

Screenplay Discourses: Bridging the Screenplay-Film Divide

DOLORES MORENO, *University of East Anglia*

ABSTRACT

This article suggests that screenplay studies should pay more attention to the meaning that screenwriting and the screenplay are given around, and after, the release of finished films. A review of existing screenwriting and screenplay theory reveals that in the past ten years there has been a tendency to reconsider these terms, relating them to the contexts in which they are culturally operative. Nonetheless, these new academic approaches primarily attach the study of screenplays to films' development and pre-production, although the term is discussed and used significantly in contexts other than film development. This article identifies different sites where screenplay discourses *emerge* from finished films, and I argue that it is necessary to study these sites in order to understand how they contribute to current ideas about the screenplay. On the basis that both finished films and published screenplays generate screenplay discourse outside the development and pre-production of films, I contend that each iteration of the screenplay has its particular function. In light of this, no form of the screenplay should be considered subsidiary in screenplay studies, and this includes screen-idea documents, released films and published screenplays. The uses of the different screenplay forms range from commissioning financiers to gaining awards at festivals and securing press reviews to facilitating screenwriting pedagogy. Therefore, it is important to take screenplay studies beyond pre-production stages to better understand the roles of screenplays within contemporary film culture and film studies.

KEYWORDS

Screenplay, screenwriting, discourse, film studies, paratexts.

Introduction

Screenplay theory reflects extensively on the development and production of films, but has little to say on the notion of a film's screenplay once the film has been made. On the basis that 'the interactions between real readers and texts, actual spectators and films' (Staiger 1992, 8) has long been accepted as a relevant object and method of study, with this article I will demonstrate how actual spectators interact with films using the term 'screenplay'. The cases that I highlight below do not stand as definitively exemplary or as statistically representative; instead, however, I have signalled spectator-film interactions that result in new and relevant texts. These examples allow us first of all to realise that spectators can sometimes refer to a film's screenplay without having read any type of pre-filmic document. For example, there are significant instances, not least in the all-important decisions made by judges at awards ceremonies, where screenplays are interpreted and evaluated on the basis of watching films. This interaction results in screenplay awards and awards generate critics' reviews, marketing

strategies, and so forth. In this light, ‘the screenplay’ that one could have traditionally thought of as a written project for the development of a film, can become a *quality* that spectators see in films. Thus, ‘by what criteria is one to isolate the unities with which one is dealing?’ (Foucault 1972, 5). I follow Michel Foucault’s idea that it is necessary to study how discourses generate and use the embrace between words and things, so that this embrace should not be simply assumed (ibid., 49). Nevertheless I am not conveying a discourse analysis of any one located use of the term screenplay in reference to finished films.¹ I only mean to point out that we should not assume that the word ‘screenplay’ related only to pre-production stages, rather ‘the screenplay’ is generated through discourses that are also present at the release and marketing of films. In consequence, screenplay studies should not be restricted to film development and production processes, because in limiting themselves to those stages they fail to reflect how the notion of ‘the screenplay’ is constructed outside those realms.

Screenplay Theory: The Academic Move Beyond Screenwriting Manuals

It appears that one consequence of current interest in the development of films is that screenplay theory is severed from the study of finished films. On the other hand, it is common practice to analyse and evaluate screenplays by watching films, and this article argues that these sources of screenplay discourse should not be neglected. The article considers different sites where finished films are used to analyse screenplays and even to publicly produce screenplays (that is, screenplays published in book form). It is, therefore, problematic to conceive of screenplays and screenwriting as objects and processes strictly happening before films have been finished, because discursive enunciations about screenplays generated by finished films are common and, I will argue, relevant. I contend that separating screenplays and films results in the misrepresentation of the term screenplay, and of the relationship between screenplays and finished films

In this article I follow recent scholarly work on screenwriting and the screenplay, and I take the methodology used one step further. Screenplay academics have questioned the traditional definition of the screenplay by investigating how the term ‘screenplay’ and the process of screenwriting operate in cultural contexts (Macdonald 2004a; Maras 2009). By studying the process of screenwriting, and the history of the screenplay, these scholars have shown that the traditional definition of the screenplay, the idea of a document to be ‘shot as written’, did not match reality. In the following review I argue that what they have done is to criticise assumptions about screenwriting and the screenplay by means of reconsidering them in relation to how they are used in practice. According to this perspective, when the authors of such analyses focus on the study of the creation, development and shooting of screenplays, they are locating the study of screenplays in some of the cultural sites where the term is generated and culturally operative. I have adopted their framework to investigate screenplay discourses generated around finished films.

