Towards a Philosophy of the Screenplay

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to take the first steps towards a philosophy of the screenplay. More specifically, the project attempts to clarify our present concept of the screenplay in two regards—in terms of what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is. In doing so, it makes the following three arguments in each of its three parts, respectively.

(1) The screenplay is an artifact concept and, therefore, an essentially historical concept, the boundaries of which are determined by the collective practices of the creators of screenplays. Therefore, any plausible definition of the screenplay must be an intentional-historical definition of some variety.

(2) Because early Hollywood screenwriting practices intelligibly emerged out of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century playwriting practices (which are acknowledged art practices), Hollywood screenwriting can plausibly be identified as an art practice and at least some Hollywood screenplays can be plausibly identified as artworks. Other screenwriting practices and screenplays can plausibly be identified as art in virtue of their intentional-historical connection to acknowledged, prior art.

(3) Through their collective creative and appreciative practices, practitioners (and others who ordinarily deal with screenplays, like readers) determine the facts about what kind of a thing the screenplay is. Any plausible account of the ontology of the screenplay must, therefore, be strictly constrained by those practices. Furthermore, an analysis of those practices shows that the screenplay must be the kind of thing that is creatable, multiply instantiable, finely individuable, and destructible.

The master argument is that because the screenplay is a kind of artifact its boundaries are determined collectively by screenwriters, and its ontological nature is determined collectively by both writers and readers of screenplays. Any plausible theory of the screenplay must be strictly constrained by our collective creative and appreciative practices.

Introduction

When I began working on this project in 2007, nothing like a sub-field—let alone a field—of screenwriting studies existed. For those interested in the scholarly study of the screenplay and screenwriting practices, there were, on one hand, a few good historical studies from (mostly) the 1980s and 1990s from which one could piece together a rough history of screenwriting in the United States.[1] On the other hand, a small group of academics was beginning, circa the late 1990s and early 2000s, to complement the historical research with more theoretical work on the screenplay. Here, scholarship was even sparser, consisting of a few monographs and articles scattered across various journals.[2]

Since 2007, however, research on screenwriting has rapidly gained momentum, and there have been several developments indicating that the establishment of screenwriting studies as a field is upon us. In addition to publishing regularly on screenwriting-related topics, Ian W. Macdonald, with Kirsi Rinne, has co-founded the Screenwriting Research Network, which has held its annual conference in Leeds, Helsinki, and Copenhagen. Jill Nelmes has led the way in establishing the *Journal of Screenwriting*, published bi-annually by Intellect. While

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[1] In particular, Edward Azlant, "The History, Theory, and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897-1920," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980); Edward Azlant, "Screenwriting for the Early Silent Film: Forgotten Pioneers, 1897-1911," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 228-256; David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Richard Corliss, *The Hollywood Screenwriters* (New York: Avon Books, 1972); Richard Corliss, *Talking Pictures: Screenwriters in the American Cinema, 1927-1973* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1974); Ian Hamilton, *Writers in Hollywood, 1915-1951* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); Patrick Loughney, "In the Beginning Was the Word: Six Pre-Griffith Motion Picture Scenarios," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 211-219; Patrick Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle* to *Jesus of Nazareth*: Thoughts on the Origins of the American Screenplay," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 277-290; Pat McGilligan, ed. *Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Pat McGilligan, ed. *Backstory 2: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1940s and 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990); Janet Staiger, "'Tame' Authors and the Corporate Laboratory: Stories, Writers and Scenarios in Hollywood," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 33-45; Janet Staiger, "Blueprints for Feature Films: Hollywood's Continuity Scripts," in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 173-192; Tom Stempel, *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in American Film* (New York: Continuum, 1988).

I refer here specifically to scholarship published in English, for some research on the histories of screenwriting in other national cinemas—in particular, French cinema—was also being conducted at this time but was generally not available in translation. For example, Isabelle Raynauld's pioneering work on screenwriting in France was not available in English until the publication of her article, "Written Scenarios of Early French Cinema: Screenwriting Practices in the First Twenty Years," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 257-268.

[2] William Horne, "See Shooting Script: Reflections on the Ontology of the Screenplay," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1992): 48-54; Nathanial Kohn, "The Screenplay as Postmodern Literary Exemplar: Authorial Distraction, Disappearance, Dissolution," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 4 (2000): 489-510; Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider, "The Published Screenplay—A New Literary Genre?," *AAA—Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 25, no. 1 (2000): 89-105; Ian W. Macdonald, "Finding the Needle: How Readers See Screen Ideas," *Journal of Media Practice* 4, no. 1 (2003): 27-39; Ian W. Macdonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," *Journal of Media Practice* 5, no. 2 (2004): 89-99; Ian W. Macdonald, "Manuals Are Not Enough: Relating Screenwriting Practice to Theories," *Journal Of British Cinema and Television* 1, no. 2 (November 2004): 260-274; Jeff Rush and Cynthia Baughman, "Language as Narrative Voice: The Poetics of the Highly Inflected Screenplay," *Journal of Film and Video* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 28-37; Claudia Sternberg, *Written for the Screen: The American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 1997); Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

the publication of screenwriting research in other journals has continued, several scholarly books dedicated to screenwriting have also appeared—in chronological order, J.J. Murphy's *Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work*, Kevin Alexander Boon's *Script Culture and the American Screenplay*, Steven Maras's *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice*, Steven Price's *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism*, and *Analysing the Screenplay*, edited by Jill Nelmes.[3] Finally, several British universities have advertised lectureships and professorships in screenwriting—posts designed to bring the history, theory, practice, and teaching of screenwriting together. In short, the speed and magnitude of recent developments suggest that screenwriting studies, as a field, has arrived in the academy.

Therefore, the completion of this project is, perhaps, more timely than it would have been just four years ago, for the emergence of any new field demands the slow filling-in of gaps in research. And as screenwriting studies has come together as a field over the last few years, my project has shifted from a relatively general, solitary inquiry to an intentional effort to fill a particular gap while also engaging recent scholarship. More specifically, it seems appropriate and necessary, at the emergence of screenwriting studies, to clarify some central concepts—in particular, I would suggest, our concepts of screenwriting and the screenplay—and reflect upon what implications that clarification might have for future research. Inasmuch as the clarification of concepts broadly falls under the purview of philosophy, what would be helpful to have, as screenwriting studies gets off the ground, is something like a philosophy, or at least steps towards a philosophy, of screenwriting and/or the screenplay. This suggestion conceives of philosophy in a particular way, and I will say more about this shortly. First, however, let me sketch what this project attempts to do.

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[3] For examples of recent work in journals (outside of the *Journal of Screenwriting*), see Jill Nelmes, "Some Thoughts on Analysing the Screenplay, the Process of Screenplay Writing, and the Balance Between Craft and Creativity," *Journal of Media Practice* 8, no. 2 (2007): 107-113; Steven Maras, "In Search of 'Screenplay': Terminological Traces in the Library of Congress Catalog of Copyright Entries: Cumulative Series, 1912-20," *Film History* 21, no. 4 (2009): 346-358; Ian W. Macdonald, "Forming the Craft: Play-writing and Photoplay-writing in Britain in the 1910s," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 1 (2010): 75-89. For books, see, J.J. Murphy, *Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work* (London: Continuum, 2007); Kevin Alexander Boon, *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008); Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009); Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jill Nelmes, ed. *Analysing the Screenplay* (London: Routledge, 2010). David Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) also deals extensively with narrative structure in contemporary Hollywood cinema despite the fact that its main focus is not screenwriting, specifically.

The purpose of the project is take the first steps towards a philosophy of the screenplay. In particular, I am interested in clarifying our concept of the screenplay in a rigorous and thorough way that I believe has not yet been done. Of course, what I say about the screenplay here will hardly be the last word on the topic. But I take it that a clarification of our screenplay concept is a crucial part of the foundation of screenwriting studies, so, at the very least, the utility of this project is to begin an important discourse. Specifically, this project's original contribution to screenwriting studies and, more broadly, film studies research is its clarification of our screenplay concept in two regards—in terms of what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is. Although my main focus is specifically on the screenplay, I hope it will become clear that I take the term "screenplay" to refer not just to film scripts, but to a rather broad category of objects including—but not limited to—teleplays and other manuscripts for screen works (i.e. films, videos, television shows, and the like). Furthermore, although the practice of screenwriting is not my main focus, I also hope it will be clear that it figures centrally in my conception of what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is.

Of these two matters—what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is— the former seems important in a very practical and immediate way because screenwriting studies ought, first and foremost, to have a handle on what its specific object of inquiry is. And if the screenplay is one of the most prominent objects of screenwriting practice, one of our first questions ought to be something like, "What is a screenplay?" In addition, satellite questions ought to be asked about what other sorts of objects are produced through the activity of screenwriting—if there are any—as well as what relationships hold between screenplays and screen works.

In fact, other critics have begun to address these questions in a variety of ways. In somewhat of a contrast to the view just sketched, Steven Maras begins his recent book by claiming that screenwriting studies faces an "object problem"—that is, "the difficulty of both defining screenwriting as an object, and identifying an object for screenwriting."[4] According to Maras:

> [S]creenwriting is not an 'object' in any straightforward sense: it is a practice, and as such it draws on a set of processes, techniques and devices that get arranged differently at different times. While this arrangement relates to what can be seen as an 'object' – say a script or a film – it is not clear that either the script or film is best treated as an

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[4] Maras, *Screenwriting*, 11.

'object' in this context: scripts are in transition all through film production, they vary in form and function across different modes of filmmaking; and films are more than final products or outputs that only exist at the end of the process. The line between where the script stops and where the film starts can, furthermore, be mysterious and blurry.[5]

Now, some of what Maras says here is surely right: screenwriting is not an object, but a practice; scripts are, usually, in transition throughout film production; scripts do vary in form and function.

However, it is not at all clear that these facts warrant the conclusions at which Maras arrives. From the fact that screenwriting is not an object but a practice, it does not follow that the screenplay is not an object of screenwriting (or an object at all). Painting is a practice rather than an object, yet it is clear that paintings are the objects of *that* practice. So, why *not* regard the screenplay as (at least) one object of screenwriting? How is the fact that it is constantly in transition or variable in form or function supposed to preclude it from being an object? Furthermore, is the line between script and film really "mysterious" or "blurry"? How so? It is not clear how these characterizations are supposed to make it difficult to identify the screenplay as an object of screenwriting—let alone an object in general. Neither is it clear that any of what Maras has to say here is specific to screenwriting or the screenplay. Playwriting and the theatrical script would seem to admit of the same characterizations, but we do not suppose there is an "object problem" in that context. In short, while Maras raises interesting questions about what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is, concluding that screenwriting studies faces an object problem ought to be a last resort rather than a starting premise. We would do better to at least attempt to get a grip on what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it as, as well as to characterize the relationships that hold between it, screenwriting practice, and screen works, before supposing an "object problem" exists.

Other critics have been more willing to try to describe the screenplay and its constitutive features. For example, Ian W. Macdonald, Steven Price, and Claudia Sternberg have made all suggestions about what characteristics the screenplay has or attempted to describe its distinctiveness.[6] Indeed, Macdonald has come close to offering something like a functional definition of the screenplay, suggesting that it

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[5] Ibid.
[6] See Macdonald, "Disentangling"; Price, *The Screenplay*; Sternberg, *Written for the Screen*.

might be characterized as "intended to convey (or at least record) the screen idea."[7]
But, as I argue in Chapter 1, such characterizations leave a more comprehensive
definition of the screenplay to be desired. Furthermore, while generally characterizing
the screenplay in terms of function seems plausible, the evidence suggests that Maras
is right that screenplays vary in function. If so, a definition of the screenplay will need
to be more inclusive.

  This is, in rough form, the argument made in the first half of Chapter 1. The
chapter opens with a lengthy consideration of defining the screenplay in terms of
function because, I think, this is both an extremely intuitive idea and, on the face of it,
a plausible one. The discussion proceeds dialectically, testing and revising possible
variations of a functional definition, before concluding that we would do better to
explore other possibilities because there does not seem to be a function or set of
functions that is specific to all and only screenplays.

  The second half of Chapter 1 steps back and reflects more broadly upon the
question of what kind of a concept "screenplay" is and, therefore, what kind of a
definition we ought to pursue. At the very least, the screenplay is an artifact concept,
which has some interesting implications. Many artifact concepts can be roughly
characterized in terms of function and form, so it is little surprise that, so too, can we
generally characterize the screenplay in this way. However, the fact that artifacts are
the results of intentional human activity means that they have an essential historicity
to them and are somewhat malleable. Thus, while many artifacts can be generally
characterized in terms of function and form, our ability to change their functions and
forms over time makes it hard to strictly define them in this regard. Therefore, at the
end of Chapter 1, I argue that an intentional-historical formalist definition of the
screenplay seems most plausible because it can account for the screenplay's essential
historicity and its historical variability in function and form.

