

Hollywood Safari

Navigating Screenwriting Books & Theory

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Introduction

“Stories are at the heart of humanity and are the repository of our diverse cultural heritage. They are told, retold and reinterpreted for new times by storytellers. Screenwriters are the storytellers of our time.”

European Screenwriters Manifesto
2006

This is not another book on screenwriting. Rather, it is a about the books on screenwriting. There are a lot of them out there. And many more each year.

Recently, I inputted “Screenwriting” into the Books section of Amazon and received 3,500 results. While many books made this category by the whims of algorithm patterns, there is no denying the fact that books on screenwriting education has become a substantial “cottage” industry today.

The books and the theories on screenwriting they can be viewed as “brands” within an industry. As such, screenwriting books possess elements of brands. A major element of brands is differentiation that posits brands within industries differentiate themselves from other industry brands in order to become unique, distinct brands that stand out from the rest of the brands. They attempt to stand out in order to be noticed and hopefully purchased by consumers in the industry.

Brand segmentation within industries s certainly one of the most observable phenomena of the contemporary world. We no longer have three major television networks but rather hundreds of cable channels. We no longer have black Model T Fords but dozens of car models. We no longer have a few brands of beer but hundreds of brands.

The upside of this segmentation is that consumers have more choice than ever before. The downside is that this choice can be confusing to these consumers. The same situation is true in the screenwriting industry that offers a plethora of methods, techniques and structures. In this scenario, there are few attempts at consolidation or finding commonalities among the various books and theories. Much of this seems similar to the world of academics where disciplines and departments within universities becomes more divided up into smaller and smaller niches of information for fewer and fewer specialists who know more and more about less and less.

In the end, one needs to ask from all of this, do all of these books advance the screenwriting art and craft or simply confuse it all the more by miring it in battling screenwriting brands?

* * *

Certainly reading the best books on screenwriting is not the only way to learn the craft of

screenwriting. Working in the industry, reading screenplays and going to film school are other ways that immediately come to mind. However, for many and especially those not in the Los Angeles area, books on screenwriting is their first (and often last) introduction to the field. Hopefully, this book helps them navigate this expanding landscape.

How does one navigate this growing landscape of screenwriting books and theory? And, how does one define the best books on screenwriting? By the advice from friends? By the books used at the leading film schools? By leading screenwriters? By readers of the books? For example, one can sort the Amazon “Screenplay” list by such pull-down menu criteria as “Relevance” or “Most Reviews” or “Publication Date” or “Average Review Ratings.” By online lists of these best screenwriting books such as “The 50 Best Books on Screenwriting” by Anish Bhatia published on the Amazon site?

One way might be to categorize backgrounds of screenwriting book authors. Some authors like Richard Walter at UCLA come from academic backgrounds. Some are screenwriters themselves such as William Goldman. Some authors like Michael Hauge, John Truby and Robert McKee have worked as story consultants and analysts for various studios and production companies. Some are both screenwriters as well as professors of screenwriting such as Eric Edson and Paul Gulino.

Another way of navigating the world of screenwriting books is by classifying the books into how they approach screenplay structure. A three-point pyramid structure is proposed by screenwriting guru Robert McKee based on the overall life perspectives screenwriters bring to screenwriting. These three major approaches are the following:

1. Classical Design and Archplot (Top of Pyramid)

Under this heading are causality. Closed Ending. Linear Time. External Conflict. Single Protagonist. Consistent Reality. Active Protagonist.

2. Minimalism and Mini Plot (Bottom left of Pyramid)

Under this heading Open Ending. Internal Conflict. Multi-Protagonists. Passive Protagonist.

3. Anti-Structure and Antiplot (Bottom right of Pyramid. Under this section are

Coincidence. Nonlinear time. Inconsistent Realities.

McKee observes that a screenwriter writes the most powerful screenplays when they understand what perspective they bring to screenwriting and are able to figure ways to best write in this perspective. This can present an ethical challenge for many since he notes that the Classical Design approach is the one most film audiences understand and the most popular. Writing screenplays with this structure is not as much of a challenge for those who have a classical design perspective on life. However, writing screenplays with classical structure presents a far greater challenge to those who bring a minimalistic or anti-structure perspective to life.

One needs to keep McKee’s three-segments in mind during our discussion of the various schools as all schools possess elements of McKee’s three design structures. For example, the minimalism

structure of internal conflict finds commonality with the Psychology School and the Personal School of screenplay writing books and theories. On the other hand, the classical design structure of external conflict and closed endings finds commonality with the Plot School and the Step School we define.

Keeping the above points in mind, perhaps the best way to navigate the dense world of screenwriting books is first to define the major segments of the screenwriting education industry. We provide this type of segmentation by calling these segments “schools” and defining ten major schools. This allows readers to see the proverbial “forest” for all the “trees.” The reader is provided with a type of map of the territory so to speak. With this information, they can navigate the area more intelligently.

* * *

While we attempt to be comprehensive on overall screenwriting books, we do not cover here the growing number of screenwriting books directed at aspects of screenwriting such as particular film genres like comedy, thrillers, horror and science fiction. For example, the book *The Hidden Tools of Comedy* by Steve Kaplan is an excellent guide to writing comedy scripts. Also, we do not cover books offering advice on certain elements of screenwriting such as writing for alternative films and the excellent *Alternative Scriptwriting* by Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, adaptations, making screenplays better such as Linda Seger’s excellent *Making A Good Script Great* and formatting such as Christopher Riley’s *The Hollywood Standard*. Nor do we cover so-called screenwriting bibles such as David Trotter’s excellent *The Screenwriters Bible*.

We also leave out books consisting of collections of articles on aspects of screenwriting such as the very worthwhile *Cut to the Chase*, edited by Linda Venis. More than a collection of “articles” on aspects of screenwriting, it consists of integrally linked chapters that mirror the famous UCLA Extension Writers’ Program feature film-writing curriculum. Its companion book is titled *Inside the Room* and focuses on television writing. Professionals teaching at UCLA Extension Writers’ Program write all chapters in these books. Also not considered in *Hollywood Safari* are books that analyze cinema such as the excellent *Film Art* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

While there are many excellent books directed at these elements of screenwriting, our purpose here is identifying and discussing major segments or “schools” of screenwriting books and theory.

* * *

Those familiar with the history of film would be hard-pressed to call the age we live in anything close to a “golden age” of cinema. The summer of 2013 saw some of the largest losses in the history of movies. Blame for the lackluster performance of many films today is spread around to a number of “villains.” Bad business decisions are offered as one excuse. Exaggerated egos are offered as another. Being out of touch with the general populace another. The failure to take risks with new films and continue building sequels under a “big tent” film another.

But perhaps the real failure of films today is something few talk about. This is the failure of the screenwriting industry to arrive at a type of agreed-upon commonality for structure, technique and method as screenwriting books and theories continue to segment modern storytelling into smaller and smaller niches that battle each other in brand warfare. In all of this, the sense of story becomes lost in more and more techniques and methods.

Legendary screenwriter Robert Towne might have identified the real reason for the continuing deluge of bad and boring movies. In an essay called “On Moving Pictures” at the beginning of my copy of the script for *Chinatown*, Towne observes:

“I think it is true that narrative skill in screenwriting may be at an all-time low. There was an undeniably greater story sense evidenced by the preceding generation of filmmakers. It may have been due in part to the fact that (they) ... began their careers in silent pictures. Without sound, they were obliged to think carefully about making the story and motivation clear. This obsession with story and with clarity never abandoned them when they abandoned silent film. They knew how much image could convey and they knew the corollary, how much and how many ways the images could confuse and mislead, just about 24 times a second.”

The era of the silent pictures and the great natural storytellers is now far away. Since their time, the Hollywood storytelling industry has evolved much over the years and, as we suggest, has become another industry or discipline with the attendant segmentation it brings with it. Similar to many academic disciplines, screenwriting today knows more and more about less and less: more and more technique about smaller and smaller elements of stories. As Robert Towne might suggest, more knowledge of technique and methods but less sense of story.

Presented in the following pages is the current territory of screenwriting with all of its attendant techniques, methods, principles and theories. In this “wilderness” we move our “safari” into, it will become evident that some “schools” have much commonality with other schools. Perhaps some type of consolidation is in order? For example, screenplay teachers who provide close to the same number of steps in their story structure might be simply calling the same steps different names. Or sometimes one book states one element or principle much better than others. For example, the section on Premise in Lajos Egri’s *The Art of Dramatic Writing* has perhaps the best section on Premise ever written.

Before any type of consolidation from all the screenwriting books out there, it is first important to survey the field so that one can navigate through it with a type of roadmap. One can say that the glut of books and screenwriting education is simply a Hollywood problem. But it might go far beyond this if one agrees with the quote at the beginning of the Introduction that stories are the heart of humanity and screenwriters are the storytellers of our time. We might need better screenplays. What we really need, though, are better stories.

1. Personal School

William Goldman *Adventures in the Screen Trade*
John Schimmel *Screenwriting: Behind Enemy Lines*

“In terms of authority, screenwriters rank somewhere between the man who guards the gate and the man who runs the studio (this week).”

William Goldman
Adventures in the Screen Trade

Anyone who has written screenplays or reviewed them for studios has a personal experience of the process. Some have written about their experiences. But of these writers have had the personal experience of screenwriter William Goldman or former studio executive John Schimmel.

William Goldman has written classic screenplays like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *All the President's Men* and *The Great Waldo Pepper* and a screenwriter for twenty years when the book was written, Goldman's book is a mixture of memoir and “field guide” to the world of screenwriting from someone in the “trenches” on the front-lines. The book is a combination of gossip, anecdotes, cynical wisdom, interviews and some of the best advice on screenwriting ever put on paper. In addition to all of this, there is also a full version of the classic *Butch Cassidy* screenplay included in the book as well as parts of others Goldman has written. While Goldman does discuss some elements of screenwriting such as the beginnings, endings and subtext of screenplays, these are given space in the book that is mostly concerned with providing the reader for a feeling of the screenwriting business.

There are a number of ways to learn the art and craft of screenwriting. Certainly one is by reading the “how to” books on writing screenplays. Another is by reading the classic screenplays, such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. One of the best ways is by working in the industry and interacting with the other people who create films. For all who have never worked in the industry but want to get a feeling for the world of screenwriting, Goldman's book is as close as they can come. It's pretty close.

As Goldman notes, “In terms of authority, screenwriters rank somewhere between the man who guards the gate and the man who runs the studio (this week).” The book brilliantly explores this “between” space better than any other book. Unfortunately, the book was written in the early 80s. If only there was a modern William Goldman to write a new “adventures” book for contemporary screenwriters that explores this “between” space.

* * *

“There are too many gurus peddling pure craft in lieu of giving equal emphasis to content and artistry.”

John Schimmel
Screenwriting: Behind Enemy Lines

If truth were told, the greatest antagonists for screenwriters are not the ones they create on the page but the ones that exist off the page in the real world. These grand antagonists are the studios. For many screenwriters studios are a type of “enemy” always at battle with the heroic efforts put forth in their screenplays. Screenwriting books tell screenwriters how to create antagonists on the page but hardly any of them discuss this particular form of enemy called the film studio. The reason is simple. Few authors of screenwriting books have ever worked for studios. Its operations remain secretive and subject to speculation.

John Schimmel used to work for the “enemy” but has never considered them the enemy. As John notes in an email to us, “It’s hard to think of someone as an enemy once you know them.” Or, once you were the enemy. He is that rare hybrid of studio development and production executive who writes about what studios are looking for in screenplays. His book *Screenwriting: Behind Enemy Lines* is based on over twenty years experience with Warner Brothers, Paramount and Ascendant Pictures and gives readers an insider’s view of the art, craft and business of screenwriting.