¹ I am not going to study power vectors and the negotiation of interests that makes a through discourse analysis. although I find that it would be extremely interesting analyse located screenplay discourses in this light (both Steve Maras and Ian Macdonald have writings on the subject), nonetheless the scope of this article is only to question the screenplay film divide.

The origin of screenplay theory could be described as a critical opposition to screenwriting manuals.² Taking this approach, recent screenplay academics have emphasised the need for further study in the field and have paved the way for screenplay research:

Somewhat ironically, because of the general interest in writing in this form, there are a plethora of publications on the subject of how to write a screenplay but there has been a meagre amount of published academic work which analyses the screenplay itself. (Nelmes 2010, 1)

The academic interest in screenplays and screenwriting has increased in the last decade thanks to scholars like Ian Macdonald, Steve Maras and Jill Nelmes. These three academics, among others, argued that there was a need for more screenplay research because the popular screenwriting manuals ‘are not enough’ to allow for a rigorous critical understanding (Macdonald 2004, in the title). The issue emerged because ‘a handful of these books are actually best sellers’ (Conor 2011, 126). They have been translated into many languages and edited repeatedly, and their writers are considered gurus. But the aim of books such as Syd Field’s (1994) *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Linda Seger’s (2010) *Making a Good Script Great*, Christopher Vogler’s (2007) *The Writer’s Journey* and Robert McKee’s (1997) *Story* is not to problematize or develop the cultural understanding of screenwriting and the screenplay. Given that they are manuals, the objective of these books is to ‘be useful as “practical theory” designed to teach artists how to effectively create’ (Mittell 2004, 3). According to Mittell, that aim is fulfilled in ‘definitional accounts’, but critical theory has long questioned whether definitions are fixed or whether they are mediated by the discourses and the cultural sites where terms operate. As a result of this, screenwriting manuals have been criticised as ‘low theory’ (Macdonald 2004) in academic circles, because they oversimplify the description of the screenplay and of the process of screenwriting.

Approaching the Screenplay

Thanks to scholarly research on the screenplay, we now have a Screenplay Research Network, a *Journal of Screenwriting* and several published academic works on the subject. One of the aims of the published analyses was to overcome the homogeneous and prescriptive nature of manuals by focusing on a variety of dimensions of the subject: screenwriting outside the West, the screenplay in early cinema, the development of screenplays in animation projects, and so forth. In sum, the screenplay no longer has a unique identity defined by screenwriting manuals; instead it is approached from diverse perspectives ‘enabled by discursive formations’ (Alba-Juez 2009, 174).

In his review of screenplay history, Steve Maras approaches different theories on the screenplay, locating them in the industrial contexts in which they were generated and reporting the most important historical debates around the screenplay in cinema studies. Maras explains that debates on the relationship between screenplays and finished films are as old as film theory, but nevertheless they have commonly been conceived of as two separate objects of study ever since. In the early cinema essays of Soviet authors (like Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov) there are already discussions on the legitimacy of using ‘scenarios’ in the production of films (Maras 2009, 33–34). In broad terms, these authors wanted to claim filmmaking as an art on the basis of its unique

² Briefly stated in Clayton (2010): ‘The only systemic context we have is the raft of Hollywood “how to” books’ (2011, 177). See also Maras (2009, 25), Conor (2011, 57), and Nelmes (2010, 1).

expressive strategies, and so they were worried about identifying the ‘essentially’ filmic. As a result of this, they placed what they deemed as literary (the scenario) in opposition to what was ‘truly’ filmic (creation through shooting and montage). In their view, what was filmic should not be ‘contaminated’ by what was not, and they thought that the scenario was not filmic in essence. Scenarios, the literary aspect, could be acceptable, at most, as a pre-filmic plan to help in the shooting and montage of films, but it was shooting and montage that were the really filmic modes of expression.³ Maras proposes to think of writing screenplays as ‘scripting’, because this term ‘provides an idea through which to examine and reconsider the place of writing and screenwriting *in the production process*’ (2009, 3; my emphasis). In sum, Maras moves away from the definitional account of screenwriting manuals to a located study of the screenplay in its historical and industrial context, but he remains attached to a notion of the screenplay as pre-filmic.

