructure needs to change but also, we need to develop more progressive ways of thinking. Because it's true, we're not a growing craft. We're not creating opportunities to grow.

It's crazy to me that you might spend all your efforts on set solving problems, making sure that you have a discussion with the DP about the axis or dealing with a conflict between the actor and the director, and you're the person in the middle that can ease that tension and come up with solutions that make everyone happy, and then you have to come back to your station and fill in a load of camera reports too. I just find it absurd that you're doing all these things with significant responsibility and urgency in the filmmaking process when an assistant could easily take care of some of the paperwork and more clerical aspects of the job.

Jodi Domanic: One of the things we're working on out here on the West Coast – the respected studio feature film script supervisor Dawn Gilliam started it because she was really concerned that script supervisors weren't getting appropriate training — is developing a programme for script supervisors, linked to local 871, that has both in class and on set components.[7] Hopefully, this will not only give script supervisors the training that they really need, but it will also eventually lead to growing beyond a one-person department. So, we're also developing training for current script supervisors as to how to use an assistant because there are so many things that could not only ease up your workload but just make what you do on set even more productive and helpful. It's definitely taking some time but we're very excited about it. And hopefully, once it gets running, it can expand across the country.

Sharon Watt: Another important thing Dawn Gilliam has done for the craft was to make IMDb create a separate category for the script department, around 2020 I think, because prior to that we were always classed in the database under 'miscellaneous' even though we're a head of department. Just in terms of visibility and raising the status of script supervisors and female department heads, we're grateful for that. Even though we're still buried in the credits next to, you know, Teamster captains...

Andrea Greer: What practical steps can we take to expand the craft? I think about the prop department and how you have an on-set prop master and then a prepping prop master. When Kim was talking about ten-episode crossboarding, do you think there's a value in having an assistant who is prepping for the day-to-day, flagging 'these are the things I see on the schedule that are coming up, these are the continuity issues that I think you're going to run across here'? I guess it's a way of rethinking whether I need to do everything myself, because I stay up *late* trying to prep for the next day and early morning too. If I could just look at it quickly in the morning, it would be helpful.

Jodi Domanic: I know if I have a second unit going, and on top of prepping for myself for the next day, I'm prepping them too and sending them stills to do matching, then that's something where I think an apprentice or an assistant could go and find those stills and send them to whoever needs them. But every script supervisor would probably use their assistant differently.

Kim Berner: Second units can be awesome because instead of carrying the whole weight on your shoulders, when you go in and do second unit, particularly when it's with

[7] For more on Dawn Gilliam's initiative, see this 2022 article in *Forbes* magazine: https://www.forbes.com/sites/josh-weiss/2022/02/10/its-all-about-legacy-inside-the-ambitious-program-to-elevate-hollywoods-script-supervisors/.

someone you know and you feel prepared, it's so nice. You're just in to do this stuff, you don't have the whole mess. It can just be nice to not have the whole mess for a change.

I find what Andrea said a while ago in this conversation about mindset a truly important part of this. We have to work towards having an abundance mindset, not believing that there is a limited set of jobs and when you're not working, you're never going to work again, and that it's OK when other people get the jobs, that your job is coming, there is enough work, and to not believe, like somebody said to Martha, that you're training your own replacements. There's enough work. I think the way you said we need to grow the craft – I've never heard that before. We have to believe that we're not going to lose work, there's actually going to be more work.

Andrea Greer: Also being practical, we want a strong pension and welfare and the bigger the department is, the more employers pay, so the stronger our pension and welfare would be.

Sean Pollock: I always feel, wouldn't you want to be the one who's training your replacements? Wouldn't you want to know that they're learning how to do it as opposed to just the one day in film school where they deign to bring in a script supervisor to talk to them? I love our mentor-mentee programme in 161. I'm on my second mentee and I love it -being able to talk about what challenges they've had, what they're noticing in the business starting out that I could learn from – because we need to have good people coming up or we're signalling the death knell for the occupation, for the craft

Sharon Watt: It's still true, even in this day and age, that it's a female-dominated craft. Hopefully, it's changing now, it has changed a bit, but still, we are for the most part female script supervisors and a one-person department working mostly with male cinematographers and male directors. With DPs I always expect a bit of conflict, hopefully a collaborative and creative type of conflict. But we have different agendas because he wants to make a beautiful shot and I want to make sure that we can use that shot. So, it's common for us to get into conversations and go head to head. Often, we're the first person to know that something's wrong with the shot, and what needs to be fixed to make the shot work but it can be difficult to have those conversations with people who are sometimes more experienced or older than us, and see their opinion as more valid than ours.

Kim Berner: One of the benefits to being older is I'm much more willing to go head-to-head, like on-screen direction, but it is hard. I would say that what age has taught me is to say, 'Fine. Can I get one take where it's the correct way? I understand lots of things work but can we have one classical way so that if people are confused or feeling the jump, we have an alternative?' If you want to make them uncomfortable, jumping the line two or three times in the scene is a great way to make everything off-kilter, but don't do it just because it's a prettier shot.