The slim book is a gold mine of useful nuggets of information and tips on getting screenplays read by studios. One of these tips is that balance in a screenplay between commercialism and the inner truth a screenwriter brings to his or her story. He notes, “Too much consciousness of the commercial prospects of your project can be just as deadly as too little.”

One of the most important things is that a script is seen as a movie in the minds of those who make decisions. There are a number of essential elements executives look for in determining whether they see a script as a movie:

- Characters who carry burdens we share or live fantasies we’d like to share
- A story with something at stake that’s important to the audience
- Writers who value what they have to say and say it coherently
- Mastery over a subject
- Roles in script that are castable
- A screenplay pointed at a clear target audience

Perhaps the most important element being “a universally recognized dilemma and a character trapped inside it.” What makes a great film is the same thing that makes a great story: a clearly defined journey taken by a character of clear humanity, and a clear point of view/attitude them, placed in a context that defines the stakes and therefore the scale of the film and helps determine how relevant the film feels.

One of the most valuable sections in the book is one called “The Rhythm of Reverses.” As Schimmel observes, “The flow of scenes, one to the next, is as important in screenwriting as the flow of notes is to composing. Here, the two words that need to be engraved over writing desks are “reverses” and “consequences.” He mentions a talk by South Park writers Matt Stone and Trey Parker in which they explained that every scene in a storyline must be connected either by “But Then” or “Therefore.” Translated by Schimmel, this means “every scene or sequence must either compel the one that follows or reverse the motion of its predecessor.” Using this reasoning, Schimmel notes, scenes or sequences connected instead by “And Then” are death as there is not energy in the connection. He offers an excellent short example of how this plays out in his book.

Another valuable section is “Character Creation – A Quick Primer” where he discusses character dialect or tensions within the hero between outward wants and inward needs. “Many a film derives its energy from the journey the protagonist takes to realize that what he/she needs is not necessarily the same as what he/she wants.” To whatever extent possible, screenwriters should construct a character that in certain key ways could not be less suited to the journey ahead.

A part of character creation close to the need/want dialect involves character contradiction. Schimmel provides the example of Richard Kimble in the film *The Fugitive* (which he was closely connected to). In the film, Richard Kimble tries to avoid the law but at the same time stops to give medical help when needed. Another example is the character Butch Cassidy who is both an honorable man but an incorrigible thief. As Schimmel observes, “These contradictions between competing strands in our characters’ personalities are enormously powerful tools to both drive your story and to establish your characters’ humanity, the key to building close relationships with your readers and audience.”

While most screenwriting books warn of the dangers of navigating that “mine field” called Act II of a screenplay, Schimmel places more emphasis on the importance of Act I noting “If the screenplay loses steam in the second or third acts, more often than not it is because the script was not set up or thought out properly in Act One.” And, if the first part is not working, there is almost no chance the script will work as a whole.

Throughout *Screenwriting: Behind Enemy Lines*, Schimmel provides readers with lessons learned from his work on *The Fugitive*, *Batman* and *Face/Off*. While structure is important to him, it does not dominate importance as it does in many other screenwriting books. “The rules of storytelling structure are vital to learn, but once absorbed, the way they are used is malleable and open to experimentation.” He feels screenwriting education has become lopsided with too many gurus peddling pure craft without consideration of content and artistry. A balance is necessary. As he notes, “Your goal should be to *sell* something, but also to *say* something.” Saying something that is true to the screenwriter. This is the most important. His closing advice is for writers to examine their writing for “the truth that is peeking through” and to “hang onto it for all you’re worth.”

2. Step School

John Truby *Anatomy of Story*
Blake Snyder *Save the Cat*

Almost all screenwriting books agree on elements and tools screenplays must contain such as setting, character, action and dialogue. However, few agree on the number of steps in screenplay structure. In a general sense, one can say that the more structural steps a screenplay book (theory) presents, the more it is oriented towards a formula while the less steps it presents, the less formula oriented it is. For this reason, another name for the Step School might be the Formula School.

The original number of steps was three and based around Aristotle *Poetics* and his proclamation a story has a Beginning, Middle and End. In Roman times, Roman playwrights like Plautus and Seneca expanded the three-act structure to five acts and this structure dominated through the plays of Shakespeare. A similar five-part structure is also used in traditional Japanese Noh drama, particularly by Zeami Motokiyo in his work *The Three Paths* (Sando) that originally described a five-part (five-dan) Noh play as the ideal form. In the 18th Century, the five-act format (known as the “five-act play”) was analyzed by Gustav Freytag in *Dramatic Techniques* (*Die Technik des Dramas*).

Much modern screenplay theory adheres to the large divisions of a screenplay into the original three-act structure. However, a number of steps are usually added to this original structure. Popular screenwriting author and teacher Syd Field (*Screenplay*) developed a five-step structure by adding two plot-points to the three-act structure. Frank Daniels developed the eight-sequence approach (outlined in Paul Galino’s *The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*), Blake Snyder a fifteen-step approach (*Save the Cat!*), Christopher Vogler a seventeen-step approach (*The Writer’s Journey* that followed the Joseph Campbell’s *Hero With A Thousand Faces*) and John Truby’s (*The Anatomy of Story*).

* * *

Perhaps the best-known guru of the Formula School is John Truby who presents both a short 7-step approach and an expanded 23-step approach in his *The Anatomy of Story*. (The short and expanded steps are reproduced in Appendix A). The Truby system rejects structural minimalists with their division of screenplay structure into a small number of steps.

One of the leading brands in Hollywood screenwriting books is Blake Snyder’s *Save the Cat!* franchise. The steps of the system can be viewed at in Appendix B. The system is based on a 15-step sequence that makes much sense when one sees it played out in examples in the Snyder book *Save the Cat!* and particularly *Save the Cat Goes to the Movies*.

* * *

The Step School segment of screenwriting books, or what we suggest might also be termed the Formula School, is on the opposite spectrum from the Personal School represented by books such as William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade*. When you commit to writing screenplays based around the Step School, you need to follow the steps and not waiver a great deal. While the structural steps in the Step School are usually found in most screenplay structure, creating a screenplay based on simply the three-acts of the Aristotle structure can be a very different experience from creating a screenplay using Field's five steps, Gulino's eight steps, Synder's 15 steps, Vogler's 17 steps or Truby and Edson's 23 steps.

3. Ancient School

Aristotle *Poetics*

Michael Tierno *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*

Long considered the bible for storytellers, the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory is *Poetics* by Aristotle written around 335 BC. And since screenwriting is cinematic drama one might also say that *Poetics* is really the first book on screenwriting. The work was lost to the Western world and often misrepresented for a long time. It was available through the Middle Ages and Renaissance Italy only through a Latin translation of an Arabic version written by the Muslim polymath Averroes (1126 –1198 AD).

Much of Aristotle's *Poetics* should sound familiar to modern students of drama. This is because many terms used by Aristotle have been re-cycled and renamed through history but not many of his ideas have been changed. The main part of the book consists of Aristotle's discussion of tragedy. This discussion consists of six parts beginning with what Aristotle considers the most important and proceeding to the least important. He identifies the six parts of drama as plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle.

Aristotle's elements of plot (*mythos*) contain elements familiar to modern dramatists such as reversals, recognitions and suffering. He notes that the best plot should be "complex" involving a change of fortune. It should imitate actions arousing fear and pity. Thus it should proceed from good fortune to bad and involve a high degree of suffering for the protagonist, usually involving physical harm or death.

In his discussion of character (*ethos*) Aristotle says that it is better if a tragic accident happens to a hero because of a mistake he makes (*hamartia*) rather than things happening anyway. While this might sound unfamiliar, what Aristotle really is discussing here is the idea that the Hero of a dramatic work needs to have some need at the beginning and that there must be some igniting incident that sets the Hero on his/her way to recognition and fulfillment of this need. The Hero should possess the following characteristics: goodness (as opposed to the badness of the Villain), consistency and appropriateness.

Aristotle's "thought" and "diction" parts of tragedy can be re-named and categorized under "dialogue" in modern screenwriting terms. Thought (*dianoia*) involves dialogue that explains character while diction (*lexis*) involves the quality of dialogue.

Finally, Aristotle observes that spectacle (*opsis*) refers to the visual part of the play, including set, costumes and props. Basically, anything one sees in the play. In modern terms, Aristotle's spectacle translates into setting, costume and props. Aristotle calls spectacle the "least artistic" element of tragedy, and the "least connected" with the work of the poet (playwright). For

example he observes if the play has “beautiful” costumes but “bad” acting story, there is “something wrong” with it. Even though that “beauty” may save the play it is “not a nice thing.” However, one might question categorizing visual elements as the least important aspect of tragedy since this visual element has greatly increased in importance since the time of Aristotle.

* * *

Many screenwriting gurus say “Everything you need to know about how to write good drama is in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.” But they never explain what’s actually in that work. Michael Tierno explains *Poetics* for modern screenwriters. As a review in *Variety* observed, enlisting *Poetics* as a guide to dramatic writing is a well-worn tool for teachers, but Michael Tierno makes it his own by targeting the silver screen and giving examples of its application in films like *American Beauty*, *The Godfather* and *Rocky*. Tierno, a story analyst for Miramax when he wrote *Aristotle’s Poetics for Screenwriters*, attempts to show how Aristotle is relevant to the modern screenwriter.

Tierno puts a new spin on Aristotle as the master of philosophy, calling him not only the greatest mind in western civilization but also the “world’s first movie story analyst.” At the beginning of his book he notes that the “criteria Hollywood executives use to evaluate screenplays are exactly those the legendary philosopher Aristotle thought were the nuts and bolts of ancient drama more than 2,000 years ago!”

A type of *Poetics for Dummies*, Tierno pulls certain quotes of Aristotle out of the book that could be listed as basic elements of screenwriting. For example, is some of the wisdom of Aristotle mined by Tierno:

- The ability to plot, or create a powerful structure, is the most important aspect of writing. “Good writers serve their story” while “bad writers serve their own agendas.”
- The story shouldn’t be made to say what the writer wants to say, but what the story demands.
- Dramatic unity is achieved using a plot that represents one complete action.
- A plot should have its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin the whole.
- Talent for writing dialogue and character comes first.

The book also discusses Aristotle’s three-act structure as it relates to screenwriting. Aristotle observes in *Poetics* that a whole has a “beginning, a middle and end.” However, Tierno observes that that quote from *Poetics* has led to a common misconception by many screenwriters that *Poetics* preaches a three-act structure as the key template for a story.

However, Tierno notes that *Poetics* never stipulates a three-act structure but rather discusses two movements: the “complication” and the “denouement.” Tierno quotes Aristotle’s *Poetics*:

Every tragedy (or “dramatic story” as Tierno translates Aristotle’s concept of tragedy for the modern world) is part Complication and in part Denouement; the incidents before the opening scene, and ... also of those within the play, forming the Complication; and the rest the Denouement. By Complication I mean all from the beginning of the story to the point just before the change in the hero’s fortunes; by Denouement, all from the beginning of the change to the end.

Obviously much has changed since Aristotle’s time but much has remained the same. The old adage there is nothing new under the sun certainly applies to screenwriting. While Aristotle’s original words have been recast with their modern versions, the original concepts and ideas they express are still very much alive and well in modern screenwriting. Michael Tierno’s *Aristotle’s Poetics for Screenwriters* proves this.

4. Drama School

Lajos Egri *The Art of Dramatic Writing*
Will Dunne *The Dramatic Writer's Companion*

Up until the advent of talking pictures in 1927, writers only had to script physical action and title cards. With the beginning of talking pictures, writers had to also write dialogue and Hollywood producers turned to experts to solve this problem. The experts they found were playwrights working on Broadway. This initial close relationship between playwrights and screenwriters gradually faded as screenwriting developed into its own particular genre. However, a few books on playwriting continue to be utilized in Hollywood. The greatest book to survive the old affiliation is Lajos Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing* first published in 1946 and still a perennial favorite among screenwriters.