Prior to Maras’ study, Ian Macdonald had already located screenplays in the cultural process of film production where they operate instead of the abstract/ideal context in which manuals had located them. According to screenwriting manuals, the writer creates a text (word-page) following a set of rules and, eventually, this fixed and stable document is sold and turned into a film. In order to problematise the image that screenwriting manuals put forward of the screenplay (and of the screenwriting process) Macdonald took particular interest in the processes of commissioning and developing projects for films in the United Kingdom. As a result of this study he proposed the term ‘screen idea’ which conveys both the contributions of the many different professionals who help define the project and the significance of the process of re-writing (2004a). The screenplay is therefore not fixed and stable but subject to changes and growing with the addition of ideas and collaborators. Again, when studied in practice definitional accounts seem to leave way to more comprehensive approaches that relate the screenplay to its uses and construction.

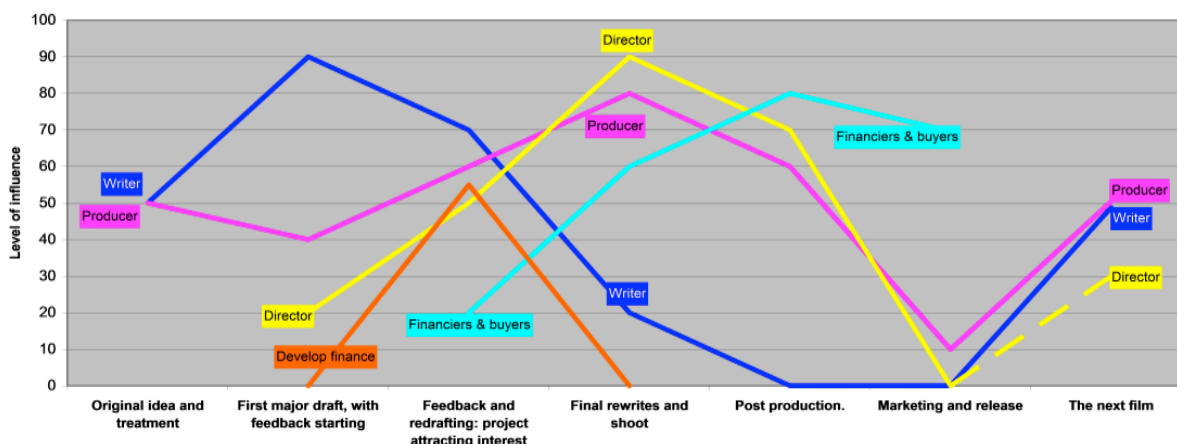


Figure 1: ‘A Typology of Changing Power and Approximate Creative Influence of Various Players in Independent Film, from Development to Distribution’, Peter Bloore, University of East Anglia, unpublished lecture notes, published here with kind permission from the author

³ In fact, some of these authors recommended not using these pre-filmic literary plans at all.

It could be agreed that at the level of film production, the screenwriter is a creative collaborator who participates from the earlier stages of a film's project and has a role in which he or she is able to make changes in the screenplay that will affect the finished film. The diagram below (figure 1), by film development scholar Peter Bloore, visualises how the influence of screenwriters decreases as film production evolves (it only increases again when the writer starts working on the next project, which is why the blue line moves upwards on the right-hand side of the diagram).

Nonetheless, screenplay values can be, and actually are, analysed and judged in finished films. I am not interested here in the negotiation of influences among the participants in the development and the production of films. Instead I want to illustrate that screenplay studies and certain assumptions about the screenplay tend to associate screenplay research with those stages where screenwriters retain power. But as much as the power of screenwriters may decrease along the film production's timeline, the screenplay's influence on the form of the film does not parallel the blue line above. This article signals several arenas of cultural practice that generate screenplay discourse outside the development and production processes, for example in the marketing and distribution stages of film production. If we locate relevant uses of the term 'screenplay' outside the development phase of film production, this means that the relationship between screenplays and films is far more complex than one of one preceding the other; they cannot be split along the production timeline.