  Chapter 2 defends this conclusion at length by offering a characterization,
borrowed from the work of philosopher Amie L. Thomasson, of artifact concepts and
their evolution in order to bolster the argument that the screenplay is an historical
concept. Following Thomasson's work, I argue that practitioners' intentions
determine the features relevant to unifying and demarcating the boundaries of the
kind, "screenplay," and that this has several important conclusions: (1) Someone who

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[7] Macdonald, "Disentangling," 90.

has a "substantive and substantively correct"[8] concept of what a screenplay is and successfully realizes her intention to make "one of those things" cannot fail to make a screenplay; (2) Practice is, thus, primary inasmuch as our collective screenwriting practices determine what our screenplay concept is; therefore, any plausible definition of the screenplay must be descriptive and be able to account for the full extension of our screenwriting practices; (3) Our screenwriting concept must be historical because practitioners have the ability to gradually change it over time. I conclude by suggesting that our screenwriting practices have changed such that essential features with regard to the screenplay's function and form are relatively loose, and the specific feature most central to unifying the kind, "screenplay," is an intentional-historical connection to other screenplays.

Thus, Part I—Chapters 1 and 2—attempts to clarifying the concept "screenplay" by answering the question, "What is a screenplay?" Furthermore, however, it addresses some important methodological questions in doing so. It argues for a particular understanding of who determines what our screenplay concept is and how they do so, thus suggesting what kind of a concept "screenplay" is and what kind of a definition we ought to pursue. Specifically, it argues that, through their collective practices, practitioners determine the kind of concept "screenplay" is. Therefore, the boundaries of the concept are, at the least, determined intentionally and historically, and any definition of the screenplay we propose must be of the intentional-historical variety. In short, Part I begins to lay out an argument for a methodological approach that is strongly contextualist inasmuch as it sees practice as primary and a philosophy of the screenplay to be constrained by our practices.

If one major task in clarifying our "screenplay" concept involves saying what a screenplay is, another entails saying what kind of a thing it is. Now, in a broad sense, the question, "What kind of a thing is a screenplay," is a question about the screenplay's ontology. Part III answers the question in this broad sense, but, first, Part II—Chapters 3, 4, and 5—addresses a much narrower construal of the question. To wit, Part II answers the question, "Is the screenplay a work of art—more specifically, literary art—in its own right?" Parts II and III keep the questions of the screenplay's art status and its ontology distinct—and, indeed, I shall argue they are distinct questions—but they are connected inasmuch as the central objections to the

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[8] Amie L. Thomasson, "Artifacts and Human Concepts," in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58.

screenplay as a work of art in its own right are made on ontological grounds. Before I rebut what I shall call these "ontological objections" in Part III, I first make a case for an historically contextualized understanding of screenwriting as an art practice—and the screenplay as an object or product of that practice—without broaching the question of the screenplay's ontology. However, following on from the conclusions at the end of Part I, both Parts II and II take our practices to be central to determining the answers to both questions.

Chapter 3 begins Part II by defending an intentional-historical method of identifying art that Noël Carroll has proposed. Roughly, the thought is that we need not have a working definition of art (or literature) at our disposal in order to successfully identify individual works or practices, which can be accomplished by tracing a kind of genetic link to acknowledged artworks and art practices. That is, we can identify candidate works or practices as artworks or art practices properly so-called by identifying an intention on the part of their maker to connect them to some previous work or practice—whether through repetition, amplification, or repudiation—in accordance with live purposes of the practice.[9] And a common way of making this identification is by relating a narrative that explains how a candidate work or practice intelligibly emerged out of some acknowledged art practice.

Chapter 4 then offers an historical narrative that traces the emergence of early screenwriting practices in the United States out of various playwriting practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I argue that this genetic link between playwriting and early Hollywood screenwriting allows us to identify the latter as an art practice, and suggests that at least some Hollywood screenplays, inasmuch as they are the products or objects of that practice, are artworks. Chapter 5 makes the argument that at least some Hollywood screenplays are artworks from a slightly different direction, analyzing the early work of Ernest Lehman and tracing its connections to Lehman's prose fiction writing practice. Because those screenplays embody Lehman's intention to repeat and amplify central stylistic and structural techniques used in his prose fiction, they can plausibly be identified as art.

Part III begins with Chapter 6, which is the first of several chapters that, in some way, address objections to the idea that screenplays are art. However, because the most prominent objections are rooted in claims about the ontological status of the

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[9] This is a paraphrase of the approach put forth in Noël Carroll, "Identifying Art" and "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75-100 and 100-118.

screenplay, Chapter 6 is more than a defense of the arguments mounted in Part II; it is also a segue to a more focused analysis of the screenplay's ontology that constitutes the bulk of Part III. Thus, Chapter 6 simultaneously rebuts one so-called ontological objection and begins to explore the ontology of the screenplay by challenging the conception of it that Noël Carroll assumes in his claim that screenplays are not the kinds of things that can be works of art in their own right. As I explain in greater length in the chapter, Carroll's remarks come in the context of a much broader discussion of the ontology of film, so we ought to extend him as much charity as possible, but his ideas are also connected to a conception of the theatrical script and its relationship to the theatrical work that he has developed at length. Therefore, my critique is not merely of his brief remarks regarding the screenplay, but rather a larger account into which he sees the screenplay fitting.

Following on from this critique of Carroll, Chapter 7 presents an alternative account of the relationships that hold between musical score and musical work, theatrical script and theatrical work, architectural plans and architectural work, and screenplay and screen work. I argue that musical scores and theatrical scripts are work-determinative documents—manuscripts whose existence entails the existence of musical works and theatrical works, respectively, and which determine the facts about what those works are like. On the contrary, I argue that architectural plans and screenplays are not work-determinative because they alone do not entail the existence of any architectural work or screen work. Nevertheless, I conclude that this difference has no bearing upon art status: Theatrical scripts are (almost) always artworks in their own right; musical scores (almost) never are; architectural plans and screenplays sometimes are and sometimes are not.

Having clarified the relationship between screenplay and screen work, as well as argued that the screenplay is the kind of thing that can be art, I consider, in the first part of Chapter 8, what kind of artwork the screenplay can be. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, I argue that when the screenplay is art, it is in virtue of it being a work of literature—usually, dramatic literature. I make this case not by assuming any one particular definition of literature, but by attempting to show that some screenplays can meet the conditions for any prominent definition or characterization of literature in currency.

In the second part of Chapter 8, I defend this argument against the other prominent ontological objection to the notion that screenplays can be art—to wit, that

screenplays are incomplete or unfinished by their very nature. The reason for dealing with this objection after a discussion of the screenplay as literature is that the objection may be hitched to a stronger claim about the screenplay's ontology, made by scholars like Steven Price, that the screenplay is like a Barthesian "text"—a text that is endlessly rewritten, or, as Barthes puts it, *experienced only in an activity, in a production*[10]—rather than a completed "work." I argue that such an account of the screenplay's ontology is implausible—if it is even coherent. And even if one accepts that the Barthesian "text"—or a similar concept, which Barthes calls the "writerly text"[11]—exists, then the account tells us nothing specific about the ontology of the *screenplay* in particular because screenplays are not the only kinds of Barthesian texts. Moreover, although Price claims that the essay in which Barthes makes the text/work distinction, "can take us further in distinguishing the screenplay from literature (or 'work'),"[12] in fact, on Barthes's account, there seem to be objects that count as both "text" and literature.[13]

Finally, Chapter 9 attempts not to say precisely what kind of a thing a screenplay is, but rather to set some limits upon what kind of a thing the screenplay could be. That is, Chapter 9 concerns itself with the methodology of theorizing the ontology of the screenplay, argues for a kind of pragmatic constraint upon our theories, and lays out desiderata that any account of the ontology of the screenplay ought to meet. In its focus on the methodology of our theorizing Chapter 9 picks up some of the arguments made in Chapter 2. Specifically, Chapter 9 draws again upon the work of Amie Thomasson to argue that the collective practices of practitioners (and other ordinary users of screenplays) determine the facts about what kind of a thing the screenplay is. This argument, if it is right, suggests that our theoretical accounts of the screenplay are strictly constrained by our screenwriting practices. (The corollary to this argument, upon which I elaborate in Chapter 10, is that our creative practices are only very loosely constrained; someone who has the concept "screenplay" and successfully realizes her intention to create "one of those things" cannot fail to do so.) Moreover, insofar as our ordinary beliefs and intuitions about what kind of a thing the screenplay is are rooted in our practices, massive collective

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[10] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 58 (emphasis in original).

[11] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974).

[12] Price, 41.

[13] For instance, Barthes suggests that Mallarmé—whose poetry, I take it, is indisputably literature—"wanted the audience to *produce* the book." See Barthes, "From Work to Text," 63.

error about the nature of the screenplay is not possible. This, I suggest, means that idiosyncratic theories, like those that treat the screenplay as an essentially endlessly rewritten text, cannot be right. Following philosophers like Jerrold Levinson, who have taken a contextualist position with regard to the metaphysics of art, I propose that, whatever they are, screenplays must be the kinds of things that are:

(1) multiply instantiable—screenplays must admit of multiple instances;

(2) creatable—screenplays must not exist until they are created by their writer(s);

(3) finely individuable—screenplays must be such that screenwriters writing in different socio-historical contexts who compose the same text compose distinct screenplays;

(4) destructible—screenplays must no longer exist when neither any of their instances nor the capacity for generating a new instance exists.[14]

Beyond the methodological constraint and these desiderata, the nature of the screenplay, it seems to me, is open for debate amongst those working on the metaphysics of art. That is, Chapter 9 stops short of wading into highly technical debates about whether multiply instantiable works, including screenplays, are, for instance, "types" that admit of token instances and, if so, what kinds of types they are. Thus, the chapter concludes my attempt to clarify our concept of the screenplay.

Chapter 10 offers a case study of a kind of fan-fiction screenplay—the virtual series screenplay—that hopefully brings the theoretical points into sharp relief. The argument in Chapter 10 is that the virtual series screenplay not only shows that accounts of the screenplay as essentially linked to a screen work or as essentially unfinished fail, but that our theorizing must be constrained by our actual creative and appreciative practices. I argue that the virtual series screenplay offers strong evidence that practitioners do determine the boundaries and nature of our screenplay concept, that our screenplay concept has changed with history, that we are now in an historical moment when some screenplays are complete, autonomous works, and that we are also now in an historical moment when some people write screenplays with the intention of creating literature while certain communities of readers have agreed to regard them as such. I conclude by suggesting that if my characterization of our screenplay concept as essentially historical and malleable by practitioners is correct,

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[14] See Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 63-88.

then we will need to constantly refine and revise our theories of the screenplay as time passes and practices change.

The picture that I hope emerges from this project is not only of a particular conception of the screenplay, but of an argument for going about our future theorizing in a particular way—namely, from the bottom up. There are good pragmatic reasons for theorizing in this fashion; the most obvious is that if the point of theorizing is to actually explain the data presented by our practices, then we must look at specific practices and the objects thereof in order to construct plausible general theories. However, if my arguments are good, we are compelled to build our theories from the bottom up because it is practitioners who determine the boundaries and the nature of the concept that we are currently investigating.

Finally, I should say something about the project's approach, which, in many places, takes its cue from analytic philosophy. This, I recognize, may distress some scholars working on screenwriting studies who have their training not in philosophy, but, perhaps, film studies, media studies, literary studies, cultural studies, and the like. A full defense of the analytic approach and its utility in the context of film (or literary) theorizing is beyond the purview of this brief introduction, but has already been mounted by more able commentators.[15] I will, therefore, highlight only a few points that I ask the skeptical reader to bear in mind. In the first place, analytic philosophy is not a uniform tradition, let alone a school of thought or a doctrine. On the contrary, "analytic" is commonly used these days to describe a particular approach to philosophizing or theorizing that, as Richard Allen and Murray Smith have put it, "is characterized by explicitness, precision, and clarity in argument…[and] strives to avoid the pitfalls of both dogmatism (the subordination of argumentative rigor and consistency to the defence of a particular doctrine) and uncritical pluralism (the acceptance of a range of positions with little interest in argument about their relative and particular merits, or attention to inconsistencies among them."[16] If this project does not meet this characterization, it certainly strives towards it; surely there is nothing objectionable here.

More specifically, however, the analytic approach is, as Allen and Smith point out, characterized by the analysis or clarification of concepts and the relationships that hold between them. And to the extent that, as I suggested earlier, the clarification of

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[15] Richard Allen and Murray Smith, "Introduction: Film Theory and Philosophy," in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1-35.
[16] Ibid, 2.

our screenwriting concept and the analysis of the relationship between it and other concepts seems an important—if not necessary—task for a new field like screenwriting studies, then it seems that an analytic approach towards a philosophy of a screenplay is not only a valid approach, but the most suitable one.

Here, I anticipate the objection that the Continental tradition represents an equally valid way of doing philosophy. I will grant that it is a different way of doing philosophy that may be better suited to other purposes than the clarification and analysis of concepts. This is one reason I have decided to entitle this project "Towards A Philosophy of the Screenplay." There are, undoubtedly, other philosophies of the screenplay that will be developed in the future, and I expect that they will do a better job of handling certain issues better than this project could.