The book is divided into a three major parts: premise, character and conflict. One could consider these the building blocks of drama. There is a fourth part called "General" under which Egri puts additional elements of plays. There is very little in the book on the structural aspects of a play as the three-act or five-act structure of a play is a given and not subject to the structural debate in screenwriting.

The premise section is one of the best explanations of premise ever put on paper and gives examples of premise of some of the great plays of history such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Ghosts* and *Othello*. While most screenwriting books offer sections on premise, the premise section of Egri's book is perhaps the most extensive. The fact that it relates to plays does not subtract from its value as a guide to premise for screenplays.

The character section also offers a superb exploration of creating dramatic characters with an excellent summary of the aspects of character in the "Bone Structure" part of the section as well as discussion of techniques such as "The Dialectical Approach" and "The Unity of Opposites." The conflict section again offers an excellent introduction to such topics as "Jumping," "Rising," and "Movement" while the final section called "General" covers a number of other elements such as "Exposition," "Dialogue" and "Obligatory Scene."

To those who are familiar with screenwriting books, much of what Egri says will seem familiar. This is because much of *The Art of Dramatic Writing* has been utilized by screenwriters and screenwriting books. In many ways, if Aristotle's *Poetics* serves as the original screenplay guide, Egri's book updates of Aristotle's theories for the 20th century playwriting. The book was one of the few present at the beginning of the screenwriting genre and the elements and techniques it

expresses have never been rejected but rather updated and translated into screenwriting, that close cousin of playwriting.

* * *

One of the best modern updating's of many of the principles and techniques expressed in Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing* is Will Dunne's *The Dramatic Writer's Companion*. While Dunne is a playwright, his book is directed to both playwrights and screenwriters. The book published by the University of Chicago Press is one of the finest compilations of principles for modern drama. While primarily aimed at playwrights, screenwriters can learn much from it. As Dunne notes, it provides tools to develop characters, cause scenes, and build stories.

While many screenwriting books argue the primacy of structure, Dunne's book starts with the principle that character is key to the story. As Dunne says, "The character is not something added to the scene or to the story. Rather the character is the scene. The character is story." It is a similar viewpoint of Egri in *The Art of Dramatic Writing* when Egri places character as the "bone structure" of story noting "Character is the fundamental material we are forced to work with, so we must know character as thoroughly as possible."

5. Mythology School

Joseph Campbell *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*
Christopher Vogler *The Writer's Journey*
Stuart Voytilla *Myth And The Movies*
James Bonnet *Stealing Fire From The Gods*
Jennifer Van Bergen *Archetypes for Writers*

The great mythologist Joseph Campbell discovered that the Hero in literature throughout history goes through a common journey delineated by a particular sequence. Campbell was one of the greatest comparative mythologists of all time and found the particular sequence of the hero's journey was common to all cultures and all periods of time.

Campbell's famous book *Hero With A Thousand Faces* expressed this sequence in the three basic actions of departure, initiation and return. Within this three-part structure, Campbell identified the following seventeen steps:

Departure

- Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the Call
- Supernatural Aid
- Crossing First Threshold
- Belly of the Whale

Initiation

- Road of Trials
- Meeting With Goddess
- Woman as Temptress
- Atonement With Father
- Apotheosis
- Ultimate Boon

Return

- Refusal of Return
- Magic Flight
- Rescue From Without
- Crossing Return Threshold
- Master of Two Worlds
- Freedom to Live

Veteran story consultant and teacher Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* explores the powerful relationship between mythology and storytelling by translating Joseph Campbell's mythic structure into screenplay structure. Perhaps the largest impetus to the formation of the

Mythology School was the revelation that George Lucas was an avid fan of Joseph Campbell's *Hero With A Thousand Faces* and created his Star Wars films based on Campbell's ideas about mythology.

* * *

While Vogler mentions many films in his book, for the most part he mentions these in passing as the major focus of his book is on the structure of Campbell's *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. The exception Vogler makes is the inclusion of the Star Wars films since the Mythology School of screenwriting developed from these. In this way, Stuart Voytilla's book *Myth And The Movies* serves as a type of sequel to Vogler's book providing a detailed application of the Mythology School to fifty key films.

Breaking the journey of the Hero into stages, Voytilla shows its application in various film genres such as comedy, horror, romance, science fiction, western and action-adventure using film examples like *Casablanca*, *African Queen*, *Annie Hall*, *Silence of the Lambs* and *Seven Samurai*. In the course of the book, Voytilla provides charts, maps, and consideration of various archetypal characters of Campbell (and Carl Jung) such as the *shadow*, *trickster*, *herald* and *shapeshifter* as well as milestones along the journey such *elixir*, *threshold* and *road back*.

* * *

James Bonnet's *Stealing Fire From The Gods* is a difficult book to place because of the wide-ranging areas it brings together such as world mythology, depth psychology and literature. In this sense, Bonnet and his approach contains aspects of the Psychology School as well as the Mythology School. Bonnet notes in his Foreword, "The knowledge contained in this book is a continuation of the work begun by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell."

The book introduces readers to a new model of the human psyche Bonnet calls the Golden Paradigm. The model was discovered through investigation of patterns hidden in stories. As Bonnet notes, "These new patterns reveal all of the psychic dimensions, their structure, their hierarchy, their conflicts and their goals." The psychological models become story models when they are used to create new stories and reveal how the conscious and creative unconscious interact to form a "creative partnership."

Also introduced in the book is Bonnet's Storywheel that brings the different types of stories together into one grand design. Bonnet observes "All great stories, ancient or modern, have a place on this wheel and when taken together in this way reveal their deeper, more amazing secrets." One of the secrets discovered are the life cycles experienced from birth to death. Bonnet notes, "The archetypes, patterns of action and cycles of transformation revealed in story are the same archetypes, patterns and cycles which run through every individual and every group ... played out in life's important stages."

* * *

While Bonnet's *Stealing Fire* ranges over mythology and depth psychology, Jennifer Van Bergen's *Archetypes for Writers* offers a guide for accessing and enriching characters that already exist inside people. As Van Bergen writes: "This approach has little to do with how to 'create' characters or plot stories. Rather, it is more about how to find your character and story archetypes, or even how to have them find you. Underlying this approach is the premise that each person carries within them a given set of character and story archetypes."

Van Bergen, a trained Shakespearean actor, writer and teacher, calls the process of discovering inner archetypes "arkhelogy" or focusing on discovering an imprint embedded in a person observed. The imprint is the archetype. She points out that the work of finding character archetypes does not begin with identifying or naming archetypes, but rather with the application of a set of skills and activities.

6. Sequence School

Frank Daniels – USC School of Cinematic Arts
Paul Galino *The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*
Eric Edson *The Story Solution*

While a scene involves one setting, a number of settings that together possess a unity are called a film sequence. The Sequence School holds that screenplays are created from a number of sequences or collections of scenes. The major proponent of this school is the sequence structure popularized by Paul Galino in *The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*.

The Sequence School originated in early Hollywood cinema when entire films could not be put on one reel. As Galino notes in his book, the beginning of movie projection in 1897 was characterized by projectors that could only hold one-reelers, or films no longer than one thousand feet. At the projection rate of 18 frames per second, the one-reeler films lasted only ten to fifteen minutes.

In 1910 for both artistic and economic reasons, films were extended beyond fifteen minutes and one reel. Because most theaters had only one projector, the projectionist was required to stop the projector, swap reels and start the show again. During this time, the audience had to wait in the darkened theater. Often there was live entertainment to pass the time until the next reel was projected.

Screenwriters of the time dealt with this time limit by dividing films into sequences that started and ended close around these fifteen-minute intervals. To do this they often created title cards announcing “End of Act I” and “Start of Act II.” These interruptions required that the narrative be adapted to conform to these restrictions. By the late 1920s, when the full-length feature film of 120 minutes came to dominate the cinema, most theaters had two-projectors where reels could end and begin almost seamlessly so stopping the reel was no longer a problem. Therefore, early adherence to writing films in fifteen-minute sequences for each reel was no longer a problem.

However, the structure of 120-minute feature films divided into fifteen-minute sequences persists to this day. The approach was revived and applied to modern screenplays in the 1990s by Frank Daniel of USC’s School of Cinematic Arts who designed the program around the sequence approach and is recognized as formalizing the sequence approach. A short outline of the sequence approach is reproduced in Appendix G.

* * *

Paul Galino notes in *The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*, “The persistence of this arrangement suggests that something deeper is at work than the somewhat accidental arrival of cinema with thousand foot reels.” What is this deeper something? Galino suggests it is tied to human physiology and the notion that live drama throughout history has been tied to an experience ranging from 1 ½ to 3 hours. Beyond this time limit, attention suffers. The division of two hour feature films into ten to fifteen minute sequences might also address the physiology of human attention in that the audience’s a two hour experience watching a film needs various levels of intensity (stories within the big story) or will become bored, with their attention fading.

While the Sequence School has similarities with other schools by its focus on a particular number of steps in screenplay structure, its major difference is that the eight sequences represent eight self-contained stories within themselves rather than steps in structure propounded in books like Truby’s *The Anatomy of Story*, Edson’s *The Story Solution* or Snyder’s *Save the Cat!*

And, the major purpose of these smaller stories within the larger story is to hold the audience’s attention over the period of a two-hour film by making them interested in what happens next. In this regard, Galino quotes E.M. Forester who observed about drama “It has only one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And conversely it can only have one fault: that of making the audience not want to know what happens next.”

To this end, Frank Daniel identified four main tools at the screenwriter’s disposal to keep the audience asking what happens next. These tools are telegraphing, dangling cause, dramatic irony and dramatic tension.

- Telegraphing is explicitly telling the audience what will happen before it happens. (A related tool is false telegraphing which explicitly tells the audience something will happen which does not.)
- A dangling cause happens when the audience witnesses a causal scene but doesn’t see the corresponding effect until later in the film.
- Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something important that the characters do not. A scene of dramatic irony is flanked by a scene in which the audience learns something, and a scene in which the characters finally learn what the audience has known. Dramatic irony can be enhanced when some of the characters are aware of what the audience knows, but other characters are unaware of it.
- Dramatic tension is described by Frank Daniels as occurring when “Someone wants something badly and is having trouble getting it.” Daniels observed that dramatic tension plays itself out in two kinds of dramatic stories: chases and escapes that are two variations of dramatic tension. In the chase situation, someone wants something and is having trouble getting it. In the escape scenario, someone is trying to escape something and is having trouble doing so.

While the Sequence School offers some good arguments for eight structural steps that use Daniels’ four devices, most of Galino’s *The Hidden Structure of Screenplays* is devoted to giving

examples of this approach in a number of classic films like *Double Indemnity*, *North by Northwest*, *The Graduate* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The application of the eight-act sequence approach in these films is meticulously demonstrated in these films to the point that it is often difficult to see their structure in any way other than the eight-step sequence approach.

* * *

Another screenwriting professor, author and script consultant ultimately should be considered within the Sequence School although he has 23 steps in his sequence rather than the USC 8-step approach discussed by Galino. Edson's excellent book is a rare blend of the Step School of formula screenplay writing with the more free-form style of the Sequence School.

We had originally placed Edson within the Step School with his very structured approach to screenwriting consisting of the highest number of actions suggested by any of the current screenplay theorists. Or, rather tied with John Truby who suggests 23 plot steps in his respected *The Anatomy of Story*.)

However, upon sharing early drafts of this book with professor Edson, he argued to me convincingly that he really belonged in the Sequence School with the following email:

"I believe there's a very big difference between a steps formula and Hero Goal Sequences. The real core and focus of my book is this new Hero Goal Sequences/Fresh News concept that can create a continuing, rising, hero-driven action line. These Hero Goal Sequences are conceptually true sequence thinking and advance, with great psychological and emotional accuracy, the flow of change required in a successful film way beyond the eight sequences that the great Frank Daniel proposed."