This view contradicts Ian Macdonald, who is the director of the Screenplay Research Network, according to whom, 'there are some things a screenplay is not: it is not a finished piece of work [...]. It is not (ever) complete, as a description of all the aspects of the screenwork. It is not image based (surprisingly)' (2004, 90). Macdonald's definition of the term is central in the field and it emerges from the conception that screenwriting and the screenplay should be understood in the context of film production. But I take this position one step further by contending that a film is actually another form of the screenplay, inasmuch as it is an important source of screenplay discourse. Therefore it must necessarily, at some point, be a finished piece of work, complete and image based (as well as sound based). In a similar line, Maras said that screenwriting manuals generated a problem because "the movement towards autonomy [of the screenplay] takes the script out of its production context and potentially reinforces the fracture between conception and execution" (2009, 5). Late screenplay research has solved this problem by analysing the production process, but, paradoxically, this has reinforced the fracture between execution (scripting, or the screen idea) and results (the film).

It should be acknowledged that the academic literature already shows some hints of moving in the direction of bridging the screenplay-film divide. According to Adam Ganz audiences share the story and other screenplay values with screenwriters: 'indeed one might describe the process, not as the screenwriter telling a story, but as the audiences assembling the story from the clues and traces they find' (2010, 127). The relationships between finished films and screenplay discourses remain uncertain not because the idea is new, but because screenplay scholars have not sufficiently investigated it. Screenwriters' 'work only becomes productive, useful and thus meaningful when it is subject to development, notes, input from other filmmakers and is *then produced in filmic form*' (Conor 2011, 42; my emphasis). It follows from this statement that the current focus of screenplay research on the process of development of films results in the neglect of precisely the most meaningful form of the screenplay,

the filmic form. Another scholar reflecting on the ontology of the screenplay is Steven Price, who writes, ‘the screenplay is erased in the process of production, but only partially, and it emerges as a ghostly presence’ (2010, 52). As much as I tend to subscribe to this idea in general, Price does not develop the idea any further and concentrates on the screenplay in its pre-filmic form. Since neither of these two authors develop the idea further they do contribute only in identifying a contradiction, rather than in solving it.

Although I would not argue that the screenplay only becomes meaningful when it is produced in filmic form I submit, of course, that the filmic form of the screenplay is meaningful. Certainly the boundaries between what is and what is not the screenplay when analysing a film will not emerge univocally, and maybe this is the reason why it only emerges as a ghostly presence. However, the methodological difficulties should not lead us to erase it. Films result from a complex process of production where the work of the different team members is intertwined and merged, therefore if we wanted to argue that the screenplay cannot be studied in its filmic form we should question if this should also be true when analysing other aspects of films or the contribution of creative team members other than screenwriters. For instance an actor can construct a character in rehearsals and then the character is produced in filmic form with the aid of make-up, lights, editing, and so on; nevertheless this has not led to a persistent neglect of films as valid sources for the study of actors’ performances, but there has been a persistent neglect of films as valid sources in screenplay studies. While no one would claim that in order to analyse, evaluate or even study an actor’s work we should focus only on the rehearsals and not study how his or her performances result in their films, academia seems to find it reasonable to reject the use of finished films in screenplay research. It is almost absurd to pretend that the contribution of the screenwriter or the many screenwriters and creative members that generate screenplay input is not present in their finished films, but the assumption that screenplays should not be studied through films tends to permeate screenplay studies. If we agree with Maras that ‘screenwriting is a fascinating form of media practice’ (2009, 1), then screenplay studies, and even screenwriting studies, should not be confined to the development and pre-production of films.

Some Cultural Sites where ‘The Screenplay’ Emerges from Finished Films

In this academic context one might wonder what Nelmes is signalling when she states that there is a need to study ‘the screenplay itself’. We should be careful not to use the emphatic ‘itself’ in order to keep ‘the screenplay’ apart from ‘the film’, as in doing so we run the risk of defeating the initial purpose of the screenplay theory renewal. I have shown that recent screenplay scholarship has moved away from the arbitrary definition that manuals put forward by approaching the screenplay with a methodology that took cultural practice into account. Therefore these should also be taken into account and I will now review some instances that I consider particularly relevant.