But in order to get a better handle on what, I argue, is the central object (not practice) of inquiry of screenwriting studies—to clarify our present concept of the screenplay by investigating both what category of things the term "screenplay" picks out and the kind of thing that the term picks out—an analytic approach is most appropriate.

Clarification of our screenplay concept along the lines of an analytic approach will, I submit, give us reason to accept the following three arguments, which this project makes in each of its three parts, respectively.

(1) The screenplay is an artifact concept and, therefore, an essentially historical concept, the boundaries of which are determined by the collective practices of the creators of screenplays. Therefore, despite the specific proposal I later make for defining the screenplay, *any* plausible definition of the screenplay must be an intentional-historical definition of some sort.

(2) Because early Hollywood screenwriting practices intelligibly emerged out of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century playwriting practices (which are acknowledged art practices), Hollywood screenwriting can plausibly be identified as an art practice and at least some Hollywood screenplays can be plausibly identified as artworks. Other screenwriting practices and screenplays can plausibly be identified as art in virtue of their intentional-historical connection to acknowledged, prior art.

(3) Through their collective creative and appreciative practices, practitioners (and others who ordinarily deal with screenplays) determine the facts about what kind of a thing the screenplay is. Any plausible account of the ontology of the screenplay must, therefore, be strictly constrained by those practices. Furthermore, an analysis of

those practices shows that the screenplay must be the kind of thing that is creatable, multiply instantiable, finely individuable, and destructible.

The master argument is that because the screenplay is a kind of artifact its boundaries are determined collectively by screenwriters, and its ontological nature is determined collectively by both writers and readers of screenplays. Any plausible theory of the screenplay must be strictly constrained by our collective creative and appreciative practices.

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Defining the Screenplay

What is a screenplay? This question should not be misunderstood as an inquiry about what kind of a thing a screenplay is—that is, as a question about the ontology of the screenplay. Rather, it should be understood as asking: What makes something a screenplay? What features do all and only screenplays share? Or, what unifies the concept, "screenplay"? These are the questions that this chapter will address.

At first glance, the answers to these questions may appear obvious. Perhaps it seems clear that something is a screenplay in virtue of its function as a sort of blueprint for the production of a film. Because I take this to be a reasonable intuition—indeed, the most likely intuition one might have about such matters—I begin the chapter by exploring the possibility of defining the screenplay functionally. I find, however, that a functional definition of the screenplay faces insurmountable objections. So too, I argue, do both a functional definition supplemented by conditions regarding form and a purely formalist definition.

The problem with all these definitions, I argue, is that they presuppose a kind of essentialism about the screenplay—specifically, what I follow philosophers in calling "intrinsic essentialism."[1] Let me be clear that I use the term "essentialism" here not in the rather loose, pejorative sense literary and cultural critics sometimes use it[2], but rather as it is used in analytic philosophy to denote a very specific idea—to wit, that a given kind (e.g. a natural kind or an artifact kind) is defined in virtue of the properties that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for kind-membership. Inasmuch as all and only members of the given kind share that set of essential properties, the set constitutes the essence of the kind. More specifically, according to intrinsic essentialism, what unites the members of a given kind is a set of underlying, intrinsic properties.

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[1] See, for example, Michael Devitt, "Resurrecting Biological Essentialism," *Philosophy of Science* 75 (July 2008): 344-382, but especially the introductory discussion in 344-346. Strictly speaking, a functionalist definition of an artifact kind is not an intrinsic essentialist definition because an artifact's having an intended function depends upon its relationship to humans. Nevertheless, in what follows I treat functionalism as intrinsic essentialism because pure functionalist definitions of artifact kinds typically treat function as if it was an intrinsic property without any connection to socio-historical context. I elaborate upon this over the course of the article.

[2] For a discussion, see Mark Bauerlein, *Literary Criticism: An Autopsy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 57-62.

We can, then, call those definitions that comprise necessary and sufficient conditions "essentialist definitions,"[3] and we can call those definitions that comprise necessary and sufficient conditions regarding underlying, intrinsic features "intrinsic essentialist definitions." I argue that an intrinsic essentialist definition of the screenplay simply may not be forthcoming because it seems unlikely that there is a particular intrinsic property (or set thereof) shared by all and only screenplays.

However, I suggest, this fact warrants neither the embrace of anti-essentialism about the screenplay, nor the abandonment of definitional project altogether. To be sure, we ought to be wary of assuming that *all* concepts admit of essentialist definitions. When we attempt to define a concept in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, we presuppose that the concept is "classically structured." That is, we assume the existence of a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that demarcates the boundaries of the concept. (We may not know what those conditions actually are, but the search for a definition supposes that they are there, waiting to be discovered.) The paradigmatic example is the concept, "bachelor," which seems to be composed of the sub-concepts, "un-married" and "man"—sub-concepts that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for "bachelor"-hood. It is worth noting, though, that very few contemporary philosophers of mind and even fewer cognitive psychologists think this account, known as the "classical theory of concepts" or "the definition view," offers a plausible explanation of how *all* concepts are structured.[4]

Nevertheless, I think that a definition of the screenplay is worth pursuing for the following reasons. First, from the fact that not all concepts are classically structured, it does not follow that *no* concepts are classically structured. In other words, it does not follow that anti-essentialism is correct. Indeed, my second reason for believing that defining the screenplay is a legitimate project is that philosophers of art have shown that there are good reasons to *not* accept anti-essentialist arguments about defining art as a whole. Third, not only do anti-essentialist arguments about art fail, but because the concept, "screenplay," appears, *prima facie*, much less nebulous

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[3] Sometimes essentialist definitions are also referred to as "real" (as opposed to "nominal") because they specify the real or actual essence of a given kind. To avoid any potential confusion, I will refer to such definitions only as "essentialist" rather than "real." However, where the term "real definition" appears in a direct quote, the reader should understand it simply to mean "essentialist definition" rather than to be marking an ontological distinction between real and ideal or fictitious.

[4] See, for reconstructions and critiques of the classical theory of concepts, Jesse Prinz, *Furnishing the Mind: Concepts and Their Perceptual Basis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 32-49; Gregory L. Murphy, *The Big Book of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 11-40; Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis, "Concepts and Cognitive Science," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 8-27.

than "art," we have even less of an incentive to accept them with regards to defining the screenplay.[5]

Fourth, and most importantly, despite some confusion in the literature about what essentialism actually entails, the fact is that it comes in different—and less and more plausible—varieties. Specifically, we ought to heed the recent warnings of some philosophers that essentialism is not to be conflated with intrinsic essentialism.[6] Although intrinsic essentialist definitions of, say, a species or art may fail because neither a species nor art has an underlying, intrinsic essence, it may still be the case that both concepts possess essences, where essence is more broadly construed as a set of intrinsic *and/or* relational, extrinsic properties. For this reason, Neil E. Williams suggests the putative failure of essentialism in biology is not a failure at all; on the contrary, it is intrinsic essentialism that has failed to offer plausible definitions of species and other natural kinds.[7] Likewise, the failure of pure functional or formalist definitions of art have not led most philosophers of art to embrace Morris Weitz's anti-essentialism, for it is only intrinsic essentialism—or what Noël Carroll has called "stage-one essentialism"—that has failed in attempts to define art.[8] In both the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of art, much more plausible definitions of species and art are on offer—specifically, definitions that identify the essence of the concept under investigation in terms of historical, social, and/or intentional relationships (or that at least have a relational component).[9]

In the tradition of this work, I propose a relational definition of the screenplay—specifically, an intentional-historical formalist definition—whereby the screenplay is defined by an intended relationship to prior screenplays (and some rough necessary conditions regarding form) rather than an essential function and/or

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[5] A recent essay by Aaron Meskin offers the most convincing statement of anti-essentialist skepticism about the possibility of defining the individual arts. However, Meskin's primary target seems to be intrinsic essentialism, rather than the kind of extrinsic essentialism I defend below. He, himself, admits that institutional and historical definitions are insulated from the kinds of objections that can be lodged against intrinsic essentialist definitions. See Aaron Meskin, "From Defining Art to Defining the Individual Arts: The Role of Theory in the Philosophies of the Arts," in *New Waves in Aesthetics*, eds. Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 125-149.

[6] See, especially, Neil E. Williams, "Putnam's Traditional Neo-Essentialism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

[7] Ibid. Also see the discussion in Samir Okasha, "Darwinian Metaphysics: Species and the Question of Essentialism," *Synthese* 131, no. 2 (May 2002): 191-213.

[8] See Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition: An Anthology*, eds. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 12-18; Noël Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64.

[9] See, for examples in philosophy of biology, Okasha, "Darwinian Metaphysics;" Paul Griffiths, "Squaring the Circle: Natural Kinds with Historical Essences," in *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Robert A. Wilson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 209-228. In the context of philosophy of art, see for example, George Dickie's institutional definition of art, which first appeared in his *Art and the Aesthetic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), and is most recently updated in his *Art and Value* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2001); also see Jerrold Levinson's intentional-historical definition in "Defining Art Historically," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 3-25, and which he has most recently defended in "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no. 4 (2002): 367-379.

(set of) formal feature(s). Furthermore, my goal here will be to develop a descriptive definition rather than a normative one. Like Jerrold Levinson's aim in defining music, my goal is to "capture the widest, most inclusive central usage of ['screenplay'] current at the present time, though stopping short of what are clearly metaphorical extensions."[10] At the very least, I take this to include screenplays for narrative fiction films (Hollywood and otherwise), screenplays for non-fiction films, screenplays for non-narrative fiction or experimental films, and unfilmed screenplays. I also take it that the term, "screenplay," is currently used to refer to a variety of dramatic manuscripts for screen works other than films—in particular, teleplays and digital videos intended to screen on the web. (Although I will use the term, "film," in a broad sense as a synonym for "screen work.") The main sorts of "metaphorical extensions" I think we want to exclude are cutting continuities and other such transcriptions, which are derived after a film is already completed.

Finally, I should point out that a descriptive definition of a category as broad as, say, music will include musical works that are not art as well as those that are. This fact is perhaps even clearer when it comes to film; lots of things that fall under the concept of film are not works of film art. I mention this to point out that the question of whether screenplays can be works of art has no bearing on the definitional project beyond the possibility that one reason defining the screenplay might be interesting or worthwhile is that we suspect some screenplays are artworks.

Defining the Screenplay Functionally

At first glance, the screenplay appears especially well suited to be defined functionally. It seems uncontroversial to suppose that the function of a screenplay is, roughly, to serve as a sort of outline or blueprint from which a film can be made. That is, it might be thought that a screenplay is a kind of tool for making films, and, as such, can be defined insofar as it fulfills its function as a tool. In addition, I think we

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[10] Jerrold Levinson, "The Concept of Music," in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, 268. It seems to me that the need to be wary of metaphorical extensions is particularly pressing in the areas of film and screenwriting, where some theorists still—after years of semiotic theory—want to treat all sorts of aspects of filmmaking as kinds of writing. Steven Maras, for example, thinks that the screenplay is a normative form of "screen writing," which includes "writing with light," "writing with sound," and "writing with bodies." Maras also invokes Derrida to remind his reader that "both cinemato*graphy* and photo*graphy* are etymologically speaking forms of writing." Here, the notion of writing for the screen is rendered so slack that it means nothing more than "filmmaking." But I take it that competent speakers use the terms "screenwriting" and "screenplay" to do some work in ordinary usage—that they use these words to pick out a specific kind of writing (in the literal sense). I think this is justification enough for limiting my scope to such central usage. See Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 2.

can identify at least one necessary condition for something to be a screenplay: screenplays are necessarily verbal objects. This also seems uncontroversial since it would be hard to imagine anything without words being correctly called a screenplay. So, a very rough functional definition of the screenplay might look something like this:

> x is a screenplay if and only if x is a verbal object from which a film can be made.

Despite having some intuitive appeal, this definition is clearly too broad. The idea that screenplays are things "from which films can be made" is just too general. As it stands, the definition would be forced to include many verbal objects from which films can be made—novels, short stories, and newspaper articles—but which are clearly not screenplays. So, we need to narrow the definition to exclude those sorts of objects while taking care not to narrow it so much that we end up excluding any screenplays. A second attempt at a functional definition might look something like this:

> x is a screenplay if and only if x is a verbal object that specifies the plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects and/or other constitutive elements of a film.

This second attempt at a functional definition is more specific to screenplays, but it does not solve our problem because it is still too broad. Again, verbal objects like newspaper articles, novels, and stories often specify constitutive elements of films like plot, character, and dialogue. Furthermore, this formulation of the definition raises another problem: some screenplays do not specify any constitutive parts of a film. That is, some screenplays are never filmed, but we still consider them screenplays. The definition also needs to accommodate this type of case.