While Edson has great respect for USC film school legend Frank Daniel and his sequence approach to screenplays, he feels he has advanced the sequence method Daniel proposed. *Story Solution* has a 23-step sequence screenplay Edson mentions above and is reproduced in Appendix F. Edson has written 17 feature screenplays on assignment for various film companies and is professor and Director of the Graduate Program in Screenwriting at California State University Northridge. Published in 2011, Edson's book is a relatively newcomer to screenwriting books but a book that has received high praise from members of the film industry as well as other screenwriting teachers. Again, its brilliance in part comes from forging a connection between the Step (Formula) School and the Sequence School of USC. But rather than just connecting these, it extends them.

7. Plot School

George Polti *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*
William Wallace Cook *Plotto*
Christopher Booker *Seven Basic Plots*
Tom Sawyer & Arthur David Weingarten *Plots Unlimited*

Plot is created from the events that make up a story. It is certainly not an exclusive element of screenplays. While almost all screenwriting books discuss plots a handful of books attempt to make plotting into a science or discover a typology of basic plots through the history of stories.

Typology of Plot

“He had likewise projected, but at what part of his life is not know, a work to show how small a quantity of real fiction there is in the world; and that the same images, with very little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written.”

Dr. Samuel Johnson
In Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*

In 1894, the French critic Georges Polti (1867 – 1946) identified thirty-six plots he claimed all drama derived from. Polti’s book *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* attempted to categorize every dramatic situation that might occur in a story or performance. To do this, Polti analyzed classical Greek texts and classical and contemporaneous French works. In addition, he analyzed a handful of non-French authors.

Of course the title of the book makes a bold claim that has appealed to a particular group of writers who stay very close to these plot patterns suggested by Polti. Others think the book is difficult to understand and that no one can make the claim there are a certain number of basic plots. The reviews of the book on Amazon are mixed garnering three stars among 19 reviewers. Some categories are too close together. There is some unintelligible writing in the book such as the “In the second, by means of a contraction analogous to that which abbreviates a syllogism to an enthymeme, this undecided power is but an attribute of the persecutor himself.”

One reviewer on Amazon writes “Legend has it that Georges Polti heard that there were 36 possible plots, and set about creating a list of plots to match the 36. He claims that this number isn't special, and there may be other classifications a bit higher, or a bit lower. He also says that these correspond to the 36 basic emotions people have, which I honestly don't see.”

While many are attracted to the book’s bold thirty-six plot typology, hanging out in the areas of stories such as plotting is very different than hanging out in other areas of screenwriting books.

The Plot School is very different from other schools of screenwriting books we discuss such as the Step School or the Personal School. One starts with plot and ends with plot without a focus too far away from this area. But then it was the one that Aristotle in *Poetics* considered the most important of the six elements of drama in lists and perhaps it is the element of screenwriting one should stay closest to? It is a good question to be pondered and considered and then acted upon by screenwriters.

This is most likely a true story as Polti was familiar with an earlier work called by Carlos Grozzi observing that there were thirty-six dramatic situations. In the Introduction of his book, Polti claims to be continuing the work of Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi (1720 – 1806) who had first identified 36 dramatic situations. In effect, Polti simply took the thirty-six number that Grozzi proposed and packaged it into a modern context. His own brand in the story industry so to speak. The thirty-six dramatic situations are reproduced in Appendix I.

* * *

Perhaps one of the great updating of the Polti book *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* is the massive book by Christopher Booker titled *The Seven Basic Plots*. It is a book that reviewers in the area of literature as well as famous authors like Richard Adams creator of *Watership Down* as well as critics from the *London Times*, the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Washington Post*. Many claim it a masterpiece.

And of all the screenwriting books out there today, this little known book might really be the true masterpiece that nobody has heard of in Hollywood. It is never mentioned in screenwriting books or classes or seminars. Simply no one has heard of this book published in 2004 by Continuum.

In Part One of *The Seven Basic Plots* Booker presents these plot structures. The thirty-six situations of Gozzi and Polti have now been taken down to twelve combinations and combinations of these twelve create seven. Few have seen these but here they are:

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. The Monster (II) and the Thrilling Escape From Death
3. Rages to Riches
4. The Quest
5. Voyage and Return
6. Comedy
7. Comedy (II) The Plot Disguised
8. Tragedy (I): The Five Stages
9. Tragedy (II): The Divided Self
10. Tragedy (III): The Hero As Monster

11. Rebirth

12. The Dark Power: From Shadow into Light

In many ways, these categories define modern film genres as well as they have been defined. At least defined in a contemporary manner. There is little chance of any of the modern books on film genre ever equaling the power and magnitude of the early books on film genre.

There is fine emotional balance needed within a screenwriter (it seems from the perspective of basic plots) between writing formulaic screenplays and Personal School of screenplays. Of starting with a plot idea. Or the original dramatic musings and methods of Aristotle thousands of years ago. An artist needs some type of popular success and acceptance without, at the the same time, selling out to the masses. It seems to present a delicate balance with culture's greatest artists. A battle between the inner forces of creation and the outward forces of expression.

From the high, broad perspective of story genres and basic plot types, one has truly large elements one might focus their attention towards. In other words, writers might be wise to focus on particular genres and well-known brands within these genres. Providing the leading seven genres of public attention, public entertainment, Booker has written one of the books for his time.

* * *

The book *Seven Basic Plots* attempts to define and argue there are seven basic dramatic situations today. In many respects, it is more of a book for literary critics and academics than for general readers or screenwriters. It has received hardly any notice within the ranks of those who carry the "story" torch into the future. Screenwriters are certainly part of this group.

Everyone might do well to ponder the big questions that *The Seven Basic Plots* presents. Few, though, seem interested in pondering large questions in our era of the ten-second attention spans and the ten-second Tweets. But even thinking about the area of genres, major story areas, one wonders if twelve is the right number? Does each one of us have their own personal perspective on this number of plots? And what this personal perspective (plot) might be?

Plots of life might be the best way to define a particular school. Plots of life might be a better title than seven dramatic stories. A number of years ago the literary critic Northrup Frye expressed the four major literary archetypes in his brilliant book of literary criticism called *The Anatomy of Criticism*. One could call the areas of tragedy, comedy, romance and satire all major genres hovering over much today. As the way we tell stories, continues to segment into more and more steps in a plot and perhaps smaller and smaller stories.

Perhaps we have moved too far away from the original purpose of the particular art-form of cinema and no longer understand its original purpose and reason for being. Endless plots follow endless plots. We hear the same plot told over and over each day in the popular media. The daily news. Everyone we talk to. There is the current "plot" of popular culture. The current "story" as to how everything moves. The Hero of culture. The current Villain of culture. Do we write the plot out there in culture we are attacked by each day? Or, do we create and write our own plot?

Perhaps there are twelve plot areas. Or perhaps one makes their own list of plot types. The thinking is big picture thinking before one hunkers down within the genres of a particular story form. They enter the screenwriting world at a high point. It is a perspective that gives them a broad, overall view of that particular cottage industry called screenwriting.

A screenwriter could do not much better than choosing and understanding a particular film genre to work within almost exclusively. In many ways the question of what genre to work in should come before anything else. There are a few brilliant books on film genre but this is beyond the scope of our current work at hand. *The Seven Basic Plots* is the modern book on story plots, or story genres or types. Hollywood will continue to push new films under past brand tents. New genres will come and go. However, in the end the number and type of genres in the film industry might mirror those in Booker's brilliant book.

Science of Plot

“*Plotto*, an invention which reduces literature to an exact science.”

Boston Globe
September 1928

Perhaps the original book in this area is William Wallace Cook's 1928 *Plotto: The Master Book of All Plots*. Cook (1867-1933) was a Canadian writer of hundreds of nickel and dime novels over his forty-four year career from romances (*Little Vassar Girl*) to science fiction (*Jim Dexter*, *Cattleman*). Each production was always carefully molded into the same 40,000-word format of sixteen chapters.

As Cook said, “A writer is neither better nor worse than any other man who happens to be in trade. He is a manufacturer.” The comparison of a writer to a manufacturer was an apt comparison at the time with the rise of high-speed presses and wide distribution through the emerging railroads, writing had become an industry and the masses wanted a written product that was cheap, potent and satisfying. As Paul Collins notes in the Forward to *Plotto*, “Cook couldn't rely on anything so capricious as artistic inspiration. He needed to systematize fiction so that nearly anything within his grasp could be readily converted into narrative – including the system itself.” So, as Cook eased into old age in the same Michigan home he had occupied for three decades, he decided his system of storytelling would become ... another book.

Cook was familiar with Polti's *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* but went much further than Polti. He created a system to mix-up the various thirty-six plots. The 1928 *Boston Globe* described the promise of this new system noting “It is possible to develop several million original works.” Like those old cardboard wheels you used to turn to put different features on a face. This is similar to the *Plotto* system. A type of dial in plot creation system. One of the greatest selling authors in history, Erle Stanley Gardner once said, “I secured data from it which has been worth a great deal to me.” Gardner created his own plot system, a system he used over and over in creating his best-selling books. As creator of Perry Mason, he sold more than 170 million books in American during his lifetime.

* * *

An updating of *Plotto* for the modern world is the *Plots Unlimited* by Tom Sawyer and Arthur David Weingarten. First published in 1994, the book updates Cook's *Plotto* for the modern world by making the information in *Plotto* more accessible and more systematic. The system they propose is a method of creating more than 200,000 possible plot combinations coming from the areas of Character Combinations, Story Types and Sub-Types and Master Plots or Themes.

As the authors say in the Introduction, "By combining these components and selecting plot turns from the myriad choices *Plot Unlimited* offers, you will generate outlines for a series of well-constructed, unified story segments which you can later combine, edit and use as the basis for your creative efforts."

While the outlines generated by *Plots Unlimited* can be immediately used by the screenwriter, the authors real intention is that the suggestions made in the book "spark your creativity and send your imagination off in entirely new and unexpected directions." The authors also call it an invaluable reference work as well as a compendium of plot turns and twists that serves as a "sure-cure" for writer's block.

8. Psychology School

Erich Neumann *The Origins and History of Consciousness*

Carl Jung *Symbols of Transformation*

William Indick *Psychology for Screenwriters*

Peter Dunne *Emotional Structure*

Pamela Jaye Smith *Inner Drives*

The Psychology School might be the furthest away from the Formula School or the Step School as it proposes the proposition that all screenplays come from the psychology of the individual rather than the themes contemporary collective culture imposes on us. As such, screenplays to this group are an expression of something deep within the particular individual possessing little connection with the outward world. Any inner and outer connections more through the magic of synchronicity than anything else.

One of the boldest and far-reaching statements of the order or sequence the inner world of mankind has been expressed through history is Erich Neumann's brilliant *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. Published in 1954 by the Bollingen Foundation through Princeton University Press, the book is divided into Part I and Part II.

Part I

The Mythological Stages In the Evolution of Consciousness

A.The Creation Myth

1. The Uroboros
2. The Great Mother
3. The Separation of the World Parents: The Principle of Opposites

B.The Hero Myth

1. The Birth of the Hero
2. The Slaying of the Mother
3. The Slaying of the Father

C.The Transformation Myth

1. The Captive and the Treasure
2. Transformation, or Osiris

Part II

Psychological Stages In The Development of Personality

A.The Original Unity

1. Centroverson and Ego Formation
2. The Ego Germ in the Original Uroboric Situation
3. Development of the Ego out of the Uroboros

4. Centroversion in Organisms on the Uroboric Level
5. Centroversion, Ego and Consciousness
6. Further Phases of Ego Development

B. The Separation of the Systems

1. Centroversion and Differentiation
2. The Fragmentation of Archetypes
3. Exhaustion of Emotional Components: Rationalization
4. Secondary Personalization
5. The Transformation of Pleasure-Pain Components
6. The Formation of Authorities Within the Personality
7. The Synthetic Function of the Ego

C. The Balance and Crisis of Consciousness

1. Compensation of the Separated Systems
2. The Schism of the Systems: Culture in Crisis

D. Centroversion and the Stages of Life

1. Prolongation of Childhood and Differentiation of Consciousness
2. Activation of Collective Unconscious and Ego Changes
3. Self-Realization of Centroversion in the Second Half of Life

What Neumann attempts with his *Origins and History of Consciousness* is basically the link between the development of cultural consciousness and the human consciousness of the individual through his or her life. The two are intimately related Neumann argues.