Screenplays are sometimes evaluated through the viewing of films, and the writers of screenplays can be awarded on this basis. At Cannes Festival, for example, the winner of the Cannes’ Best Screenplay award is decided by watching the films in ‘The Competition’.⁴ Thus, Cannes’ jury and the festival’s

⁴ Not all the films premiered at Cannes compete for the Palme D’Or, only those in the section labelled ‘The Competition’.

institution find it legitimate to choose one screenplay among twenty based solely on the film's premiere (with maybe one re-viewing) and the subsequent discussions. The selected screenplay and its screenwriter are 'raised among [their] peers' (Czach 2004, 78): they are, in principle, given more cultural value than those films or screenplays which do not receive awards. If we consider that this procedure is broadly the same in many award ceremonies and festivals, we can conclude that films generate significant screenplay discourses, including hierarchies of taste and distinction (in Pierre Bourdieu's terms). This discursive practice challenges any conception of the screenplay that wants to encapsulate it in those stages of film production happening before the film's completion.

As it was my intention to identify sites of cultural practice where the screenplay was reflected upon on the basis of watching films, I have observed screenwriting classes and I have corresponded with screenwriting teachers.⁵ I have observed that another site where we can find screenplays approached through finished films is screenwriting classes. Nonetheless, in these classes I have found not a single instance where the screenplay-film divide was considered an issue. It was assumed naturally that films carry screenplay values since screenwriting teachers played and analysed films to teach students 'how to write'. As such, while screenwriting teachers did not debate the appropriate methodologies to separate screenplays from films, they were contributing to the generation of screenplay discourses from released films. For instance, one teacher played two films adapted from the same novel in order to show that one source text could be turned into two different screenplays, another played the first sequence of a *Star Wars* film to show that mythic structure was present in the screenplays of science fiction films, another played a Mike Leigh scene to encourage realism in the writing of screenplays, and so on. In sum, it is often the case that teachers use films in order to represent the screenwriting values that they are pointing out at that moment.

One of the screenwriting teachers who participated in my research said she finds analysis of silent films in her screenwriting classes particularly useful (Bermudez, 2012). The fact that she proposes to analyze the screenwriting of silent films by watching them signals that she is not confronting words versus images when she proposes her students to interact with screenplays through finished films. She uses silent films precisely to help her students *visualise* screenplays, because filmed screenplays are purely visual when films are silent. We may recall that *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2010) received several screenplay awards, despite being mostly a 'silent' film. It could be argued that, actually, the most prominent characteristic of that screenplay was the film's lack of the need of words to communicate and engage (for it was certainly not the *déjà vu* love story that made the film stand out). As a matter of fact, even screenwriting manuals recommend that prospective writers concentrate on visual communication when writing a screenplay – the motto being 'show don't tell' (McKee 1997, 10). Hence, it appears not to be the case that what is audible or verbal counts as the screenplay and what is visual counts as filmic. This seems quite obvious, but it is worth pointing it out in order to re-consider screenplay discourses in the context of finished films.

⁵ My findings are based on my personal observation of classes in a film school in Madrid, at Instituto del Cine NIC, and at ESCAC University in Barcelona, as well as classes at MA level at the University of East Anglia in the UK. I have also had correspondence via e-mail with MA level teachers from New York University of the Arts and UCLA. While this small sample cannot be taken to generalise on the teaching of screenwriting, it serves to illustrate some common tendencies and techniques in the teaching of screenwriting.

Although screenplay scholars reject the idea that screenwriting manuals are screenplay theory, it cannot be denied that these books are important sources of screenwriting discourse (for example, they commonly are used in classes).⁶ I am not returning to screenwriting manuals in order to evaluate their definition of the screenplay or their description of the screenwriting process; I am only interested in their use of finished films. Therefore, I am going to briefly explain how screenwriting manuals, the four mentioned previously, regard the relationships between screenplays and finished films.⁷ These books assume both that screenwriting can be studied through films and that films carry screenplay values, because they recommend that their readers watch a selection of films in order to better understand the books. To begin with, in their final pages they invariably propose a filmography, and not a list of screenplays. Second, they sometimes analyse the value of screenplays without quoting excerpts from the texts; that is, they assume that the reader is familiar with the film in question. And third, they, implicitly or explicitly, choose examples from *films* which are easy to access; in fact Linda Seger states that she has intentionally chosen films which were easily available on video (2010). Given this methodology, it seems that manuals are bridging the screenplay-film divide, because they ‘naturally assume’ that films can be used to teach people how to write screenplays. While screenwriting manuals define the screenplay as a pre-filmic plan in the form of a text with a particular form and format, they nonetheless aim to teach this form (certainly not the format on the page) through films. But as has been pointed out, screenwriting manuals do not problematize their assumptions, and they do not have a critical or discursive approach to the screenplay.