One way to attempt to solve both of these problems—i.e. to 1) sufficiently narrow the definition so that it includes screenplays but not other verbal objects that specify constitutive elements of films, and 2) include screenplays that are never shot and, thus, do not specify any actual constitutive elements—might be to appeal to the intentions of the agent who creates a screenplay. Such a solution may seem promising because screenplays are artifacts and a commonly held view is that an object's belonging to an artifact kind like "screenplay" is a matter of its "proper" or intended

function (regardless of whether that function is realized).[11] For example, Lynne Rudder Baker claims, "artifacts have proper functions that they are (intentionally) designed and produced to perform (whether they perform their proper functions or not)... [A]n artifact has its proper function essentially: the nature of an artifact lies in its proper function—what it was designed to do, the purpose for which it was produced."[12] Perhaps, then, something is a screenplay in virtue of it having been created with the intended function of specifying certain constitutive elements of a film. According to this account, screenplays that are never shot are still correctly regarded as screenplays because they were nevertheless created with the intended function that separates screenplays from other artifact kinds—that is, the intended function of specifying the plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects and/or other constitutive elements of a film.

On this view, a modified functional definition of the screenplay might look something like this:

> x is a screenplay if and only if x is a verbal object that has the intended function of specifying the plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other constitutive elements of a film.

This final revised definition has several merits. As I mentioned earlier, it seems true that screenplays are necessarily verbal objects. The "intended function" condition excludes other verbal objects like novels and short stories from which films might be made but which do not have the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film. Furthermore, the definition will cover screenplays that are never filmed and do not specify the constitutive elements of a film, but were nevertheless intended to fulfill that function. Finally, the definition leaves open the possibility that the screenplay might have other intended functions that are not exclusive to the artifact kind, "screenplay." For example, in addition to its "proper" function, a screenplay also might have the function of affording an aesthetic experience despite the fact that many non-screenplay artifacts share that function. Despite these merits, however, this more sophisticated functional definition still faces challenges that I think are ultimately insurmountable.

The first challenge to this functional definition of the screenplay is that although most screenplays have the intended function of specifying the constitutive

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[11] For a discussion, see Amie L. Thomasson, "Artifacts and Human Concepts," in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52-73
[12] Lynne Rudder Baker, "The Ontology of Artifacts," *Philosophical Explorations* 7, no. 2 (2004): 102.

elements of films, not all do. One counterexample to the functional definition is the fan-fiction screenplay. Fan-fiction is a genre of popular literature in which fans of a particular film or novel write a new piece of fiction based in the same story world as the original film or novel. For example, a devotee of the *Star Wars* franchise might write a short story or screenplay about what happens to Han Solo after the events in *Return of the Jedi* (1983). For a variety of reasons, fan-fiction usually has a very small audience—in most cases, an on-line community of fans with similar interests. So, when a fan-fiction screenplay is written and posted to an on-line bulletin board, it does not have the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film. Surely, such a screenplay might have that function in the future, but it is not the intended function the screenplay was created to fulfill. In most cases, writers of fan fiction screenplays do not intend to create a blueprint for a film, but to create a piece of writing that itself affords an imaginative experience for a community of readers.

Cormac McCarthy's unpublished screenplays present a similar counterexample. In 1984, McCarthy began work on two screenplays. Each one became the basis of a later novel—*Cities on the Plain* and *No Country for Old Men*. In these cases, it appears that the screenplays had the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of novels rather than films. In the latter case, McCarthy's screenplay did, in the end, specify some constitutive elements of a film—*No Country for Old Men* (2006). However, it did so by first specifying the constitutive elements of the novel that the filmmakers adapted into their own screenplay. And while this was a happy result, McCarthy certainly did not write the screenplay with the intention that it would function in this manner. On the contrary, it seems likely that McCarthy's screenplays were written with the intended function of helping him outline and visualize his novels. Of course, research would need to bear out such a conclusion, but the theoretical point is not to be lost amongst the details: It is clearly possible that McCarthy created a document we would admit was a screenplay—apparently based on its formal features alone—even if its intended function was not to specify the constitutive parts of a film, but of a novel. In sum, these two counterexamples show that having the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film is not a necessary condition for something to be a screenplay.

The second challenge to the functional definition of the screenplay comes from the opposite direction. Even if one rejects the two aforementioned counterexamples and we grant, for the sake of argument, that screenplays necessarily

have the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of films, it is nevertheless the case that screenplays are not the *only* verbal objects that have this intended function. This becomes clear when we ask what it means to specify the constitutive elements of a film. Screenplays are, by their nature as verbal objects, never totally constitutive of films. The most we can say is that a screenplay may have the intended function of specifying *some* of the constitutive elements of a film. But this feature is not exclusive to screenplays. Consider a verbal object that is created with the intended function of specifying the plot and the characters of a film but not the dialogue. In the film industry such objects are usually regarded as treatments rather than screenplays. Shot lists present a similar problem. Having the intended function of specifying the shots of a film cannot be sufficient for something to be a screenplay, since this is precisely what shot lists do. As Steven Maras has observed, "there is little that is exclusive to the screenplay that is not present in the scene-based organization of the scenario, the shot-by-shot format of the continuity script, 'the read' of the extended synopsis or dialogue of the playscript."[13]

The way out of this predicament might appear to be to argue that what distinguishes screenplays from treatments and shot lists is either that screenplays specify *more* constitutive elements or that screenplays specify a particular constitutive element that no non-screenplay object specifies. That is, one might attempt to add one of two additional conditions for something to be a screenplay: (1) that it specify a certain number of constitutive elements, or (2) that it specify a constitutive element that all and only screenplays specify. Of course, adding (1) would require demonstrating that in fact screenplays necessarily specify a certain number of constitutive elements, and adding (2) would require an account of what constitutive element it is that all and only screenplays specify.

Adding (1) as a necessary condition would be an arbitrary stipulation quickly undermined by empirical evidence. The point of coming up with a number would be to demonstrate that screenplays necessarily specify more constitutive elements of a film than non-screenplays that also have the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film. But this is clearly false. There are some very detailed treatments that specify lots constitutive elements—more than screenplays that are very minimal and specify few constitutive elements. An attempt to add (2) as a

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[13] Maras, 6.

necessary condition will be stymied by the fact that none of the various ways in which a screenplay can specify the constitutive elements of a film (e.g., plot, dialogue, characters, shots, edits, sound effects, and so forth) is individually necessary for something to be a screenplay. We can think of or imagine examples of screenplays that do not have the intended function of specifying a film's plot or dialogue or shots, and so on. And if we are unable to offer an account of how screenplays differ from other verbal objects that also have the intended function of specifying some of the constitutive elements of a film, then having that intended function cannot be sufficient for something to be a screenplay. In other words, even if the verbal object condition and the intended function condition were both necessary (and I think the latter is not), they are still not jointly sufficient for something to be a screenplay. We would have to introduce some further conditions, but at this stage it is not clear what those could be.

So, contrary to what intuition suggests, having the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be a screenplay. Now, the guiding assumption in the attempt to define the screenplay functionally was that there was an intended function—or some other intrinsic feature(s)—shared by all and only screenplays. The fact that having the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film has proven not to be that essential purpose means one of two things: either there is some other essential intended function or set of intrinsic features that all and only screenplays possess or there is no such essential intended function or set of intrinsic features. Let us take each of these possibilities in turn.

Perhaps it is the case that screenplays, as members of an artifact kind, do share some intended function that no non-screenplay objects possess, but it is not the function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film. What else could that intended function be? The only substantive possibility on offer in the current literature is suggested by Ian W. Macdonald. In order to clearly explain Macdonald's claims, let me quickly gloss the relevant terminology he introduces in his essay. For Macdonald, a "screen idea" is "any notion of a potential screenwork held by one or more people, whether or not it is possible to describe it on paper or by other means."[14] In short, the screen idea is "a concept…intended to become a screenwork," and "screenwork" is "the completed film, TV drama, etc."[15] Although he makes no strong claims about

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[14] Ian W. Macdonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," *Journal of Media Practice* 5, no. 2 (2004): 90.
[15] Macdonald, 90; 89.

how the screenplay is to be defined, Macdonald suggests that it might be characterized as "intended to convey (or at least record) the screen idea."[16] Macdonald qualifies this somewhat and he does not, I should emphasize, intend to offer a definition of the screenplay, but because this is the most developed current characterization of the screenplay, let us take it under consideration.

As a general characterization of the screenplay, Macdonald's account appears plausible. Surely, most screenplays are in fact intended to convey a screen idea, which is, in turn, intended to become a screen work. However, appropriating Macdonald's characterization for the purposes of formulating a definition will generate the same problems that my previous functional definition encountered. To wit, having the intended function of conveying the screen idea (where the screen idea is intended to result in a completed screen work) is not a feature shared by all and only screenplays. Recall, for example, the fan-fiction screenplay, which is not intended to result in a completed screen work. But perhaps we could construe the screen idea somewhat differently, such that having a screen idea does not necessarily entail having an intention to complete a screen work. Is there another way we could plausibly conceive of the screen idea so that it was something that all and only screenplays conveyed? Unfortunately, I think there is not because once the screen idea is no longer characterized by the intention to create a screen work, it becomes so broad and abstract that it is meaningless. (Indeed, why would we call it a "screen" idea at all?) So, while Macdonald's characterization of the screenplay may be generally accurate, it does not isolate a proper function of the screenplay.

One might conclude here that we ought to keep searching for such a function, but I would like to suggest that there is a good reason not to do so. Despite the intuitive appeal of the notion that artifact concepts—like "screenplay" and "screwdriver"—are necessarily individuated in virtue of intended function, recent work by psychologists and philosophers has challenged this notion.[17] The psychologist Paul Bloom points out that while intended functions are often relevant in determining artifact kind, we do not always judge them to be necessary or sufficient to be included in that kind. As Bloom puts it:

> A…general problem with the functional view is that people can
> construct artifacts without intending them to be used at all. There is

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[16] Macdonald, 90.
[17] See, for an example of work in psychology, Paul Bloom, "Intention, History, and Artifact Concepts," *Cognition 60* (1996): 1-29; for an example of work in philosophy, see Thomasson, "Artifacts."

nothing incoherent about someone creating a boat without any desire that it end up in water, or even creating a boat with an express desire that it never end up in water. We would still view it as a boat, a fact that seriously undermines any function-based theory of artifact concepts.[18]

Bloom's point is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of screenplays. We can clearly imagine a person creating a verbal object that we recognized as a screenplay, but that the author expressly intended never be used for anything, let alone specifying the constitutive elements of a film or conveying a screen idea. Thus, our specific problem of being unable to determine the proper function of the screenplay might be symptomatic of a broader flaw with functional theories of artifact concepts.

Does Bloom's criticism of the functional view of artifact concepts mean that we ought to move in the direction of a formalist definition of the screenplay? For perhaps if we recognize some objects—say, fan-fiction screenplays—as screenplays not in virtue of their intended function, but in virtue of their physical appearance, then it is the case that what unifies the concept, "screenplay," is actually some set of formal properties.

However, the problem any formalist definition of the screenplay faces is that it does not seem possible to identify a physical characteristic (or set thereof) that all and only screenplays share. The category, "screenplay," is actually more diverse than it may appear to be at first glance. I think it is uncontroversial to say that all of the following fall under the category: Orson Welles's screenplay for *Lady From Shanghai* (1947), Paul Schrader's screenplay for *Affliction* (1997), Jim Benning's "New York 1980," with which he shot his experimental film, *Him and Me* (1982), Samuel Beckett's teleplay, "Eh Joe," and his "Film" screenplay, which was used to make the original *Film* (1965) and used again by the B.F.I. to make *Film* (1979), Su Friedrich's screenplay for *Sink or Swim*, Trinh T. Minh-ha's screenplay for *Naked Spaces— Living is Round*, Derek Jarman's unproduced screenplay, "Sod 'Em," Guy Maddin's screenplay for his silent film, *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006), and the web-based, fan-fiction teleplay, "Reset Reality Check."[19] In short, our present concept of

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[18] Bloom, 5-6.
[19] Camille, "Reset Reality Check," *Charmed: Reset Reality* Season 6, episode 22, dated December 13, 2009, http://resetreality.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=showroom&action=display&thread=900. This is an episode in an online fan-fiction, virtual series. See chapter 10 for more details.

"screenplay" includes a variety of different looking objects despite the fact that we might have a clear sense of what features a screenplay typically has.[20]

Moreover, in attempting to define the screenplay in virtue of physical features, we also face hard cases—cases in which it is extremely difficult to determine whether or not a work is correctly categorized as a screenplay. Some examples of such hard cases include Su Friedrich's "(Script) for a Film without Images," Yoko Ono's "Film Script 4" and "Tea Party," and Morgan Fisher's script for *Standard Gauge*. There just does not seem to be a physical feature (or set of them) that determines screenplay-hood and will allow us to correctly judge whether the hard cases are actually screenplays or not.