The book followed a brilliant study of psychosis by Carl Jung of one of his patients in the early years of the 20th century. The book was titled *Symbols of Transformation* and followed the progression of symbols within the mind of a woman who was termed psychotic and schizophrenic at the time.

Jung approaches this area from the perspective of looking at the major symbols a psychotic person passes through. Jung believes that psychosis provides a type of window to the collective unconsciousness of the times. Rather than describe the actions of a person that is an outcast of current society and culture, one that is psychotic (including artists and screenwriters in this category) sees things with clearer glasses (as Proust might say) and more connection to their environment. This was the feeling that Carl Jung had when he analyzed the woman that became the basis for *Symbols of Transformation*.

His book written in the early part of the 20th century followed the path of a psychotic patient. Yet might Joseph Campbell's *Hero With A Thousand Faces* (about the path of the Hero through history) be similar to Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*? Was there a connection between the path written in myth and the path written in the psychosis of a particular patient?

The large question in the Psychology School of screenwriting is the relationship between the stages of the unconsciousness and the structure of story plots. This is a topic explored by some interesting books in the field.

* * *

Perhaps one of the best attempts to translate psychology to the screen in the book *Psychology for Screenwriters* by William Indick. The book offers the theories of Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Alfred Adler and Rollo May as they relate to the human mind. Indick, a developmental psychologist, is an active screenwriter and screenwriting consultant and Assistant Professor of Psychology at Dowling College in Oakdale, New York. As Indick notes in the Introduction to his book, “A thorough understanding of the unconscious mind – the birthplace of fantasy, dreams, and imagination – is a fundamental point of departure for creating psychologically resonant scripts and films.”

In elucidating a psychoanalytic approach to screenwriting, Indick notes that films “visceral appeal as a larger than life medium on both visual and auditory levels makes it an extremely powerful psychological force.” Viewers become so emotionally connected to the characters and plot and that the illusion on the screen becomes intertwined with their own psychological lives. Indick notes this is achieved through the unconscious process of “identification” where the people in the audience actually become the characters they identify with in the film. This makes them experience vicariously the same psychological development and catharsis that the characters on the screen experience. By learning about the inner workings of the human mind, Indick observes that filmmakers and screenwriters bring more skill and depth to their craft and create more powerful and resonant films.

Like screenwriting, true psychoanalysis is not a science but an art. “In this sense,” notes Indick, “psychoanalysis and screenwriting are two sides of the same coin.” They are both creative arts aimed at the investigation and understanding of the human character, mind and soul. They are both intrinsically engaged in the personality and personal development of their subjects. They are both immersed in the world of archetypal symbols and mythological figures. And they both are rooted firmly in the unconscious realm of human experience.

* * *

The book *Emotional Structure: A Guide for Screenwriters* is by Emmy and Peabody Award-winning producer, writer and teacher Peter Dunne. While Indick's *Psychology for Screenwriters* offers main theories from six leading psychologists, Dunne's book focuses on the psychology of emotion. Dunne observes that screenwriters often get the plot right at the expense of the story's real power. “The result,” he notes, “is a script that is logical in every way, yet unmoving.” Dunne notes that the missing piece needed will not be found by adding more action. You can't stir the soul with a car chase. And the problem will not be helped by a change of location. The only location that matters is deep inside the emotions of the protagonist.

When any scene is created, whether it's a police pursuit on the interstate or a heart-to-heart in the kitchen, the emotional reasoning behind the scene has to be evident. When a screenwriter develops the emotional current that sustains the action, they create a scene with heart and soul and both the screenwriter and the reader are going to feel the passion. Much of Dunne's excellent

book is concerned with showing the relationship of the three-act screen structure to emotional structure and connecting internal and external themes.

* * *

Pamela Jaye Smith's *Inner Drives* is based on the Eight Classic Centers of Motivation. In Sanskrit, these centers are called the chakras, but other cultures have other names for them. An author, international consultant, speaker, and Producer/Director with over 30 years experience in feature films and television, she has authored other books relating to inner drives for developing screen characters. Other books by Smith, extend the ideas of *Inner Drives* to creating powerful villains in *The Power of the Dark Side* or going beyond the myths not explored by Joseph Campbell's *Hero With A Thousand Faces* in her book *Beyond The Hero's Journey*. Her book *Symbols, Images & Codes* explores the secret language of meaning in media.

The book *Inner Drives* explores the core of human thoughts, feelings and actions by looking closely at the energy centers or chakras so characters can be created from the inside out making them more authentic and easier for an audience to connect with. These energy centers are bundles of nerves in the body associated with an endocrine gland that affects individuals both physically and emotionally through particular hormones secreted by these glands. For example, the sex hormone comes from the sacral center. The stress hormone from the root center. Creative individuals (archetypes such as artists, detectives, intelligence officers, and writers) with active throat centers, often crave something for their mouth. A lover archetype, with an active sacral center, consumes food like oysters, chocolate, finger foods and champagne.

For each energy center, Smith covers a large array of things to use as references when creating characters such as kinds of clothing, speech, music and physical actions. Many examples of characters in films are provided: Johnny Depp's Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of The Caribbean*; Jody Foster's Clarice Starling in *Silence Of The Lambs*; Samuel L. Jackson's Jules Winnfield in *Pulp Fiction* and Susan Sarandon's Annie Savoy in *Bull Durham*. She includes techniques and exercises to get screenwriters in touch with the energy frequency of their characters, themselves and their audience.

9. Principles School

Robert McKee *Story*

David Howard and Edward Mabley *The Tools of Screenwriting*

Richard Walter *Essentials of Screenwriting*

Lew Hunter *Screenwriting 434*

Carson Reeves *ScriptShadow Secrets*

“No one needs yet another recipe book on how to reheat Hollywood leftovers. We need a rediscovery of the underlying tenets of our art, the guiding principles that liberate talent.”

Robert McKee
Story

The Principles & Elements School of screenwriting might be said to stand somewhere between the Personal School and the Step (or Formula) School of screenwriting. It believes in the personal quality of screenplays while at the same time realizing there are principles screenplays must adhere to. While plot and structure might be important to this school, the most important things ultimately is not plot or structure but rather principles of the craft. The division seems to be between those that fit stories into predetermined steps or sequences and those who work with principles. With a particular knowledge of the craft and use of the particular tool or element they identify and discuss, these books provide tools while the other books on plots and sequences provide a type of map. What is it most important to possess? If one can possess only one of these? A map or a principle?

Robert McKee is one of the leading “brands” in the screenwriting industry and commands a large part of the segment school that focuses on screenwriting principles. McKee’s seminal book *Story* as well as his popular series of seminars makes McKee the leading exponent of the Principles & Elements school of screenwriting. His screenwriting workshops have earned him an international reputation for inspiring novices as well as helped to refine works in progress and put major screenwriting careers back on track. Writers, producers, development executives and agents come to his lecture series. In *Story*, McKee expands on the concepts he teaches in his seminars.

While many screenwriting books focus on formula, McKee focuses on form. The book begins by lamenting the fact that the overall quality of storytelling is eroding. The result, as he notes, forces flawed and false storytelling to substitute spectacle for substance, trickery for truth. “Weak stories,” McKee observes, “desperate to hold audience attention, degenerate into multimillion-dollar razzle-dazzle demo reels. In Hollywood, imagery becomes more and more extravagant, in Europe more and more decorative. The behavior of actors becomes more and more histrionic, more and more lewd, more and more violent.”

The problem goes wider than just stories written by screenwriters notes McKee but applies to all writers from the 70s through the late 90s when *Story* was published. As McKee writes, “The

method of teaching creative writing in American universities has shifted from the intrinsic to the extrinsic. Trends in literary theory have drawn professors away from deep sources of story toward language, codes, text – story seen from the outside.” The result is that the current generation of writers has been undereducated in the prime principles of story.

McKee’s *Story* attempts to remedy this by dividing his book into major sections. Part 1 is titled “The Writer and the Art of Story.” Part 2 is “The Elements of Story.” Part 3 is “The Principles of Story Design” and Part 4 is “The Writer At Work.”

Part 2 “The Elements of Story” discusses story structure and its relationship to setting, genre, character and meaning. While McKee spends considerable time on story structure, he is not as concerned as presenting a particular formula as he is in providing tools and elements to make stories work. He wants the screenwriter to first study story elements before they focus their attention on structure. As McKee says, “A beautifully told story is a symphony unity in which structure, setting, character, genre, and idea meld seamlessly. To find their harmony, the writer must study the elements of story as if they were instruments of an orchestra – first separately, then in concert.”

Part 3 “Principles of Story Design” in *Story* provides a discussion on familiar topics to screenwriters such as the inciting incident, act and scene design, composition and crisis, climax and resolution. The principles provide a method that forces screenwriters to work within a framework. McKee quotes T.S. Eliot at the beginning of Part 3. “When forced to work within a strict framework the imagination is taxed to its utmost – and will produce its richest ideas. Given total freedom the work is likely to sprawl.”

The book attempts to take a more conservative approach to the area of screenwriting than a liberal one of new formulas and anti-structure. As such, it espouses the tenets of what McKee calls Classical Design with the familiar three-act structure, strong protagonists, inciting incidents. Unlike some books that provide rules, McKee’s focus is on providing the screenwriter with “looser-fitting” principles. Classical film structure and old story-telling methods will serve the screenwriter very well. If only he or she will again discover what these are.

* * *

There are other leading screenwriting books in the Principles & Elements school of screenwriting books. Some of the best representatives of this area are David Howard and Edward Mabley’s *The Tools of Screenwriting*, Richard Walter’s *Essentials of Screenwriting*, Lew Hunter’s *Screenwriting 434* and Carson Reeves’ *ScriptShadow Secrets*. All of these books offer helpful principles and tools of screenwriting.

Howard and Mabley’s *The Tools of Screenwriting* is divided into sections on basic storytelling, screenwriting tools and a final section devoted to the analysis of a number of classic films like *North By Northwest*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Citizen Kane*, *Chinatown* and *The Godfather*. Under the tools section of their book, Howard and Mabley cover interesting tools of screenwriting not often discussed in other books such as dramatic irony, planting and payoff, elements of the future and advertising and plausibility.

The books by Lew Hunter and Richard Walter represent insight from two of the leading screenwriting professors at the UCLA Screenwriting Department. Lew Hunter's *Screenwriting 434* refers to Hunter's legendary screenwriting class at UCLA that educated many well-known industry veterans. Hunter has worked for Columbia, Lorimar, Paramount, Disney, NBC, ABC, and CBS as a writer, producer and executive. Currently he is Chair Emeritus of the screenwriting department at UCLA. Hunter takes a conservative approach focusing on three-act structure more than new formulas of the Step School.

Richard Walter has been chairman of UCLA's graduate screenwriting program for almost 35 years. A novelist and screenwriter himself, he lectures and offers master classes in screenwriting throughout the nation and world. His *Essentials of Screenwriting* gives a big acknowledgement to his predecessor Lew Hunter. Walter's book is divided into the major sections of art, craft and business. Wise advice learned from his many years of teaching and writing in one of America's foremost screenwriting schools is provided in the book.