Screenwriting manuals define with precision what their readers should consider as screenplay values when analysing a film: they present a particular screenplay model and define it as ‘the screenplay’ in the films proposed. This model is composed of a series of elements that each manual names somewhat differently, but which are identified univocally by the manual. Screenwriting manuals assume that whatever fits the manual’s definition of the screenplay model and of its elements is the screenplay of any film, therefore, according to them this would be what any spectator refers to when he or she interacts with ‘the screenplay’ through the film. These books work with a vacillating structuralism paradigm according to which the ‘bits and parts’ they have identified are, in fact, the constituents of their object of study.⁸ Since the objective of these books is not to investigate the tensions between films and screenplays, and much less to analyse screenplay discourses as they operate in cultural contexts, their procedure only works to test the same model they propose. Fortunately, as I have shown, we now have several academic points of view in order to overcome many of the short-sighted perspectives of screenwriting manuals and how it should be created. Nevertheless, the manuals still constitute an instance of cultural practice in which screenplays are analysed by watching films, so I have presented how they bridge the screenplay-film divide merely to reinforce the argument that the gap needs to be addressed by screenplay theory.

⁶ It is worth noting that research has, in fact, signalled that the authority of these books is questioned in much of the teaching of screenwriting. Nonetheless, as such, their pedagogic use represents a relevant discourse on screenwriting (for a thorough review of this topic see Conor 2011, 164-65).

⁷ I offer no insight into the differences among them, because these manuals offer the same perspective on this particular issue.

⁸ I would argue, in this light, that they all propose *one model* and that the differences are minor.

Also, it is not unusual to find the idea that films are screenplay forms filtering through in academic accounts (for example, Ganz 2010; Clayton 2010; and Nelmes 2010). Therefore the academic discourse on this matter is confusing: on the one hand screenplays are not studied in their filmic form in screenplay theories (Macdonald 2004; Maras 2009), and on the other hand, those scholars who analyse screenplays through films do not reflect on the ontology assumed (Nelmes 2010). This is illustrated in Sue Clayton's discussion of the writing of dream sequences: 'this approach to dreaming is evidenced in the screenwriting of other Southeast Asian cultures – for instance in Thai writer-director Apichatpong Weerasethakul' (2010, 191). Clayton is not concerned with the screenplay-film divide but rather with specifics of South East Asian screenwriting. Nevertheless she uses Weerasethakul as an example for her argument on the basis of watching his films and not of reading their screenplays. First, this writer-director has given interviews where he states that he used 'traditional screenplays' for only some of his films (Romers 2005, 42). Second, through correspondence with Weerasethakul's assistance, I have been informed that he does not give out his screenplays (Prasertphan 2002). To complicate the matter even more, I have also corresponded with one of the companies that co-produced his film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), and they didn't even have a copy of a screenplay (Montse Pedros, via telephone, 25 July 2012). In sum, Sue Clayton is most probably analyses Weerasethakul's 'screenwriting' solely through the films. This is certainly not to say that the claim is illegitimate. On the contrary, I am pointing these tensions out precisely because she is a recognised academic and the article was published in a relevant screenplay analysis publication. What it means is that Weerasethakul's screenwriting is not strictly pre-filmic because it can – indeed must – be analysed on the basis of watching the films. This constitutes another instance of screenplay discourse generated in the interaction between a film and an spectator where no reading of screenplays is involved.

As a final example of the 'screenplay discourse' that emerges from finished films, I want to come to the important presence of published screenplays.⁹ This phenomenon raises new issues about how 'the screenplay' operates in cultural practice. Since there is a market for published screenplays,¹⁰ this puts into question 'the ontology of the screenplay' (Horne 2007) because these screenplays are simultaneously books. While my intention here is not to investigate the literary claims of published screenplays, it is important to signal that status of literariness in relation to my argument that the screenplay does not simply belong in the realm of pre-production.¹¹

⁹ I am not considering edited screenplays only those that are in the form of a book. I am considering all screenplays produced once the film production process has finished under this label, because to separate these two categories would lead to unnecessary confusion in the already difficult definition of screenplay forms in the scope of this article.