Julie Robinson: Referring to gender, I would say that since we've had more equality in the world, the profession is opening up, and people are seeing that script supervising is more than just a typist coming onto the floor and taking notes. With the advent of men coming into the profession, and probably with the role being explained at universities and colleges, people are beginning to take it much more seriously than ever before and realising that actually you have to know a hell of a lot of stuff in order to do the job. And I think script supervisors can get breaks into being able to direct or write or produce, if they want to, which you hardly ever saw twenty years ago.

Jodi Domanic: One thing that's different from the period discussed in the article is that a number of script supervisors I know who have wanted to move into directing have been able to do that. I don't think it's easy for them to get into it and it might still be easier for them if they were a man, but I think it has opened up more to being able to move up that ladder, if you want it. Almost every television series I work on, there's at least one female director, and there is always the feeling that the production needs to have at least one female director in the group of directors.

Kim Berner: I think it's easier for the younger women just coming into the business to get to places that weren't open to some of us, or super hard to break into. I think younger women in general are just not putting up with a lot of things that I put up with. I was once asked to go run lines with an actor, went to his dressing room, knocked on the door. He appeared at the door without his pants on and invited me in. I'm not saying that doesn't go on anymore, but I think the younger women are much less willing to put up with stuff that we tolerated and rebuffed and dealt with. They just call bullshit on it much quicker.

Martha Pinson: When I wanted to direct, I understood that it was going to be very difficult to be hired as a woman, but I just kept going. I had a good salary, and I used my time off to direct theatre and some shorts and so forth, working in any way possible to get some recognition, some experience. I spent so much time watching and learning from brilliant directors, you know. How did they prepare? It was all very informative. I knew that I knew a lot, and that directing was not going to be a big challenge, but also that I wasn't just going to get called by a television series to come in and do an episode. But I kept going and then I got a call to direct a feature and I remember telling Marty that I wasn't going to be able to do his next film because I was hired to do this and he said, 'send me the script. I'm behind you 100%. I'll executive produce it.' I'm like, great, if Marty was signed on as an executive producer, I wasn't going to get fired or replaced by someone with more experience.

There's no way to predict if your efforts are going to work out; you just have to try. There's always a high risk in venturing into a creative effort. Whereas script supervisor jobs are good-paying jobs. It makes sense to do them – unless you have a really, really rich dad.

Kim Berner: Martha mentioning Martin Scorsese's support reminds me of support I've received from directors I've worked with. That is one of the other aspects of the work that has changed: it used to be that you found a director and you worked with them a lot. That's gotten much harder to do, perhaps because we're all doing a lot more television than film. But you had really interesting symbiotic relationships with them and they respected you and there was a give and take that I miss because I haven't had that in a while.

Sean Pollock: On set, I would say that nearly every single person that I encounter assumes that I want to direct or that I am a director. They just assume it, and I'm always saying 'no, I'm the script supervisor' and I wonder how that applies to women in the role. I know plenty of women script supervisors who want to direct, but I wonder if that aspiration is just assumed, as it is with me, or do they assume that women are just going to be content with what they perceive as a lower-level job, that that's as far as they're going to go?

Kim Berner: That's exactly it. I've had people say, 'oh, you should be directing', but the assumption that you're going to be directing, no. Does anybody ever call you 'scripty'?

Andrea Greer: Ohh, I hate that.

Sean Pollock: I don't get called scripty.

Sharon Watt: I find that so interesting because that's a common nickname these days. Some people are very offended by it, some people don't mind but maybe don't recognise how it fits in with the whole history of it being a gendered craft. I see a lot of script supervisors starting out, and when they complain about low rate and not getting parity with the people in the camera department, I feel like, where do you think that comes from? You know it comes from the fact that people still regard our job as a note-taker, a secretarial worker. So even if you don't feel that it is gendered work, there is a certain cultural conditioning reflected in things like compensation and the way that we're paid and the fact that since 1984, we still haven't been able to raise our $40 multi-camera fees for watching multiple cameras. The fact that we're not able to win fights like that comes from the fact that studios still regard us as secretaries and not the head of department that we are today, or what the job really encompasses today.

Julie Robinson: If script supervisors were to be removed from the set, what would it look like at the end of a six-week shoot? Or during that six-week shoot? It would be really interesting to see. I mean, I think we all know what the obvious answer is, but that question puts it into context in terms of the entire set of responsibilities that we have. And that should give us all confidence in order to go forward and argue our case.

Jodi Domanic: I've often thought, if I was on set and got horribly sick and had to be rushed to the emergency room, that nobody on that set is going to take over my job, you know, there's really *nobody* that could just jump in and do what I do. I know that they would go to the Union and pull somebody in but it's kind of wild that we have such an important position to the extent that if something happened to us, nobody else on set could do it. Because it is a difficult job to do.

Sean Pollock: You don't have to wait six weeks to find out what would go wrong. It can be one day and if there's not somebody who knows what they're doing who can help guide the way it should be going, we know what's going to happen.

Julie Robinson: Exactly, but then you try and convince the production manager and the producers. I think there's a lack of confidence among script supervisors, not having enough belief that we can bring the producers to the table to negotiate a better deal. How do you infuse that into the craft? But take us out of the equation and you see what a mess would be left behind. That should give everybody the strength to stand up and really fight for what we believe in.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.