An interesting feature of Walter's book is the sprinkling of principles throughout. One of Walter's principles is that screenwriters should always write their own personal story and eschew current trends in the industry. Walter argues that writers always tell their own story anyway, whether they realize it or not. "Whatever the original concept," Walter notes, "however specific, however narrow, in all instances it is filtered through the peculiar sensibilities of the specific writer. In the end, despite himself, the writer will create a tale that is personal." Walter encourages the writer not to fight the telling of the personal story but rather surrender to it. "It is one battle in which defeat actually amounts to victory."

* * *

The era of blogging has brought screenwriting blogs into existence. One of the best of the screenwriting blogs is the Scriptshadow Secrets blog of Carson Reeves. See the blog at <http://scriptshadow.net>.

Author Carson Reeves began as a screenwriter himself but struggled to figure out the elusive formula for writing a successful screenplay. A number of years ago, he started getting his hands on spec sale scripts and reading them. Within weeks, he learned more about screenwriting than he had since he first started studying it. He then turned his attention from writing to helping others write. This was the genesis behind the Scriptshadow website - a way to teach screenwriting through reading professional screenplays.

The site quickly grew but became controversial due to Reeves breaking down material Hollywood considered private. As such, the site became a "love it or hate it" fixture in Hollywood and the screenwriting community. Even so, the site has tens of thousands of aspiring screenwriters visiting it daily and making it the most popular screenwriting site on the web. The site's most popular feature, the "What I learned" section at the end of each review, was the main inspiration behind the book *Scriptshadow Secrets* as Reeves saw how positively writers responded to quick context-relevant tips.

The book is *Scriptshadow Secrets* provides 500 screenwriting hidden inside 50 well-known movies. As Reeves notes, the book was written as an answer to the glut of tired A-Z screenwriting books that have flooded the market over the years. Instead of another extensive How-To guide, *Scriptshadow Secrets* looks at 50 popular movies from the past six decades and offers approximately ten screenwriting tips from each. The idea in *Scriptshadow Secrets* is both teach screenwriters valuable lessons as well as to show how these lessons are incorporated into successful films. Writers learn by example this way. From *Aliens* to *Pirates Of The Caribbean* to *The Hangover* to *The Empire Strikes Back*, the book of Reeves teaches screenwriting lessons from the greatest films of all time.

In the mean time while a screenwriter (current or potential) ponders all the books in this cottage industry called screenwriting. The so-called screenwriting “how to” market out there. Those willing to pay a considerable amount of money to here the entire McKee method presented. But so many that swear by the method they learn in these seminars. Yes, perhaps many of our greatest storytellers are being trained at the hotel out by LAX the McKee holds his four day seminar expounding on the topics in his brilliant and groundbreaking *Story*. Not only does it provide the principles and application examples of basic screenwriting principles but he suggests to the screenwriter that there are big subjects to be tackled out there. Subjects much larger and more powerful ones than the ones we currently create in our lives. By suggesting the three division with his pyramid in the second chapter of *Story*, McKee becomes one who attempts to define various schools of screenwriters. Just like we do on this Hollywood Safari project you’re reading now.

If nothing else, buy the book and make a chart of the pyramid McKee presents on page 45 of the hardback edition of *Story*, published in 1997. Today, in 2014, McKee’s book somewhat dated by fifteen years. A lot of time in the quickly evolving screenwriting education market out there. McKee has a regular Blog but it is certain he has much to say since *Story*. Perhaps something new or perhaps simply updated *Story* for modern screenwriters.

10. Visual School

Bill Boyle *The Visual Mindscape of the Screenplay*
John Fraim *Battle of Symbols*
Margaret Mehring *The Screenplay: A Blend of Film Form and Content*
Jennifer van Sijll *Cinematic Storytelling*
Bruce Block *The Visual Story*

“The notion of writing moving pictures is absurd. One can’t *write a picture*. One *describes a picture*. And one thing can be said about a really good screenplay: it reads like it’s describing a movie already made.”

Robert Towne
“On Moving Pictures”

Before sound, film was very much a visual medium. As Robert Towne observes in his essay “On Moving Pictures” early filmmakers were obliged to think carefully about making the story and motivation clear. “They knew,” writes Towne, “how much the image could convey and they knew the corollary, how much and how many ways the images could confuse and mislead.”

Alfred Hitchcock echoes the feelings of Towne. In the 1967 book *Hitchcock* by Francois Truffaut, Hitchcock is quoted as saying “In many films now being made, there is very little cinema: they are mostly what I call ‘photographs of people talking.’ When we tell a story in cinema, we should resort to dialog only when it’s impossible to do otherwise.”

Today, most textbooks and courses acknowledge that film is first and foremost a visual medium, but few offer any advice on how to write a screenplay that fully exploits the visual potential of the story. So much copy has been written on story and structure and theme and dialogue and character development that the most essential element of screenwriting is often glossed over, at best, or neglected at worst. With the emphasis on plot points and sequence of actions, screenwriters forget that what they are creating is a sequence of moving pictures rather than moving words.

Of all the leading screenwriting gurus, John Truby probably offers the greatest exploration of visual in screenwriting in his chapter “Symbol Web” from *The Anatomy of Story*. But Truby argues that images and symbols in films should be connected to structure and plot. Rather than view symbols as isolated elements in a screenplay, Truby views them as contained within a particular system or “web” within the screenplay. He asks the screenwriter to consider whether there is a particular symbol that expresses the premise or theme of the story. A screenwriter needs to determine the symbols for the characters within the screenplay. He talks about the need to create a web of symbolic objects in a screenplay. Symbols are interconnected with structure. But for Truby, plot structure dominates over visual structure.

Although Truby devotes a substantial part of his book to discussing visual elements of a screenplay in the form of a “symbol web” he does not give primary importance to visual imagery in structuring screenplays. However, a number of others do place primary importance on the visual elements of film. In a large sense, this group is grounded in the past rather than the future, on the early years of film when all movies were silent and dependent only on moving pictures.

Legendary directors like Truffaut and Hitchcock realize the cinematic properties of film above all else. The silent era was close at hand to them. The directors and producers of these early silent years of film were idols to Hitchcock and Truffaut. Like the Beatles are idolized by the baby boom generation. The silent directors were idolized by directors who followed them like Hitchcock who believed in – as they did - the visual, cinematic storytelling of silent films more than the new wordy, dialogue and plot storytelling that had invaded storytelling with the coming of the talking pictures in 1927. Soon, the age of talking films will almost be ninety years old. It’s a lot of time to grow into something new. Or grow away from something old. One needs to ask whether or not films have moved too far away from cinema and the visual and too far into dialogue and action. It’s one of those “out of the box” questions they teach at weekend seminars I heard about somewhere.

* * *

One member of this new Visual School is Bill Boyle. In his book *The Visual Mindscape of the Screenplay* Boyle, a leading screenwriting consultant and teacher at the well-known UCLA Extension Writer’s Program, observes that a fully realized screenplay reveals itself primarily through images, making use of what he calls the “Visual Mindscape” allowing the reader or viewer to “discover” elements of the story rather than being told about them. This discovery makes the reader or viewer an active participant in the unfolding of the story and the overall experience a more visceral and luminous experience.

As Boyle notes, when one thinks of their favorite film, the thing they most likely remember is an image because an emotional attachment has been established to it. For example, the shower scene in *Psycho*. Or the little alien riding a bike across the face of a full moon in *ET*. Or a baby alien bursting out of the chest of a crewmember in *Alien*.

Even if the screenwriter chooses to ignore it, Boyle says there is one absolute about a screenplay and this is that fact that every scene has an image attached to it. In Boyle’s visual system, the locations of scenes in a screenplay are allegories symbolizing screenplay ideas and concepts.

Boyle believes that a fully realized screenplay exploits the visual potential of each scene making use of what he calls the “Visual Mindscape of the Screenplay.” This is done by exploring:

- The visual composition of the story within the narrative
- The visual expression and interpretation of the character’s inner journey
- The visual stimuli of the story to create a visceral experience within the reader

For example, Boyle offers the Rosebud image in *Citizen Kane*. At no point in the film are we told what “Rosebud” means but when we see the sled thrown into the furnace we put the pieces together. We recognize the implications of his childhood and discover a certain surprising truth about Charles Foster Kane.

The important point here is that *we* discover this truth and thus we *own* it.

* * *

In the 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad observes “the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze.” The famous Conrad phrase was expanded from literature to media in the mid-1960s by Marshall McLuhan. In *Understanding Media* McLuhan observed the “medium is the message” meaning context of communication influences content of communication.

McLuhan was mainly concerned with how various communication mediums like film, television, radio or newspapers influence what they communicate. Their meaning is not inside them “like a kernel but outside” them, enveloping them. However, McLuhan’s statement might also apply to various contexts within particular mediums. For example, the contexts of scenes within a particular story might be considered a series of mediums influencing messages within these mediums.

In the column “Script Symbolology” in *Script Magazine* as well as the book *Battle of Symbols* and manuscript *Symbolism of Place* (www.symbolism.org) he argues that mediums in a story relate to symbols involving place and key elements associated with place, time and space. As symbols in a narrative, story place is subject to two major principles of symbolism: the principle of duality and the principle of correspondence.

A story can be viewed as representing a cycle of the movement of symbols between dualities or opposites. The principle of duality suggests that symbols at the beginning of the cycle (story) should be opposite those at the end of the cycle (story) for greatest dramatic effect. Duality symbols offer bookends for a screenplay. For example, a story might begin at night in a valley and end at day on top of a mountain. The symbols contrast the unconsciousness of feminine night and valley against the consciousness of the masculine day and mountain.

While the principle of duality is concerned with opposition, the principle of correspondence is concerned with similarities, the principle of correspondence embodies the idea that there is always a relationship and harmony between the laws for phenomena on various “planes” of being and life: the physical plane, the mental plane and the spiritual plane. The correspondence principle derives in large part from the ancient Hermetic philosophy that observes “As above, so below” meaning the inner world of the individual is represented in the outer world. The internal world has a relationship to the external world.

Utilizing the principle of correspondence in screenplays means achieving an alignment between the context and content of scenes in screenplays and films. In other words, the place, space and time of a scene needs to correspond with the action, characters, dialogue and objects within a scene. The interior world of characters is best represented in the outside world of the places

containing the character in story scenes. Particularly the hero of the story. The place he/she finds themselves in at the beginning of a story needs to be opposite the place they find themselves in at the end of a story.

In the “Script Symbology” system, a screenplay can be represented by the symbol of a cross and it’s intersection of a horizontal line with a vertical line. The horizontal line represents movement in linear time and the vertical line a non-linear point (scene) within this movement. The beginning symbol of the screenplay is on the left side of the horizontal line and the ending symbol on the right side of the horizontal line. At the same time, the vertical line represents scene points in the movement of symbols between beginning and ending. While symbols at beginning and endings of screenplays should be opposite symbols, those within scenes should possess a “vertical” correspondence between the top of the vertical line and the bottom of the line, between the outer world and the inner world, the context and the content of the scene, the medium and the message of the scene so to speak.

Just as the true symbolism of the cross is really the paradoxical intersection of linear and non-linear time, the real symbolism of screenplays and films also involves this intersection between linear and non-linear time, the movement between duality symbols at the beginning and ending of the story and the alignment or correspondence between symbols within scenes.

* * *

The “Script Symbology” system introduces the dynamics of symbolism into scripts but Jennifer Van Sijll’s *Cinematic Storytelling* translates symbolism dynamics to specific techniques of visual storytelling. In doing so she has created one of the most important books in the Visual School of screenwriting. While *Cinematic Storytelling* is a remarkable achievement, Van Sijll acknowledges her debt to two famous teachers she had at USC in the 80s: Les Novros and Margaret Mehring.

Les Novros (1909-2000) was one of the pioneers in the film business and teacher of a legendary course at USC called Filmatic Expression. As George Lucas once said, “The first time I truly understood the unique quality of film was when I took Les Novros’ class.” The comment of Lucas was contained in an introduction to an out-of-print textbook Novros fashioned from lectures in his *Filmic Expression* class taught at USC from 1941 to 1984.