¹⁰ The publishing sub-market comprised of screenplay books raises more questions for researchers than can be covered here. For example, why are some screenplays are given the cultural value to be published while others are not; or who buys these screenplays and why. Again I can only make the initial case here that these publications bridge the screenplay-film divide.

¹¹ Although I am not going to develop the problem of how we should define these books, the problem of whether screenplays are ever complete has been related to Roland Barthes' readerly and writerly texts by Kohn: "Even when reading a screenplay for a movie already produced and distributed (the finished film in some ways very much a readerly text), one still feels the urge to add a word, change a character, construct a subplot to fill the welcoming open spaces – the obligatory "white space" – on the page. A writerly text demands a productive collusion on our part' (2000, 495).

The question that interests me most here, though, is the fact that screenplays are generally published for the consumer market on the basis of a film's status after release.¹² Given that filmmaking usually means that screenplays are subject to change, it is of course difficult to find versions of the screenplay produced prior to the completion of the film which follow it word for word. In spite of this, published screenplays are often loyal to their films word for word. In the rehearsal, shooting or editing phases of film production, a sentence might be cut out, a location changed or a whole sequence moved, but many published screenplays are scrupulously consistent with the film as it has been released. At this level, these screenplays emerge directly from finished films. These screenplays are not pre-filmic plans; on the contrary, they are screenplays that have come into being from films. In order to better understand the meanings that the term 'screenplay' has in discourses generated after the release of films, it is important to take into account published screenplays, because these texts are marketed in 'the glow of their films' (Maras 2009, 23); therefore they could not precede their films and, nonetheless, each one of these books is a 'screenplay itself'.

At the same time, these published screenplays generate a back-and-forth relationship with their films: they seem to have been created once the films were finished, but they relate to the development of the films because of their appearance on the page. In general (I have not found any instance where this is not true), published screenplays follow screenplay conventions such as 'interior/exterior, location, and day/night' headings for each separate sequence as well as centre-justified dialogue, and often even use the same font as production screenplays. A published screenplay is what the filmmakers and book publishers (or sometimes anonymous 'pirates'¹³) have decided to put forward as the film's screenplay, maybe because they think that it will, more or less, fulfil the expectations of the potential reader/buyer. Those who put together a screenplay for its publication may not be spectators of the film but agents involved in the making or the marketing of these films and the resultant books, yet the fact that they do so shows that spectators interact with screenplays through finished and released films. If 'the screenplay' was merely a pre-filmic plan and it could not be considered as part of the relationship that certain spectators have with films there would be no interest in publishing screenplays.

But not all published screenplays are like those discussed above; sometimes they offer insights into the development and production processes of their films. Some published screenplays include photographs of the shooting and reproduce notes in the margins, as if replicating working documents or diaries. Others claim to be the work written by the writer before production changes occurred (for example, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita: A Screenplay*, which was never shot). While these publications do not adhere to the first description of published screenplays presented here, it must not be forgotten that, in any case, these objects were produced, as books, after their films had succeeded. Published screenplays are versions of the screenplay which emerge from their finished films and which recreate, to different degrees, the development of those films. When I say that 'the screenplay' is not strictly pre-filmic I am not arguing that there is nothing pre-filmic in it per se, and published screenplays are a perfect example of this complexity. On the one hand screenplays are published after films have been released, on the

¹² To my knowledge screenplays are never marketed before their films, although there are often 'pirate' or leaked copies circulating on the Internet.

¹³ There is surely a difference between fan-produced and officially produced published screenplays, but this complicated distinction is outside my scope here.

other hand they tend to replicate a phantom stage in the production process (as has been argued, a stage that probably never was). To complicate the matter even more, it is only the screenplay of films with a particular cultural value that one would expect to find published, so I would say that there are significant discourses about the screenplay that could be studied in depth here.

On the light of all these examples it is striking that in screenplay studies, as in film studies, the screenplay is still severed from filmmaking by the same line that early film theory used. By not taking into consideration films as sources of screenplay discourse, we are still dramatically separating pre-filmic from filmic. There is a significant parallel between Eisenstein's understanding of 'the script as one part of a process of conditioning material *leading to realization in images*' (quoted in Maras 2009, 34; my emphasis) and the neglect of films in screenplay studies. While screenplay scholars have located the different ideas about screenplays in their historical contexts and in the context of film production, they still tend to neglect the contribution of the discourses generated once films have been released to the construction of the notion of the screenplay. There is a *continuum of screenplay forms*, from inception to films, and even beyond, and each screenplay form deserves its own analysis, because all forms serve different functions for audiences, the industry and researchers.