But even if we limit our focus to the pool of uncontroversial screenplays, wide variations in formatting and content stymie an attempt to find even one essential physical feature beyond the use of words. Of course, one might, by fiat, declare that most of the examples I have given above are not *really* screenplays because being a screenplay is actually a matter of conforming to certain industry standards and conventions. And perhaps we can construct a list of the industry standards and conventions that are necessary and jointly sufficient for a Hollywood studio executive to recognize something as a "real" screenplay. But such a prescriptive definition of the screenplay does not, as far as I can see, line up with the concept of "screenplay" that most people actually have. Imagine, for example, that not a single student in my introductory screenwriting class manages to set the margins of her final project at the correct industry standard. It just does not seem plausible to say that these students have, for that reason, failed to successfully create screenplays. This is certainly not an explanation that would be accepted by tuition-paying parents or a department chair, at any rate. So, I think we have to acknowledge the fact that although many screenplays are recognizable as such in virtue of conforming to very specific and rigid formatting standards, our concept of the screenplay is nevertheless so broad as to include a very diverse group of objects—so diverse, in fact, that there seems not to be a single physical characteristic that all and only screenplays possess.

Towards a Relational Definition of the Screenplay

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[20] For a good collection of unconventional screenplays, including several of the examples mentioned here, see Scott MacDonald, *Screen Writings: Scripts and Texts by Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995). As the title indicates, however, not all of the texts in the collection are screenplays properly so-called.

So far, I have argued that we have reasons to doubt that the concept, "screenplay," is unified either by an intended function or a set of physical features. In fact, as I indicated at the outset, I think it is likely that any intrinsic essentialist definition of the screenplay will fail. Why? One crucial fact illuminated by the previous discussion is that screenplays are artifacts—the products of intentional human activity. As such, they are socially and historically situated. Thus, it would be odd indeed if screenplays were united by some underlying essence that was *exclusively* intrinsic—like a set of physical features—unrelated to and unaffected by socio-historical context. So, too, would it be strange if the concept, "screenplay," was solely unified by an intrinsic essence in a weaker sense of having an intended function. For even though having an intended function is a matter of having a certain kind of relationship to human intentions, a pure functional definition presupposes an unchanging socio-historical context. That is, on a pure functional definition of an artifact kind, once the artifact kind has its intended function, it has that function eternally (indeed, essentially)—as if that function were wholly intrinsic to the artifact in the first place. In fact, this is one of the problems with pure aesthetic definitions of art: As time has passed, art's functions have changed such that it seems clear that the concept is not unified by having the function of affording an aesthetic experience (or, for that matter, any other function).[21]

Now, in the context of philosophy of art, one well-known reaction that emerged out of the rejection of what I am calling intrinsic essentialism was the anti-essentialism advocated by Morris Weitz. Weitz put the challenge this way: "If we actually look and see what it is that we call 'art,' we will…find no common properties—only strands of similarities. Knowing what art is is not apprehending some manifest or latent essence but being able to recognize, describe, and explain those things we call 'art' in virtue of these similarities."[22] And, indeed, I suspect that those of my colleagues in literary and cultural studies who are skeptical of all things "essentialist" may feel inclined to adopt Weitz's anti-essentialism and his family resemblance approach. However, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, there are good reasons to reject both—not only in the context of defining art, but in the context of defining the screenplay as well.

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[21] See Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 50-77; Noël Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, 101.
[22] Weitz, 15.

The objections to Weitz's anti-essentialism are well known.[23] A central one, which I mentioned previously, is that from the fact that some concepts cannot be defined, or that art (or any other concept) has not yet successfully been defined, it certainly does not follow that art (or any other concept) is indefinable. But rather than rehearsing every objection, I will only raise one other matter. Perhaps the crux of Weitz's argument, and the point I imagine many scholars find most convincing, is the idea that to define art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions would be to foreclose upon the creative possibilities open to practitioners. According to Weitz, "the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties."[24] Thus, art is an "open concept."[25] In other words, a definition that identifies the essence of art cannot truly be descriptive in nature because, as we know, artists are constantly experimenting and redrawing boundaries of art through their practices. No essentialist definition is possible, therefore, unless it is a normative one that demarcates the boundaries of art and circumscribes artists' options for art making—so the argument goes. However, we should reject this argument, too, because it amounts to a claim that creativity is an essential feature of art, and it is clear that an essentialist definition could easily be tailored to accommodate this idea.[26] As Noël Carroll summarizes, "Of course, if a definition of art precludes artistic experimentation, that is a problem. But it is a problem with the particular definition in question, not with the very idea of defining art itself. There is no reason to imagine that, in principle, defining art is necessarily a barrier to artistic innovation."[27]

If Weitz's open concept argument is unconvincing in the context of defining art, it is even more so in the context of defining the screenplay. For surely there is less diversity among screenplays than among artworks. It seems that the concept, "screenplay," is less similar to the concept of art than to that of an individual art form like music, which has—as Jerrold Levinson puts it—a narrower extension (that is, the set of all objects to which a term applies, or, roughly, its reference) and a more specific intension (that is, the set of features shared by all and only those objects to

[23] For a review, see Davies, *Definitions of Art*, 4-22; Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 209-226.
[24] Weitz, 16.
[25] Ibid, 15.
[26] See Davies, *Definitions of Art*, 15; Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 219-221.
[27] Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 220.

which a term applies, or, roughly, its meaning).[28] If these thoughts are accurate—and if it is plausible that individual art forms like music do admit of definition, as philosophers like Levinson have suggested—then we have little cause to suppose that "screenplay" is an open concept. For the concept, "screenplay," has existed for less than a hundred years; we should therefore expect that its extension is significantly narrower than that of the concept of, say, music or poetry—art forms that have changed significantly over thousands of years—let alone the concept of art.

Furthermore, I do not regard adopting a family resemblance approach to defining the screenplay as a live option for a specific reason and a general reason. The specific reason is that it would make distinguishing screenplays from related objects like treatments, shot lists, and storyboards impossible. Eventually, one would be forced to take the position Steven Maras does, according to which "writing with light," "writing with sound," and "writing with bodies" are all kinds of "screen writing."[29] How many different, related kinds of "screenplays" would be generated from these different forms of "screen writing?" And how would they be distinguishable from constitutive parts of films, like performances, or entire films themselves?

This specific problem is symptomatic of the general difficulty with the family resemblance approach: It cannot successfully pick out members of a given category because the principle of resemblance is too broad to distinguish genuine category members from non-members that resemble genuine members in some fashion. For example, there are numerous ways in which dolphins resemble fish despite the fact that dolphins are correctly categorized as mammals and fish are not. In other words, the problem with the family resemblance approach is that mere resemblance is not sufficient for the purposes of correct categorization because it does not provide an account of the basis of the relationship between category members.[30]

Hopefully, this discussion has made clear that the common problem with Weitz's anti-essentialism and his family resemblance approach is the one I have been at pains to highlight from the start—the conflation of intrinsic essentialism with essentialism in general. As Stephen Davies writes, Weitz denies "the possibility of an essential definition in terms of particular sorts of properties; that is, in terms of the perceptible properties intrinsic to artworks. Of course, he may be right in thinking that

no internal, perceptible property is essential to something's being an artwork, while being mistaken in the claim he actually makes—that no essential definition is possible."[31] Likewise, the flaw of the family resemblance approach is that perceptual or physical resemblances do not link family members; the relationships that underlie those resemblances do.

Thus, it should be clear that, in the present context of defining the screenplay, abandoning intrinsic essentialism in no way commits us to embracing anti-essentialism or a family resemblance approach. In fact, their mistaken identification of essentialism with intrinsic essentialism suggests a way forward in our attempt to define the screenplay. For it is plausible that the concept, "screenplay," is unified not in virtue of intrinsic features, but in virtue of extrinsic features—or, more specifically, relationships. That is, "relational essentialism" is still worth pursuing. If we continue to follow work in the philosophy of art, then there are broadly two options for proceeding: a procedural definition or an intentional-historical definition. On a procedural definition, screenplays would be defined as such as a result of how we treat them. Applying an institutional theory, for example, would result in something like a proposal that screenplay-hood is a sort of status conferred upon particular verbal objects by a member or members of an informal institution like the screenplay-world or, at least, someone with the appropriate authority. However, I think such an approach is a non-starter because it does not appear to describe how we actually determine what objects count as screenplays and because it appears to suffer from vicious circularity.[32] How, on this account, could screenplay-hood status be understood independently of the concept of screenplay?

Therefore, I want to leave procedural definitions aside in favor of focusing on an intentional-historical approach. Jerrold Levinson and Noël Carroll are the best-known advocates of intentional-historical approaches, but they have are developed substantively different proposals. The nub of the difference is that Levinson offers a definition of art, whereas Carroll offers a method of identifying art. The distinction is this: On one hand, Levinson's proposal—roughly, that "something is a work of art if and only if it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded"[33]—involves a condition that is supposedly both necessary and sufficient for something to be art. Thus, although this account centers upon the

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[31] Davies, *Definitions of Art*, 20.
[32] See, for example, Davies, *Definitions of Art*, 109-112, and Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 224-239.
[33] Levinson, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art," 367.

extrinsic rather than intrinsic features of art, it is, nevertheless, a definition that putatively identifies the essence of art.

On the other hand, Carroll's proposal—that we can use historical narratives to "establish the art status of contested works by connecting the works in question to artworks and practices already acknowledged to be art"[34]—offers a method for identifying art without making a claim about art's definition. Now Carroll does not hitch his proposal to an anti-essentialist argument; his thinking is that the practical matter of identifying artworks just does not require a definition. And I agree with him about this. However, our present task is not merely to find a reliable method of identifying screenplays, but rather to say something about what screenplay-hood is. Simply put, our task is not to identify screenplays, but to determine what unifies our concept of the screenplay. For this reason, and owing to the considerations discussed above, we ought to follow Levinson in attempting an intentional-historical definition rather than merely adopting Carroll's intentional-historical approach for the purposes of identifying the screenplay. Nevertheless, we ought to keep Carroll's model in mind because, as we construct a definition, we can fruitfully borrow certain elements of it.

Of course, intentional-historical approaches are subject to a number of different criticisms. One obvious objection to characterizing art from an intentional-historical approach according to either Levinson or Carroll's version is that the approach is not very informative. Indeed, this problem seems more acute if an intentional-historical approach is used to define or characterize a concept with a narrower extension like the screenplay. It would clearly not be ideal to say nothing more about the screenplay beyond "something is a screenplay if and only if it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some screenplay is or has been correctly regarded."

In fact, this is a problem Levinson recognizes in his critique of an intentional-historical definition of artifacts offered by Paul Bloom. As mentioned previously, Bloom is skeptical that artifact concepts admit of functional definitions. His solution is to adopt Levinson's intentional-historical definition. In Bloom's words, "We construe the extension of an artifact kind X to be those entities that have been successfully created with the intention that they belong to the same kind as current and previous Xs."[35] On this account of artifacts, for something to count as a

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[34] Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," 109.
[35] Bloom, 10.

screenplay, it would have to be successfully created with the intention that it belonged to the same kind or category of things as current or previous screenplays.

As Levinson points out, however, it seems extremely implausible that artifacts (besides artworks) have *only* intentional and historical necessary conditions. Whereas, on Levinson's account, just about anything—including Brillo boxes or a messy bed—can be art now, there still seem to be at least some rough requirements about form or function for other artifacts—as indicated by the "success condition" of Bloom's proposal. As an example, Levinson suggests that some artifacts, such as a javelin-shaped object, could never be chairs just because they do not meet certain formal and functional requirements of chair-hood. In Levinson's words, "It seems that what is relevant to satisfaction of the minimal success condition is not the maker's conception of a chair based on past acquaintance with them, but rather the conception of a chair endorsed by competent users of the term 'chair' in general, one that imports at least some minimal features of form or function."[36] If Levinson's objection to Bloom's proposal is valid, it does not preclude the possibility of defining the screenplay along intentional-historical lines but it does mean that some additional conditions will be needed to circumscribe the boundaries of the category.[37]

There are other objections to intentional-historical definitions. Carroll is able to dodge most of them because he proposes an approach to identifying art rather than a definition of it. Levinson, however, does have to respond to several challenges—some more serious than others. Rather than addressing all of them here, I will mention only what I take to be the most sustained objection—namely, that the definition cannot account for "first-art." Stephen Davies puts the challenge from first-art succinctly: "Though the emphasis usually falls in these [intentional-historical] theories on the characterization of the art-defining relation, they need a second, non-recursive part for their completion: they must also explain how the first generation of artworks, those without artwork predecessors, became art."[38] But while the problem of first-art may turn out to be one that Levinson's definition cannot satisfactorily solve, it is not a problem that necessarily threatens the approach as applied to individual arts or other artifact concepts. Here we see the relevance of the fact that the individual arts are more homogeneous than art in a broad sense. In many cases, the

[36] Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks as Artifacts," in *Contemplating Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Stephen Davies, "Trying To Define Art as the Sum of the Arts," *Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of Arts* 8 (Spring 2008): 14.

second, non-recursive part of the definition will be possible to provide because the histories of most of the individual arts can be traced back to their origins.