Born in Passaic, New Jersey, Novros Novros was many things in his life: an artist, animator, teacher and inventor. Perhaps inventor more than anything else. He studied painting at the National Academy of Design in New York City and was an active member of the Art Students League of New York and even studied art at the prestigious Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain. His curiosity in the study of movement lead to an interest in motion pictures. In 1936 he was recruited by the Walk Disney Company to come to Hollywood to work on feature animation projects. Novros worked on the Disney classic *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), and received a credit for art direction for the “Night on Bald Mountain” sequence of *Fantasia* (1940). Later in his career, his documentaries about space inspired a new director called Stanley Kubrick so much he was hired to help with special effects on Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

The other mentor of Van Sijll was Margaret Mehring the USC professor and author of a classic screenwriting book, *Screenplay: A Blend of Film Form and Content*. Mehring was not only an academic innovator of the Filmic Writing Program at USC but was also a political activist. Through her efforts, USC created a monument dedicated to the First Amendment called “Blacklist” based on the Hollywood 10, blacklisted writers during the McCarthy era of the 1950s.

In many ways, Mehring’s *The Screenplay* is a modern updating of earlier works on the visual aspects of film such as Sergei Eisenstein’s famous books *Film Sense* (1942) and *Film Form* (1949). Eisenstein was a pioneer in a specific use of film editing called montage. One of the earliest film theorists, Eisenstein argued montage was the essence of the cinema and *Film Sense* and *Film Form* explain the significance of montage in cinema. Eisenstein believed editing could be used for more than expounding a scene through a “linkage” of related images creating a “collision” of shots. This “collision” of shots could be used to manipulate emotions of the audience and create film metaphors. He believed that an idea should be derived from the juxtaposition of two independent shots, bringing an element of collage into film. He developed what he called “methods of montage.” The work of Eisenstein was somewhat of a casualty to new cinema techniques when films changed from silent to talking but updated for modern filmmaerks by Mehring in *Screenplay*. The book taught screenwriters to think in terms of the unique visual and aural elements of film, create stories using these elements and communicate these stories in words. The information attempted to unite the emerging craft of screenwriting with the visual art of motion pictures.

* * *

In her 2005 book *Cinematic Storytelling*, Jennifer Van Sijll provides a modern interpretation of Novros, Mehring and Eisenstein while, at the same time, giving expression to many of the visual techniques of legendary filmmakers like Hitchcock and Truffaut. The sections of Van Sijll’s book address topics like shape within the frame, composition of frames, camera position, lighting, color, props, wardrobes and locations. Certainly topics one is more likely to find in a book on cinematography than one for screenwriters and directors.

While the book offers a brilliant synthesis of the early visual bias of film, some would argue it doesn’t belong in the ranks of screenwriting books but rather books directed at directors and especially cinematographers. Van Sijll argues modern filmmaking’s increasing division into parts is one of its major problems and challenges. At the beginning of *Cinematic Storytelling* she observes “In teaching filmmaking, story and film are often taught separately. Screenwriters are housed in one building, production people in another. Unintentionally, a divide is created where there should be a bond. Technical tools become separated from their end, which is story.” The result is that “Story has taken a back seat to technical wizardry and style.”

Books like *Cinematic Storytelling* that attempt to unite rather than divide exist outside the radar of many in the modern cinema and screenwriting industry. The largeness of its scope, the boldness of its goal, paradoxically make it relatively difficult to see in a culture that knows more and more about less and less. If modern film is to return to its visual roots, Van Sijll’s book offers an essential guide.

* * *

If *Cinematic Storytelling* provides the elements of visual storytelling, the 2008 book *Visual Story* by Bruce Block puts these elements into a true visual grammar of modern cinema providing a relationship between story structure and visual structure. Block has the credentials to write a definitive guide with a long list of clients like the American Film Institute, PIXAR Studios, Walt Disney Animation, Dreamworks Animation, Nickelodeon Animation Studios, Industrial Light & Magic and a variety of film schools in Europe.

Block's book divides the screen image into tangible sections like contrast and affinity, space, line and shape, tone, color, movement, and rhythm. The vocabulary as well as the insight is provided to purposefully control the given components to create the ultimate visual story. Some of his observations and admonitions and examples: a saturated yellow will always attract a viewer's eye first; avoid abrupt editing by mastering continuum of movement; a list of suggested films to watch to understand rhythmic control.

While Block's *The Visual Story* compliments Van Sijll's *Cinematic Storytelling*, its heritage goes back to Eisenstein and Slavko Vorkapich, a Yugoslavian filmmaker who had been directing montages at MGM, RKO and Warner Bros. In the 1950s, Vorkapich was briefly the chairman of the film department at USC and extended Eisenstein's ideas developing groundbreaking theories about movement and editing.

In 1955, Les Norvos begin teaching his classes at USC based around the ideas of Eisenstein and Vorkapich. When Norvos retired, Block took over his famous course. As Block notes in his book, "I decided to delve into his source material, including research in perception, psychology, the visual arts, theater and art history." This source material included works outside the scope of other works on film such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Rudolph Arnheim's *Visual Thinking*, John Dewey's *Art As Experience* and EH Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*.

As Block writes in the Introduction to *The Visual Story*, "It was my goal to bring film theory into the present, make it practical, and link it with story structure. I wanted to remove the wall between theory and practice so that visual structure would be easy to understand and use."

He succeeded brilliantly in this task providing modern cinema a way forward by showing it a way back.

Appendix A
Bibliography of Screenwriting Books
(Alphabetical Order)

- Ackerman, Hal. *Write Screenplays That Sell*
- Blacker, Irwin. *The Elements of Screenwriting*
- Block, Bruce. *The Visual Story*
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- Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots*
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----- . *Save The Cat Goes to the Theater.*

Tierno, Michael. *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*

Truby, John. *The Anatomy of Story*

Van Bergen, Jennifer. *Archetypes for Writers*

van Sijll, Jennifer *Cinematic Storytelling*

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey*

Voytilla, Stuart. *Myth And The Movies*

Walter, Richard. *Essentials of Screenwriting*

Appendix B
John Truby's Step Sequences

7-Step Sequence

1. Weakness and need
2. Desire
3. Opponent
4. Plan
5. Battle
6. Self-Revelation
7. New Equilibrium

23-Step Sequence

1. Self-Revelation, Need, Desire
2. Ghost & Story world
3. Weakness & Need
4. Inciting Event
5. Desire
6. Ally or Allies
7. Opponent and/or Mystery
8. Fake-ally Opponent
9. First Revelation & Decision: Changed Desire & Motive
10. Plan
11. Opponent's Plan and Main
12. Counterattack
13. Drive
14. Attack by Ally
15. Apparent Defeat
16. Second Revelation & Decision: Obsessive Drive, Changed Desire & Motive
17. Audience Revelation
18. Third Revelation & Decision
19. Gate, Gauntlet, Visit to Death
20. Battle
21. Self-Revelation
22. Moral Decision
23. New Equilibrium

Appendix C

Blake Synder's 15-Point Sequence

Opening Image – A visual that represents the struggle & tone of the story. A snapshot of the main character's problem, before the adventure begins.

Set-up – Expand on the “before” snapshot. Present the main character's world as it is, and what is missing in their life.

Theme Stated (happens during the Set-up) – What your story is about; the message, the truth. Usually, it is spoken to the main character or in their presence, but they don't understand the truth...not until they have some personal experience and context to support it.

Catalyst – The moment where life as it is changes. It is the telegram, the act of catching your loved-one cheating, allowing a monster onboard the ship, meeting the true love of your life, etc. The “before” world is no more, change is underway.

Debate – But change is scary and for a moment, or a brief number of moments, the main character doubts the journey they must take. Can I face this challenge? Do I have what it takes? Should I go at all? It is the last chance for the hero to chicken out.

Break Into Two (Choosing Act Two) – The main character makes a choice and the journey begins. We leave the “Thesis” world and enter the upside-down, opposite world of Act Two.

B Story – This is when there's a discussion about the Theme – the nugget of truth. Usually, this discussion is between the main character and the love interest. So, the B Story is usually called the “love story”.

The Promise of the Premise – This is the fun part of the story. This is when Craig Thompson's relationship with Raina blooms, when Indiana Jones tries to beat the Nazis to the Lost Ark, when the detective finds the most clues and dodges the most bullets. This is when the main character explores the new world and the audience is entertained by the premise they have been promised.

Midpoint – Dependent upon the story, this moment is when everything is “great” or everything is “awful”. The main character either gets everything they think they want (“great”) or doesn't get what they think they want at all (“awful”). But not everything we think we want is what we actually need in the end.

Bad Guys Close In – Doubt, jealousy, fear, foes both physical and emotional regroup to defeat the main character's goal, and the main character's “great”/“awful” situation disintegrates.

All is Lost – The opposite moment from the Midpoint: “awful”/“great”. The moment that the main character realizes they've lost everything they gained, or everything they now have has no meaning. The initial goal now looks even more impossible than before. And here, something or

someone dies. It can be physical or emotional, but the death of something old makes way for something new to be born.

Dark Night of the Soul – The main character hits bottom, and wallows in hopelessness. The *Why hast thou forsaken me, Lord?* moment. Mourning the loss of what has “died” – the dream, the goal, the mentor character, the love of your life, etc. But, you must fall completely before you can pick yourself back up and try again.

Break Into Three (Choosing Act Three) – Thanks to a fresh idea, new inspiration, or last-minute Thematic advice from the B Story (usually the love interest), the main character chooses to try again.

Finale – This time around, the main character incorporates the Theme – the nugget of truth that now makes sense to them – into their fight for the goal because they have experience from the A Story and context from the B Story. Act Three is about Synthesis!

Final Image – opposite of Opening Image, proving, visually, that a change has occurred within the character.

Blake Snyder Sequence Beat Sheet

1. Opening Image (1):
2. Theme Stated (5):
3. Set-Up (1-10):
4. Catalyst (12):
5. Debate (12-25):
6. Break into Two (25)
7. B Story (30):
8. Fun and Games (30-55):
9. Midpoint (55):
10. Bad Guys Close In (55-75):
11. All Is Lost (75):
12. Dark Night of the Soul (75-85):
13. Break into Three (85):
14. Finale (85-110):
15. Final Image (110):

Appendix D

Towards A Graphic Map of Screenwriting Books

More Formula				Polti Cook Sawyer Booker
	Vogler	Snyder Edson	Truby	
	Indick Dunne Smith	Daniels	Howard Hunter Reeves	
	Goldman	McKee Walter		
More Personal Less Formula				Less Personal

Map of Screenwriting Books & Theories

Appendix E
Eric Edson Structure Steps

Act I (Story Set-Up)

Inciting incident

Moment when story begins

Stunning Surprise 1

Surprise event that ends Act I and begins Act II, putting Hero in new world

Act II (Rising Conflict)

Midpoint

- Different from mood and style from rest of film and frequently has a transitional montage covered with music
- Scenes serve as an emotional or physical point of no return
- Hero's conflict with the adversary becomes personal
- Love stories or romantic comedies its often here that lovers kiss or make love or same-sex buddies work together as a true team for the first time
- Can include an unmasking that's either metaphorical or literal
- Midpoint scenes most often contain the second crucial step in character growth
- A ticking clock countdown often begins at the midpoint to increase suspense
- Often a literal or metaphorical death as a ritual rite of passage for the Hero

Climax

Dramatic action rises to a crescendo and the Hero's expected victory appears to be near

Stunning Surprise 2

Surprise dramatic reversal that ends Act II by destroying the Hero's plan for victory while launching Act III; often is Hero's darkest hour

Act III (Resolution)

Obligatory scene

Final showdown between Hero and Adversary that resolves the main plot question once and for all

Denouement

Wraps up all plot loose ends and relationships

Appendix F Sequence Approach

1. First, a hook to excite the viewer's curiosity. Then, the exposition answering who, what, when, and where. Show a glimpse of the life of the protagonist before the story gets under way. This first sequence ends with the inciting incident.
2. Protagonist tries to reestablish the status quo disrupted by the inciting incident, fails, and is faced with a worse predicament. Gulino says that this sequence poses "the dramatic question that will shape the rest of the picture." This is the end of the first act.
3. The protagonist attempts to solve the problem presented at the end of the first act.
4. The solution from the last sequence is seen to fail, and the protagonist tries one or more desperate measures to restore the status quo. The end of this sequence is the midpoint/first culmination/crisis, which brings a major revelation or reversal. The audience should be tempted to guess the outcome of the story.
5. The protagonist deals with the ramifications of the first culmination. Sometimes new characters are introduced, or new opportunities discovered in the fifth segment. This segment may also deal heavily with subplots.
6. Last sequence of the second act, and the second culmination. The protagonist has exhausted all the easy courses of action, and directly addresses the central dramatic question. The audience should be tempted to guess the outcome of the story, although the obvious answer may often be a mirror opposite of how the film actually ends.
7. The apparent solution of the central dramatic question in sequence F shows its problems here. The stakes are raised. The effect of a long dangling cause may occur. The story is seen in a new light, and the protagonist might need to reverse his goals.
8. The tension created by the inciting incident is truly resolved. Consider this resolution in light of the hints from the first and second culminations. Any remaining subplots are resolved. There may be a brief epilogue. The last sequence may in some way (visually?) recall the first sequence.