The screenplay may or may not have an existence independent of the finished film. It can be published or it can be made available to the interested researcher, but, to a certain extent, it is these forms that could be considered subsidiary when the screenplay has been produced in film form. However popular or easy to access, those forms of the screenplay other than the films reach fewer people and, maybe, they could even be generating less significant screenplay discourses. I do not want to engage in much discussion of which form of the screenplay is more operative in screenplay discourses, but certainly screenplays do not vanish once their films have been made.

Somehow the aforementioned neglect in screenplay theory signals that Jean Claude Carriere's image of the 'vanishing screenplay' (1995, 36) and his caterpillar-butterfly hierarchy are still operative in screenplay research and film studies. Carriere was a prominent *nouvelle vague* screenwriter, and according to him the screenplay vanishes when the film is made, just as the caterpillar vanishes when it becomes the butterfly. What I contend is, of course, that just as the caterpillar does not vanish, neither does the screenplay, because both are present (as opposed to having vanished) in the new forms into which they have trans-formed. More importantly, I argue that both the caterpillar and the screenplay were somehow born precisely to develop into their final butterfly and film forms. Therefore the screenplay does not vanish when its film is made; instead it achieves its goal.¹⁴ Although the 'vanishing' screenplay might seem of use in helping prospective screenwriters reflect on their work, it contributes to the misrepresentative separation of screenplays and films. Much as the screenplay has been redefined to fit and reflect the industry contexts where it is used, as long as we conceive of it primarily as a pre-filmic plan we are reinforcing the notion of a screenplay that vanishes when the film appears, and this idea is a reflection of the same screenplay-film separation that early film theorists defended.

¹⁴ One possible problem is that screenplays as written documents still exist once films are made, and caterpillars do not exist once butterflies come into being. Although development and production versions of screenplays can exist separately to and simultaneously with their films, outside of research or, maybe, teaching contexts, the film is preferred in general (published screenplays are not production screenplays, as I will discuss later).

Conclusion

As I have shown, screenplay scholars have identified that the screenplay presented by screenwriting manuals is oversimplified. Also, we have seen that in context the term ‘screenplay’ can refer to purely visual values. In sum I have shown that the screenplay of films is not strictly attached to their production process, since these can be analysed only on the basis of films. We are faced with a confused picture of what values within the finished films might constitute its screenplay, and further research is necessary in order to understand how these change according to the discursive site and the interests of the speakers. For instance, if we think back to Clayton’s statement that ‘this approach to dreaming is evidenced in the screenwriting of...’, her remark about Southeast Asian writing is not accompanied by a discussion of what elements or values of the relevant films constitute such an approach to dreaming. She states that it is some ‘dreamy’ value she is interested in, but in *Uncle Boonmee*, for instance, we could consider that the ‘dreamy’ is signalled by the mere presence of monkey ghosts; or we could think that it is the shining red eyes of the figures against the blue night light that is dreamlike. Which one of these two, or many other, possibilities constitutes the screenwriter’s ‘approach to dreaming’?¹⁵ The problem here, in short, is the lack of studies of the screenplay discourses emerging after films have been finished and released, which could help us to understand the criteria by which those elements deemed valuable or noteworthy can be isolated.

Although we might now be tempted to argue that ‘the screenplay’ could be just about anything that the speaker wants to address as such when analysing a film, this argument empties the meaning of the terms and devalues them completely. If one buys the screenplay of a film, there is a series of elements that would probably not fulfil one’s expectations: for instance a list of the origins of the costumer design might seem awkward, and a catering list would probably appear even more so. While the meaning of the screenplay in discourses generated once films have been made is in flux, there must still be some sort of embrace between the word and the things (concepts) it designates. Consequently, I have argued here that it is necessary to redefine the screenplay according to the multiple contexts in which it is used and consumed, as well as to study in more depth the discursive tensions that are informing that fluid definition.

¹⁵ To be fair the Clayton, it was not the aim of her essay to problematize the tension between films and screenplay discourses; rather her aim was to introduce the reader to screenwriting outside the west, which she does efficiently. I use it only as an example of the blind-spots that characterise screenplay studies in general.

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