Anna Ribeiro has recently offered an intentional historical-definition of poetry that avoids the objections Davies has to Levinson's definition of art as well as those that Levinson levels at Bloom's definition of artifacts. In short, Ribeiro proposes a two-step intentional-historical model that also imposes additional conditions regarding form—or, as she calls it, a sort of "intentional-historical formalism."[39] Ribeiro's core definition is this:

> To be a poem is to be a verbal object intended by its writer or discoverer [i.e. in the cases of "found" poems] for membership in the poetic tradition or, in other words, in the category 'poetry.'[40]

Expanding upon this core definition, Ribeiro adds that what makes something a poem is, in short, "an author's intention to connect his or her work to preexisting poems," and "such an intention will amount to intending to make use of, transform, or reject the repetition techniques that came to mark the history of poetry around the world."[41] Like Levinson's definition of art, Ribeiro's definition of poetry claims that standing in the right sort of relationship to prior works or a prior tradition is necessary for a candidate work to fall under the category. Notice, though, that Ribeiro's definition of poetry is narrower than Levinson's definition of art. In specifying the nature of the author's intention in terms of the use of repetition techniques (e.g. rhyme schemes or stanza forms), or, as she puts it, "enriching this intention with concrete features," Ribeiro adds a condition regarding the form of poems—thus circumscribing the category and avoiding the kind of criticism Levinson has of Bloom's proposed definition of artifacts.[42]

Ribeiro also avoids Davies's objection regarding the endlessly recursive nature of Levinson's definition by including a second, non-recursive part of the definition that supplies a functional definition of first-poems. According to Ribeiro, first-poems can be defined as "versified language made to serve various purposes: religious rituals, war songs, histories, and so on."[43] Now, whether the evidence would show this to be an accurate characterization of first-poems is irrelevant to the point

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[39] Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 190.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 199.
[42] Ibid, 190. One need not agree with Ribeiro's account of *which* formal features are relevant to accept the general model she proposes.
[43] Ibid, 198.

that, unlike the origins of art, the origins of the individual arts and other artifact concepts may be empirically researched and determined with some certainty. Therefore, while a functionalist definition of this sort would clearly not be adequate to characterize all of poetry as we now know it, it might be sufficient for defining the much more homogenous category of first-poetry.

Using Intentional-Historical Formalism to Define the Screenplay

I propose that we borrow Ribeiro's two-step intentional-historical formalist model in order to define the screenplay. As Ribeiro's definition of poetry shows, this will allow us to cover the full extension of the concept, "screenplay," without being so broad as to allow non-screenplay objects into the category or be uninformative. Furthermore, we have seen that when it comes to defining individual arts or other artifact concepts, the intentional-historical approach need not be stymied by the problem of first-art since artifacts like first-poems, first-screenplays, and so forth are likely to be defined in terms of form or function.

Following Ribeiro, I think an important first step in constructing the definition is to move towards Carroll's approach insofar as we ought to shift our concern with the "regard" for an object to the object itself. Ribeiro writes, "The agent's *poetic* intention with respect to her verbal object is directed at the object, not at the ways that object is to be regarded or treated."[44] Likewise, I submit that screenwriterly intention with respect to an agent's verbal object is directed at the object rather than how the object is to be regarded. Moreover, if there are cases in which screenwriterly intention is directed at the ways the object is to be regarded rather than the object itself, these cases can be accommodated by simply speaking more broadly of "screenwriting practice" because this category will cover both intentions about objects themselves and intentions about how they are to be regarded. So, rather than starting with the Levinsonian formulation, *x* is a screenplay if and only if *x* is intended for overall regard as some prior screenplay is or was correctly regarded, we should appropriate Carroll's approach to identifying artworks, whereby "the way in which we identify objects as art is to rely upon strategies internal to the practice of art, which enable us to situate objects [or practices] that repeat, amplify, or repudiate already accepted

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[44] Ibid, 190.

artworks [or art practices]…"[45] Borrowing Carroll's approach for the purposes of formulating an intentional-historical definition of the screenplay will give us something like this:

> x is a screenplay just in case x is intended to repeat, amplify, or repudiate some prior screenplay(s) (or screenwriting practice).

This is helpful as a kind of core definition, but some modifications are immediately in order. First, as Carroll himself notes, there are other ways in which a work may emerge out of a practice or tradition besides repetition, amplification, and repudiation.[46] An easy way to make the definition more inclusive is simply to switch the word "amplify" with "change." But even before making this modification, there is a danger that the definition is too inclusive, for surely one could write a manifesto or give a speech that repudiated a specific screenplay or screenwriting practice. In such a case, we would not want to say that someone had thereby created a screenplay. Carroll anticipates this problem and therefore also stipulates the following requirement that we too should adopt: The repetition, amplification (or change), or repudiation must be conducted "in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of the practice."[47] This should ensure that only *screenplays* that continue, change or repudiate screenwriting practice are included in the definition. Thirdly, the definition still needs to be narrowed by offering a characterization of screenwriterly intention in terms of form in the same way that Ribeiro characterizes poetic intention.

How, then, can we characterize screenwriterly intention? First, screenwriterly intention needs to be grounded in the history of screenwriting. If, when examining some candidate object, we cannot infer some intention on the part of its creator to somehow continue, change, or repudiate prior screenplays or screenwriting practice, we have no reason to think that the candidate object is a screenplay. Furthermore, we need to recognize that the screenplay and screenwriting practice have evolved over the course of history such that the notion of screenwriterly intention has to be more broadly construed than it once was. We have seen that at present, screenplays are not essentially verbal objects that have the intended function of specifying the plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other elements of a film.

Is there no way to more narrowly describe screenwriterly intention than in terms of intended function? Despite the fact that specifying the constitutive elements

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[45] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 71.
[46] Ibid, 402 n8.
[47] Carroll, "Historical Narratives," 113.

of a film is no longer an essential function of the screenplay, I think that history clearly shows that it once was and, furthermore, that it is precisely this function that has historically characterized screenplays and shaped their form. As such, I think that we can characterize screenwriterly intention, at present, in terms of an intention to use the forms that historically have had the function of specifying the constitutive elements of films as long as we allow that screenwriterly intention could now be an intention to change or repudiate this very function.

My proposed definition of the screenplay, then, is this:

x is a screenplay if and only if *x* is a verbal object intended to repeat, change, or repudiate the ways in which plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other features have historically been specified as constitutive elements of a film by a prior screenplay(s) or screenwriting practice (in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of that practice).

I anticipate two immediate objections to the definition and address each in turn.

First, it might be objected that the definition is too broad. It might be charged that on this definition, we are forced to count as screenplays non-screenplay objects (e.g. shot lists) that are intended to repeat, change, or repudiate the ways in certain features (e.g. shots) have historically been specified as constitutive elements of a film by screenplays. My response is that this is not so. Things like shot lists may be intended to change the ways in which shots have been specified as constitutive elements of a film by screenplays, *but not in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of screenwriting practice.* Countering this objection hinges on a distinction between defining screenwriting practice and identifying screenwriting practice. But while defining the screenplay (and screenwriting practice) has required extended conceptual analysis, identifying screenplays and instances of screenwriting practice is not so difficult. It is uncontroversial to say that simply listing shots is not a recognizable and live purpose (or feature) of screenwriting practice. Hence, shotlists cannot be screenplays.

One might object from the opposite direction that what I have proposed is a functional definition in disguise and is too narrow. According to the definition, for something to count as a screenplay, it must be intended to repeat, change, or repudiate the ways in which plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other features have historically been specified as constitutive elements of a film. But as we have seen in the case of fan-fiction screenplays, some screenplays are just not

intended to specify the constitutive elements of a film in any sense. This is where the intentional-historical part of the definition becomes crucial. The definition accounts for fan-fiction screenplays by allowing that something can count as a screenplay if it is intended to change or repudiate the ways in which these features have historically been specified as constitutive elements of a film. This is precisely what fan-fiction screenplays do (in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of screenwriting practice) in so far as they are not intended to specify the constitutive elements of a film.

As another example, suppose that I create something that meets all of the industry standards for a screenplay—i.e., it is in the proper format, it specifies plot, character, dialogue, scene action, some camera angles, some edits, and so forth. But suppose my intention in creating this object is really just to practice standard industry formatting, dramatic construction, and character development. I have absolutely no intention that what I have written specify the constitutive elements of even a potential film. The intentional-historical part of the definition gives us a way of acknowledging that what I have created counts as a screenplay in virtue of its connection to prior screenplays.

At this point, however, one may wonder if I have embraced an intentional-historical formalist definition of the screenplay as an *ad hoc* last resort. In fact, I think that, independent of the problems with intrinsic essentialism and anti-essentialism, there is a compelling reason to define the screenplay historically—to wit, the concept, "screenplay," seems to be an historical one. It is to an examination of the screenplay as historical concept that I turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: The Screenplay as Historical Concept

I have proposed that our present concept of the screenplay is essentially historical and can be defined as such:

> x is a screenplay if and only if x is a verbal object intended to repeat, change, or repudiate the ways in which plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other features have historically been specified as constitutive elements of a screen work by screenplays or screenwriting practice (in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of that practice).

If this definition is to stand, I have to show that our concept of the screenplay is, in fact, an historical concept—as well as what I mean by this in the first place.

History and Concepts

Defending his intentional-historical definition of art, Jerrold Levinson writes:

> Virtually all concepts, we may safely venture, are subject to historical evolution. In any event, the concept of art is clearly no exception. What was understood by the term "art" in 1790 is not the same thing as is understood by the term today, a mere two centuries later; what items or activities would have counted, the reasons why they would have so counted, and what would have been the paradigms with reference to which counting would have been assessed, were dramatically different.[1]

Levinson's goal here is to call our attention to a weak sense in which most concepts are historical so that, later in his essay, he can distinguish the special historicity of art from the historicity of other concepts. Therefore, the passage offers a useful starting point for delineating several kinds of relationships that obtain between concepts and history.

First, note that the "virtually all" modifier stakes out space for purely formal concepts—like mathematical concepts—that do not evolve historically. For example, something is a square just in case it is a polygon with four equal sides and four right angles. There seems to be no sense in which the concept, "square," could evolve or, in

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[1] Jerrold Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:3 (Summer 1993): 411.

any way, be affected by history. At least some concepts, therefore, are essentially ahistorical.

Beyond these sorts of cases, however, most concepts do seem to have an essential historicity to them. And this is not only true of what Levinson later calls "cultural entities," but of many non-human kind concepts. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many philosophers of science now reject the idea that biological kind concepts like species have intrinsic essences because strong intrinsic essentialism cannot accommodate contemporary work in evolutionary science.[2] Richard Boyd describes such a version of intrinsic essentialism according to which natural kinds "must possess definitional essences that define them in terms of necessary and sufficient, intrinsic, unchanging, ahistorical properties."[3] Accepting this sort of strong intrinsic essentialism about natural kinds has unhappy consequences for biological kinds like species, which, on this theory, seem not to count as natural kinds precisely because they do not have unchanging, ahistorical essences.

On the contrary, most philosophers believe that biological kinds are essentially historical, and, if this conflicts with strong natural kind intrinsic essentialism, so much the worse for it. Ruth Garrett Millikan argues, "Biological kinds are defined by reference to historical relations among the members, not, in the first instance, by reference to properties. Biological kinds are, as such, historical kinds."[4] Interestingly, what Millikan proposes here bears a striking similarity to Levinson's definition of art. She continues,

> The members of these kinds are like one another because of certain historical relations they bear to one another (that is the essence) rather than by having an eternal essence in common. It is not just that each exhibits the properties of the kind for the same eternal reason. Rather, each exhibits the properties of the kind because other members of that same historical kind exhibit them. Inductions made from one member of the kind to another are grounded because there is a certain historical link between the members of the kind that causes the members to be like one another.[5]

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[2] See, for examples of seminal essays, David Hull, "The Effect of Essentialism on Taxonomy: Two Thousand Years of Stasis," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 15, no. 60 (1965): 314-326 and 16, no. 61 (1965): 1-18; Elliott Sober, "Evolution, Population Thinking, and Essentialism," *Philosophy of Science* 47, no. 3 (1980): 350-383; John Dupré, "Natural Kinds and Biological Taxa," *The Philosophical Review* 90, no. 1 (1981): 66-90. For examples of recent work, see Marc Ereshefsky, "What's Wrong with the New Biological Essentialism," *Philosophy of Science*, PSA Proceedings (forthcoming); Robert A. Wilson, Matthew J. Barker, and Ingo Brigandt, "When Traditional Essentialism Fails: Biological Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Topics* 35, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2007): 189-215; Bence Nanay, "Three Ways of Resisting Essentialism about Natural Kinds," *Carving Nature at Its Joints: Topics in Contemporary Philosophy, Volume 8*, ed. J. Campbell, M. O'Rourke, and M. Slater (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming).
[3] Richard Boyd, "Homeostasis, Species and Higher Taxa," in *Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Robert Andrew Wilson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 146.
[4] Ruth Garrett Millikan, "Historical Kinds and the 'Special Sciences,'" *Philosophical Studies* 95 (1999): 54.
[5] Ibid, 54-55.