Appendix G
The 36 Dramatic Situations of Georges Polti

Each situation is stated and then followed by the necessary elements for each situation as well as a brief description.

Supplication

A Persecutor or suppliant: a Power in authority whose decision is doubtful. The Persecutor accuses the Suppliant of wrongdoing, and the Power makes a judgment against the Suppliant.

Deliverance

An Unfortunate; a Threatener: a Rescuer. The Unfortunate has caused a conflict, and the Threatener is to carry out justice, but the Rescuer saves the Unfortunate.

Crime Pursued By Vengeance.

A Criminal; an Avenger. The Criminal commits a crime that will not see justice, so the Avenger seeks justice by punishing the Criminal.

Vengeance Taken for Kin upon Kin

Guilty Kinsman; an Avenging Kinsman; remembrance of the Victim, a relative of both. Two entities, the Guilty and the Avenging Kinsmen, are put into conflict over wrongdoing to the Victim, who is allied to both.

Pursuit

Punishment: a Fugitive. The Fugitive flees Punishment for a misunderstood conflict.

Disaster

A Vanquished Power; a Victorious Enemy *or* a Messenger. The Power falls from their place after being defeated by the Victorious Enemy or being informed of such a defeat by the Messenger.

Falling prey to cruelty/misfortune

An Unfortunate; a Master *or* a Misfortune. The Unfortunate suffers from Misfortune and/or at the hands of the Master.

Revolt

A Tyrant or Conspirator. The Tyrant, a cruel power, is plotted against by the Conspirator.

Daring Enterprise

A Bold Leader; an Object; an Adversary. The Bold Leader takes the Object from the Adversary by overpowering the Adversary.

Abduction

An Abductor; the Abducted; a Guardian. The Abductor takes the Abducted from the Guardian.

The Enigma

A Problem an Interrogator, a Seeker. The Interrogator poses a Problem to the Seeker and gives a Seeker better ability to reach the Seeker's goals.

Obtaining

A Solicitor & an Adversary who is refusing *or* an Arbitrator & Opposing Parties. The Solicitor is at odds with the Adversary who refuses to give the Solicitor what they Object in the possession of the Adversary, or an Arbitrator decides who gets the Object desired by Opposing Parties (the Solicitor and the Adversary).

Enmity of Kin

A Malevolent Kinsman; a Hated *or* a reciprocally-hating Kinsman. The Malevolent Kinsman and the Hated *or* a second Malevolent Kinsman conspire together.

Rivalry of kin

The Preferred Kinsman; the Rejected Kinsman; the Object of Rivalry. The Object of Rivalry chooses the Preferred Kinsman over the Rejected Kinsman.

Murderous Adultery

Two Adulterers; a Betrayed Spouse. Two Adulterers conspire to kill the Betrayed Spouse.

Maddness

A Madman; a Victim. The Madman goes insane and wrongs the Victim.

Fatal Imprudence

The Imprudent; a Victim *or* an Object Lost. The Imprudent, by neglect or ignorance, loses the Object Lost or wrongs the Victim.

Involuntary Crimes of Love

A Lover; a Beloved; a Revealer. The Revealer betrays the trust of either the Lover or the Beloved.

Slaying of Kin Unrecognized

The Slayer; an Unrecognized Victim. The Slayer kills the Unrecognized Victim.

Self-sacrifice for an Ideal

A Hero; an Ideal a Creditor or Person/Thing sacrificed. The Hero sacrifices the Person or Thing for their Ideal, which is then taken by the Creditor.

Self-sacrifice for Kin

A Hero; a Kinsman; a Creditor *or* a Person/Thing sacrificed. The Hero sacrifices a Person or Thing for their Kinsman, which is then taken by the Creditor.

All Sacrificed for Passion

A Lover; an Object of fatal Passion; the Person/Thing sacrificed. A Lover sacrifices a Person or Thing for the Object of their Passion, which is then lost forever.

Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones

A Hero; a Beloved Victim; the Necessity for the Sacrifice. The Hero wrongs the Beloved Victim because of the Necessity for their Sacrifice.

Rivalry of Superior vs. Inferior

A Superior Rival; an Inferior Rival; the Object of Rivalry. A Superior Rival bests an Inferior Rival and wins the Object of Rivalry.

Adultery

Two Adulterers; a Deceived Spouse. Two Adulterers conspire against the Deceived Spouse.

Crimes of Love

A Lover; the Beloved. A Lover and the Beloved enter a conflict.

Discovery of the Dishonour of a Love One

A Discoverer; the Guilty One. The Discoverer discovers the wrongdoing committed by the Guilty One.

Obstacles to love

Two Lovers; an Obstacle. Two Lovers face an Obstacle together.

An Enemy Loved

A Lover; the Beloved Enemy; the Hater. The allied Lover and Hater have diametrically opposed attitudes towards the Beloved Enemy.

Ambition

An Ambitious Person; a Thing Coveted; an Adversary. The Ambitious Person seeks the Thing Coveted and is opposed by the Adversary.

Conflict With God

A Mortal; an Immortal. The Mortal and the Immortal enter a conflict.

Mistaken Jealousy

A Jealous One; an Object of whose Possession He is Jealous; a Supposed Accomplice; a Cause *or* an Author of the Mistake. The Jealous One falls victim to the Cause or the Author of the Mistake and becomes jealous of the Object and becomes conflicted with the Supposed Accomplice.

Erroneous Judgment

A Mistaken One; a Victim of the Mistake; a Cause *or* Author of the Mistake; the Guilty One. The Mistaken One falls victim to the Cause of the Author of the Mistake and passes judgment against the Victim of the Mistake when it should be passed against the Guilty One instead.

Remorse

A Culprit; a Victim *or* the Sin; an Interrogator. The Culprit wrongs the Victim or commits the Sin, and is at odds with the Interrogator who seeks to understand the situation.

Recovery of a lost one

A Seeker; the One Found. The Seeker finds the One Found.

Loss of Loved Ones

A Kinsman Slain; a Kinsman Spectator; an Executioner. The killing of the Kinsman Slain by the Executioner is witnessed by the Kinsman Spectator.

Appendix H
Robert McKee's Three Types of Screenplay Structure

1. Classical Design and Archplot (Top of Pyramid)

Under this heading are causality. Closed Ending. Linear Time. External Conflict. Single Protagonist. Consistent Reality. Active Protagonist. Film examples: *Chinatown*, *The Hustler*, *Men in Black*, *Thelma & Louise*, *Dr. Stanglelove*.

2. Minimalism and Mini Plot (Bottom left of Pyramid)

Under this heading Open Ending. Internal Conflict. Multi-Protagonists. Passive Protagonist. Film examples: *Five Easy Pieces*, *Blow Up*, *Tender Mercies*, *The Accidental Tourist*.

3. Anti-Structure and Antiplot (Bottom right of Pyramid. Under this section are Coincidence. Nonlinear time. Inconsistent Realities. Film examples: *Wayne's World*, *8 ½*, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, *Weekend*.

Formal Differences Within The Three

Closed Versus Open Endings

External Versus Internal Conflict

Single Versus Multiple Protagonists

Active Versus Passive Protagonists

Linear Versus Nonlinear Time

Causality Versus Coincidence

Consistent Versus Inconsistent Realities

Change Versus Stasis

Comments

“An interesting approach very useful for aspiring writers sorting out the many texts available to them and one I haven’t seen before. The book would also prove a very useful resource to professors. “

Linda Venis, PhD
Director, Department of the Arts
Program Director, Writers’ Program

“I think the book would definitely be useful for film school teachers and for serious aspiring writers who are trying to navigate the vast literature. I’m not aware of any such book.”

Paul Gulino
Associate Professor
Chapman University
Dodge College of Film and Media Arts

“I think that this will be a very useful book, indeed.”

Eric Edson
Coordinator, Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting Program
Department of Cinema and Television Arts
California State University, Northridge

“As I read through, I was forcefully struck (!) by the obvious use it would be to scriptwriters and students of the craft (and their teachers).”

Eric McLuhan
Director, Media Studies, Professor
The Harris Institute of the Arts
Toronto, Canada

“I found it very interesting. I had never thought of the whole school or method breakdown before and looking at each of the examples you used I did see the formula come into play. I think that there is also (for lack of a better term) those schools whose focus is external and those that are internal. External is that you follow the rules and don’t color outside of the lines. The internal school acknowledged the external in that the basis of all storytelling has inarguable structure, set-up, journey and resolution. This can be called any number of things but always comes down to that. That said (and here is where internal approach comes into play) even though all stories have a form of set-up, journey and resolution, one does not always choose to reveal the story in that order. This is where the non-linear comes into play. I suppose this is one of the reasons I balk at Chris Soth’s mini-scripts or other forms that define a detailed breakdown of the story into certain unbendable points.”

Bill Boyle
Screenwriter and Script Consultant
Author, *The Visual Mindscape of the Screenplay*

John Fraim

John has a BA from UCLA and a JD from Loyola Law School and is President of GreatHouse Marketing Strategy and GreatHouse Stories in Palm Desert, California. He is the author of many published articles and three books: *Spirit Catcher: The Life and Art of John Coltrane* (winner of the 1997 Best Biography Award from the Small Press Association), *Point Zero Bliss* (1995) and *Battle of Symbols: Global Dynamics of Advertising, Entertainment and Media* (Daimon Verlag, Zurich, 2003). He currently writes a regular column titled “Script Symbology” for *Script Magazine*, the largest publication for screenwriters and is on the Board of Directors of the Palm Springs Writers Guild. He is a member of the Palm Desert Historical Society and the Coachella Valley Hiking Club.

He is considered a leading expert on symbols and symbolism. Much of his writing on symbols and symbolism are published on his website www.symbolism.org. His first major work on symbolism *Symbolism of Place* (1993) relates the movement of symbols through cycles in stories and screenplays. His manuscript *Symbolism of Popular Culture* (1995) relates symbols and symbolism to popular culture. His book *Battle of Symbols* was published by Daimon Verlag (Zurich, 2003) and discusses the dynamics of global advertising, entertainment and media symbols. GreatHouse Stories conducts ongoing research and application of his ideas on symbols and symbolism to modern story forms by both original story development and work with clients on their stories.