Millikan herself recognizes and draws out the parallel between biological kind concepts and artifact kind concepts. In her words, "The members of some historical artifact kinds are similar in nearly the same detail as members of animal species."[6] Of course, there is an important difference between the historicity of a biological kind like a species and that of an artifact kind like art. To wit, the causal/historical link depends on intentionality in the realm of art, but not in the realm of biology (unless, of course, one believes in intelligent design).[7]

The broader point is that there are good reasons to think Levinson is right that most of our concepts are historical since this is true of even some non-human kind concepts. Furthermore, though, if certain non-human kind concepts are historical, then we might think that most human kind concepts are historical in an even stronger sense. Whereas biological evolution occurs slowly over many generations, cultural forces may rapidly and drastically change human kind concepts. In the passage quoted above, one of the points Levinson seems to want to make is that we could substitute for "art" a variety of concepts invented by humans and get a true statement. "What was understood by the term x in 1790 is not the same thing as is understood by the term today, a mere two centuries later," allows for x to be a lot of different things: medicine, government, and so forth. So, we ought to make distinctions not only between historical concepts and ahistorical concepts, but also amongst the kinds of historicity that historical concepts can exhibit. Cultural concepts, like "medicine," appear to be essentially historical in a particular way that differs from the way in which "dog" is essentially historical.

According to Levinson, "all cultural entities or categories," including art, exhibit what he calls "external historicism," which he contrasts with the "internal historicism" that is specific to art:

> What we might speak of as the "internal historicism" of the concept of art, if I am right, is thus something distinctively attributable to art-making, as opposed to just any activity the terms of whose discourse or practice have historically evolved, and which is subject even to possible disappearance, i.e., transformation to such an extent that no longer recognizable as the same thing. Call that condition and

[6] Ruth Garrett Millikan, *On Clear and Confused Ideas: An Essay About Substance Concepts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21.

[7] On this difference, see Tim Lewens, *Organisms and Artifacts: Design in Nature and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

possibility, which applies to all cultural entities or categories, "external historicism."[8]

In other words, Levinson understands art to be essentially historical in an even stronger sense than all other cultural entities. The concept of art is not only externally historical, but, furthermore, internally historical. Describing what he calls "internal historicism," Levinson writes:

> So what I mean by historicism with regard to the concept of art, at least in this context, is not so much the truism that our notions, art among them, have evolved over time as a result of familiar cultural forces, but rather the conviction that the only common core of art applicable to art-making today and two thousand years ago…is one which makes historical reference or connectedness, that is, reference or connectedness to predecessor works, activities, modes of reception, *internal* to the idea of art-making itself.[9]

Thus, for Levinson, internal historicism is exclusive to art; it constitutes art's essence.

Levinson is not alone in thinking that insofar as art is a cultural entity it necessarily has (at least) what he calls an external historicity to it. A similar premise motivates and grounds Noël Carroll's theory of identifying art historically. In Carroll's words, "Art has an inexpugnable historical dimension because it is a practice with a tradition."[10] According to Carroll:

> To refer to something as a practice in its simplest sense is to regard it as an activity that is customarily or habitually undertaken; a cultural practice, in this sense, applies to the customary activities of a culture…
>   Custom, traditions, and precedent are integral components of a cultural practice. Nevertheless, cultural practices need not be static. They require flexibility over time in order to persist through changing circumstances…Practices sustain and abet change while remaining the same practice...[11]

So, for Carroll, too, art is essentially historical (in Levinson's external sense), because it is a cultural entity.

Now, after Levinson makes the distinction between the internal historicism of art and the external historicism of other cultural entities, he does not draw further distinctions regarding the ways in which non-art cultural entities are essentially historical. In other words, the implication seems to be that with the exception of art, cultural entities are essentially historical in roughly the same way. However, for

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[8] Levinson, "Extending," 412.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Noël Carroll, "Identifying Art," in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.
[11] Noël Carroll, "Art, Practice, Narrative," in *Beyond Aesthetics*, 66.

Carroll, there is something about the fact that art is, specifically, a cultural *practice*, which makes it historical in a stronger sense than that in which other cultural entities are historical, but which is not exclusive to art practice. The crux of the matter is that, on Carroll's view, cultural practices are able to evolve historically in a way that other cultural entities are not.

It should be apparent, then, that Levinson and Carroll differ in their conception of the way in which the concept, "art," is essentially historical. To summarize: Levinson contrasts the external historicism of cultural entities in general with the internal historicism of art. For him, to call art internally historical entails making three distinct but related claims. Claim (1) is that "the concrete history of art is logically implicated in the way the concept of art operates," or that what is art now depends upon what has been art in the past.[12] Claim (2) is that "the *only* [my emphasis] common core of art…is one which makes historical reference or connectedness…*internal* to the idea of art-making itself;"[13] in other words, our concept of art is unified *solely* in virtue of "purely historical and intentional necessary conditions."[14] Claim (3) is that this "pure" historicity is exclusive to art and makes art an historical concept in a way that differs from all other cultural entities: "the current concept of art…in contrast to perhaps every other artifact concept, retains only certain purely historical and intentional necessary conditions."[15] For Levinson, art's internal historicism involves all three of these putative facts.

In contrast, although Carroll also thinks that the concept of art is historical in a special sense, he differs from Levinson in important respects. Carroll's account seems to involve a view that is similar to Levinson's first claim above since Carroll says that art's "identity [is] an integrated historical process"[16] However, Carroll's view is at odds with Levinson's second claim because, despite the fact that the only essential feature of art for which Carroll argues is its historicity, he says he is "convinced that art has more than one essential or general feature."[17] Moreover, in contrast to Levinson's third claim, Carroll suggests that the kind of historicity essential to art is not exclusive to it; rather, art is essentially historical in the same way any cultural practice that evolves is essentially historical. Thus, whereas Levinson draws an

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[12] Jerrold Levinson, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no. 4 (October 2002): 367.
[13] Levinson, "Extending," 412.
[14] Levinson, "Irreducible Historicality," 379.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 73.
[17] Carroll, "Identifying Art," 86.

explicit distinction between the internal historicism of art and the external historicism of all other cultural entities, Carroll makes an implicit distinction not between art and other cultural entities but rather between cultural practices and other entities.

In sum, for Carroll, it is cultural practices that are essentially historical in a particular way that other cultural entities are not. If he is right about this, then some important consequences follow. Specifically, it appears, on Carroll's account, that the potential for historical evolution is less circumscribed for practices than it is for other entities (cultural and non-cultural alike). Why might he think this?

Consider the difference between the nature of an artifact concept that is essentially functional and the concept of a cultural practice like poetry. Although in the previous chapter I suggested that not all artifacts can be defined solely in virtue of their intended functions, it is plausible that at least some artifact concepts have essential intended functions in addition to essential socio-historical relationships.[18] For example, it would be hard to imagine that something could count as an artificial pacemaker unless it was created with the intention that it should regulate the heartbeat. Now, the concept, "artificial pacemaker," may be an historical concept in several senses. First, and most obviously, the artificial pacemaker is a human invention; it came into existence at a particular historical moment. Moreover, if it does have an essential function, it does so in virtue of a relationship to historically grounded human intentions. Second, the extension of the concept changes slightly with the creation of every new artificial pacemaker. Third, it is likely with the passage of time, the concept, "artificial pacemaker," has changed quite significantly; formerly essential physical features like a plug for an AC socket became unnecessary because the concept evolved in a particular way. And, indeed, it is likely that the concept will continue to evolve as our technology becomes more sophisticated. Yet despite the fact that the concept, "artificial pacemaker," is subject to a certain amount of historical evolution, the potential for such evolution is limited to the extent that the identity of the concept remains circumscribed by its intended function.

However, other human kind concepts do not have such a rigidly fixed nature. To be sure, there are other artifact concepts that do not have essential functions (e.g. "sculpture"), but the point may be brought into sharper relief by contrasting the concept, "artificial pacemaker," with the concept of a cultural practice rather than

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[18] See, for example, Risto Hilpinen, "On Artifacts and Works of Art," *Theoria* 58 (1992): 63.

another artifact. Recall, for example, Anna Ribeiro's discussion of poetry, in which she argues that poetry cannot be defined strictly in terms of form or function. Rather, she defines poetry as consisting of a backward-looking intention to "make use of, transform, or reject the repetition techniques that came to mark the history of poetry around the world."[19]

Now the concept of poetry appears to be historical in a stronger sense than an essentially functional artifact concept like "artificial pacemaker" for the following reason. I think we would understand any given artifact created with the intention that it should regulate the heartbeat as an artificial pacemaker, regardless of whether it was connected to some specific prior artificial pacemaker or the history of artificial pacemakers. Putting it in the terms of Levinson's claim (1), the concept, "artificial pacemaker," is not historical inasmuch as "whether something falls under [the concept] does not seem to depend…on what specifically fell under [it] in the past."[20] So although "artificial pacemaker" is an historical concept in the ways delineated above, it is not an historical concept insofar as the history of the concept is not an essential part of its identity. However, Ribeiro's point about poetry is that the history of the concept *is* an essential part of its present identity. What counts as a poem now does depend on what has counted as a poem in the past. The possibilities of what kinds of things may count as poems are further delimited by certain necessary conditions regarding form, but poetry is to be defined, at least in part, in terms of its history.

And this seems to be something close to what Carroll wants to say about cultural practices in general. Insofar as any cultural practice is, in his words, "an arena of activity that governs itself such that it reproduces itself over time" and also "readjust(s) itself and evolve(s)," it is essentially historical in a way other cultural concepts, like artifacts, are not.[21] According to Carroll, such self-perpetuation and evolution is possible because practices "tolerate and indeed afford rational means to facilitate modification, development into new areas of interest, abandonment of previous interests, innovation, and discovery."[22] In short, Carroll's argument underscores an important difference in kinds of cultural concepts. As a cluster of human activities, a cultural practice necessarily contains the means of its own

[19] Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 199.
[20] Levinson "Irreducible," 367.
[21] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 67.
[22] Ibid, 66.

transformation. In contrast, a product of a cultural practice—say an artifact—does not have this special quality.[23] Our concept, "artificial pacemaker," cannot change until there is some kind of change in our artificial pacemaker-making practices.

Perhaps this is an obvious point, but some interesting consequences follow from it. It seems possible that if any cultural practice has the capacity for self-transformation, the identities of the products of a given practice can similarly be changed—especially those that are intentionally produced: artifacts. That is, it is plausible that, under the right conditions, the practitioners of a given cultural practice can transform the identity of an artifact concept that is the product of the practice—and not merely in terms of slight modifications to physical features. What is of particular interest in the present context is that practitioners appear able to change an artifact concept in such a way that conditions regarding form or function are so slackened that the history of the concept becomes increasingly central to its identity—perhaps even to the point that nothing is more relevant to the identity of the concept than its own history.

This, finally, is the crux of the matter: At some point, however fuzzy it may be, a cultural practice may evolve in such a way that the concepts of the artifacts produced by the practice are transformed so that they, in Levinson's terms, come to involve the "concrete history" of the practice itself. Indeed, one supposes this is precisely how art itself evolved. On Levinson's view, art "was always *at least*...intentional invocation, either explicitly or implicitly, of predecessors and their reception—in addition to any other definienda of a formal or functional sort, and now it is *only* this, so far as necessary features are concerned."[24] But it seems plausible that when the concept of art did have other formal or functional necessary features, the concrete history of the concept was not central to the concept's very identity in the way it presently is. For when such formal or functional necessary conditions existed, the question of whether something fell under the concept depended, first and foremost, on whether it met those formal or functional conditions. One would not have needed, to put it in Levinson's terms, "to invoke the concrete history of [the concept of art's] correct application," in order to correctly use the concept.

Similarly, on Ribeiro's account of poetry, being a poem used to be a matter of having a certain form. As with art, one would not, at that point in history, have needed

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[23] I presume here that not all the products of cultural practices are artifacts. Following Hilpinen, in "On Artifacts and Works of Art," I take it that a necessary condition for something to be an artifact is that it be produced intentionally.
[24] Levinson, "Extending," 412.

to invoke the concrete history of poetry in order to determine whether something was a poem or to correctly employ the concept in any other way. Yet as the practice of poetry evolved, necessary conditions regarding the form of poems became much looser. And it seems that at the same time, poetry's concrete history became more relevant in determining what a poem could be. In fact, it is plausible that it is precisely because of the fact that our poetry *practices* had changed the concept that defining and using the concept came to depend on the history of those practices. Once our poetry practices changed, expanding the boundaries of our concept, "poem," such that it came to retain only very loose necessary conditions regarding form, it seems that the concrete history of poetry came to figure more prominently into the identity of the concept inasmuch as there was little else determining the boundaries of the concept besides what had counted as a poem previously.

If one finds Ribeiro's definition of poetry controversial, we can use another example. Consider the evolution of the blues. At one point, around the 1910s or 1920s, the concept of the musical genre, "the blues," crystallized around a particular form—"a standard rhythmic-harmonic structure in which the 12-bar progression I-I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I-V-IV-I-I is tied to the AAB couplet in three 4-bar phrases."[25] Consider, for example, Robert Johnson's 1936 recording of "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom." The AAB couplet is constituted by the lyrics, "I believe… I believe I'll go back home/ I believe… I believe I'll go back home/ You can mistreat me here, babe, but you can't when I go home." Four bars are played over each phrase, so over the first phrase we have E-E-E-E, over the second we have A-A-E-E, and over the third we have B-A-E-E. Now, even as early as the 1910s or 1920s, the boundaries of the concept, "the blues," were somewhat fuzzy; for example, eight and sixteen bar blues also existed. Nevertheless, our concept, of the blues, was at least roughly defined in virtue of form. Or, to put it another way, if something had the form I have just described, then it necessarily fell under the concept, "the blues," and if something was "the blues," it either had this 12-bar form or a close variation of it.

However, "the blues" continued to evolve almost as soon as the concept crystallized around the 12-bar form. As indicated above, the 12-bar form itself was the result of structural evolution. For instance, some historians maintain that while the subdominant chord (that is, the IV chord) in the tenth measure is now standard, a

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[25] Don Michael Randel, ed., *The Harvard Dictionary of Music, 4th Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 104.

dominant chord (V) in the tenth measure was the norm in early country blues. Blues historian Charles Keil points out, "A subdominant chord substitution in the tenth measure occurs in almost all non-country blues." [26] Furthermore, though, Keil writes of later blues: "Other substitutions of this kind are found with increasing frequency along the folk-urban continuum until in some contemporary blues and in a great many modern jazz renderings of the blues form there is a chord change or a shift in chord voicing with every measure."[27]

So, Johnson's 1936 "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" is a 12-bar blues that is clearly situated at the "folk" end of this continuum. But already by the 1930s, musicians were experimenting with the structure of the blues such that by, say, 1942, the blues could take the form of Duke Ellington's "C Jam Blues." Around the same time, Charlie Parker's experiments with the 12-bar blues structure resulted in tunes like "Hootie Blues." Big Joe Turner used the structure in "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," recorded in 1951—the same year Thelonious Monk also used it in, "Straight, No Chaser." By 1960, John Coltrane was experimenting with complex chord changes within the 12-bar blues structure on tunes like "Equinox" and "Mr. P.C."

Now, I think it is uncontroversial to say that at some fuzzy point Parker, Monk, and Coltrane are no longer playing "the blues"—even if their tunes are in 12-bar blues form. Similarly, the kind of music pioneered by Big Joe Turner—rock and roll—is, at some point, no longer "the blues" even if it is still in 12-bar blues form. On the other hand, however, there are plausibly certain instances—such as those examples in the previous paragraph—in which although 12-bar blues form is rendered in an innovative or untraditional way, we are clearly able to identify a tune as "the blues." Plausibly, all of the following tunes structured by 12-bar blues form are, as B.B. King would say, "still called the blues": Jimi Hendrix's "Red House," Hank Williams's "Move It On Over," Elvis Presley's rendition of "Hound Dog," Louis Prima's "Jump, Jive, an' Wail," Chubby Checker's "Twist," James Brown's "I Got You (I Feel Good), Stevie Wonder's "Superstition," Z.Z. Top's "She Loves My Automobile," The White Stripes's "Ball and Biscuit."

Furthermore, there are other instances in which we can identify a song as "the blues" even if it does not have 12-bar blues form or something like it. For example, "Bridging the Gap," by Nas is "the blues" even though it incorporates rock and rap

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[26] Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 52.
[27] Ibid.

elements. Much of the White Stripes's catalogue, including "Suzy Lee," "Little Bird," "Catch Hell Blues," and "300 M.P.H Torrential Outpour Blues," is "the blues" influenced by garage rock and punk rock. And, finally, several of the guitarist Scott Henderson's songs, like "Tore Down House" and "Continuum," are "the blues" supplemented by elements of jazz and fusion.

Therefore, it seems that although the concept, "the blues," was once defined in virtue of form, it evolved in two central manners. In the first place, we can identify various ways in which the concept evolved such that it became an entirely new concept like "jazz" or "rock and roll." On the other hand, however, "the blues" has gone through a kind of self-transformation such that although it is not strictly identical to the blues concept we had in 1930, it is continuous with that older concept. Specifically, our present "blues" concept still retains some necessary conditions regarding form, but, through the activities of musicians, it has evolved in such a way that its identity is no longer a matter of conforming to a particular structure. On the contrary, our present concept of the blues necessarily involves the history of the concept. The blues as played by The White Stripes, for example, only became possible at a particular point in time as a result of the evolution of the concept of the blues in a particular way. What the blues are now depends upon what the blues have been up to now.

If the concepts, "poetry," and "the blues," are the kinds of concepts I am arguing they are, then Levinson's distinction between external historicism and internal historicism is in need of some further refinement. For the dichotomy he sets up here does not seem to leave space for the cultural practices and artifacts which necessarily make "historical reference or connectedness, that is, reference or connectedness to predecessor works, activities, modes of reception, *internal*" to the concepts of those practices and artifacts even if such historical connectedness is not their *only* essential feature.[28] That is, Levinson's conception of internal historicism conflates the idea of a concept's history being essentially involved in, or internal to, the identity of that concept with the idea of a concept's historicity being its *only* content.

Even if Levinson is right to suggest that art is a historical concept in the unique sense that it "has no content beyond what art *has been*," nevertheless "internal

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[28] Levinson, "Extending," 412.

historicism" does not seem to be the right term to describe art's special historicity because there are at least some other concepts whose identities essentially involve their concrete history—whose concrete history is internal to their very identities.[29] Carroll's argument suggests that, in fact, most (maybe all) cultural practices have this quality. And what is significant about this is that it provides an account of how certain other human kind concepts—specifically artifact concepts—may also come to be defined in terms of their history. Levinson argues, "our present concept of art is *minimally historical*" in the sense that "whether something is art now depends, and ineliminably, on what has been art in the past."[30] I think this is right, but not exclusive to art. Concepts like "poetry" and "the blues" are also essentially historical in this same way because their present identities depend on their past identities in virtue of the ways in which the practices of writing poetry and playing the blues have evolved.

Finally, then, this is the way in which I take the screenplay to be an historical concept: Like the concept of poetry and the concept of the blues (*qua* artifacts—not practices), the screenplay is an artifact concept whose identity essentially involves its history—whose history is internal to it. By this I mean that whether something is a screenplay now inescapably depends *in part* upon what has been a screenplay in the past. The "in part" is what distinguishes what I take to be the internal historicism (broadly understood) of the concept screenplay from what Levinson takes to be the unique internal historicism of the concept of art. For, as my definition suggests, the screenplay does retain some necessary conditions regarding form. Specifically, for something to be a screenplay—according to our present concept—it must be a verbal object that specifies certain constitutive elements of films in a way that continues, changes, or repudiates the ways in which screenplays have historically done so. Yet the actual possibilities of *how* a screenplay specifies those elements are entirely dependent upon prior screenplays. In Levinson's terms, the possible extension of the concept of the screenplay now (or at any time *t*) depends upon the actual extension of the concept of the screenplay prior to now (or prior to *t*).[31] Moreover, by offering a definition of *our present concept* of the screenplay, I want to allow that even the necessary conditions I stipulate regarding form could change in the future depending

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[29] Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 7.
[30] Levinson, "Irreducible," 367.
[31] Ibid, 376.

upon how our screenwriting practices go. What I seek to offer here is, after all, a descriptive definition that is based upon our actual screenwriting practices.

Here, two assumptions that undergird my argument about the essential historicity of the screenplay should be clear. First, I assume that, as Carroll argues, practitioners of a given cultural practice can reproduce that practice over time such that it evolves yet is continuous with that earlier practice and is, therefore, recognizable as the same practice.[32] (This is not to deny that in other instances such practitioners may create a new practice out of a prior practice.) Second, I assume not only that practitioners have the power to change their practice concepts, but furthermore that they can change the concepts of certain products—namely artifacts— of their practices. Specifically, my argument is that our screenwriting practices have evolved in such a way that they have changed our concept of the screenplay. The concept, "screenplay," used to be—like many other artifact concepts—a matter of being intended to fulfill a certain function and having certain, relatively specific formal attributes. But recent and contemporary practices have changed the concept. Fan-fiction practices like web-based virtual movies and series have changed the concept of the screenplay such that it no longer retains a necessary function. Avant-garde screenwriting practices like those of Su Friedrich have changed the concept of the screenplay such that the necessary conditions regarding form are much looser than they once were. Thus, I claim that something like Friedrich's "But No One" counts as a screenplay now—despite the fact that it could not have counted as screenplays in the 1940s—because of the way Friedrich has intentionally related it to prior screenplays.

I mention the two major assumptions underpinning my argument because although Carroll's suggestion that cultural practices can evolve appears uncontroversial, one may wonder if (and how) certain artifact concepts—specifically the concept, "screenplay"—can in fact change in the way I have described. Perhaps it will be objected that the concept is not so mutable and, in fact, some of the objects that I take to be screenplays—say Friedrich's "But No One" or various unusual-looking web-based fan-fiction pieces—are simply not screenplays properly so called.

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[32] Here I wish to avoid becoming bogged down in philosophical debates about identity—specifically, about identity over time. I hope it will suffice to say that here and elsewhere, by saying a practice like screenwriting-at-(time)t is recognizable as "the same" practice prior to t, I do not mean to imply that screenwriting-at-t and screenwriting-prior-to-t are strictly identical. Screenwriting-at-t and screenwriting-prior-to-t cannot be qualitatively identical because they do not share all of the same properties. On the contrary, I want to get at the idea that screenwriting practice is continuous over time—that it persists over time even if it changes—such that screenwriting-at-t is numerically identical with screenwriting-prior-to-t. For a summary, see Andre Gallois, "Identity Over Time," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-time/.

To answer the question and get my argument off the ground, I want to sketch a theory of how artifact concepts change. In doing so, I closely follow the work of the philosopher Amie L. Thomasson.

The Evolution of Artifact Concepts

Another way of thinking about the question of how it is possible for the concept, "screenplay," to evolve and for my use of the term "screenplay" to correctly refer to an object that could not have counted as a screenplay, say, sixty years ago, is to ask: How does an artifactual kind term like "screenplay" acquire reference? Our previous distinction between natural kind concepts and artifact kind concepts suggests that, in the first place, artifactual kind terms do not acquire reference in the same way natural kind terms do. According to direct reference theories, a natural kind term acquires reference based upon a causal relationship to a set of objects that are individuated by their underlying, intrinsic essence.[33] So, for example, the term "water" refers to whatever substance has the structure, H_2O.[34] What counts as water (or any natural kind), then, depends on the essence of a candidate object. As Amie Thomasson puts it, "The nature of the kind and the conditions for kind membership are thus determined by mind-independent boundaries of the kind, and may be discovered empirically…"[35] Furthermore, Thomasson notes that an important consequence of this fact is that natural kinds have "independence from human beliefs and concepts."[36] That is to say, if we believe that the green liquid running through the Chicago River on St. Patrick's day is not water because we think that water is necessarily clear, then knowing that water's underlying nature is H_2O and discovering that the green liquid is also H_2O will show that our beliefs about the nature of water and what conditions are necessary for something to count as water are simply wrong. There is no sense in which the nature of a natural kind is contingent upon what we believe about it.

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[33] See, for example, Hillary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), as well as Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[34] Note that I am merely sketching the argument here. It has recently been suggested that whether H_2O is the essence of water, pure and simple, is an open question. See Paul Bloom, "Water as an Artifact Kind," in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, ed. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150-156.

[35] Amie L. Thomasson, "Artifacts and Human Concepts," in Margolis and Laurence, 54.

[36] Ibid.

But artifact kind terms cannot acquire reference in the same way as natural kind terms. This is because of what philosophers of language call "the *qua* problem."[37] Thomasson describes the problem as follows:

> Suppose a speaker is faced with a sample of teak lawn chairs, and attempts to apply a new term to refer to 'that kind of thing'…[T]he reference of the speaker's term will be radically indeterminate unless she disambiguates the sort or category of kind she means to refer to. For any sample of entities will instantiate many different kinds (chemical, biological, artifactual…), and so to disambiguate and establish the reference of a kind term, a speaker who seeks to ground that term's reference must have at least a very high-level background conception of what *sorts of* features are relevant to being a member of this sort of kind…[38]

According to Thomasson, the conclusion to be drawn from the fact that speakers who ground (and re-ground) the reference of a term must already have a conception of the relevant sorts of features of the kind to which they refers is this: Those speakers who ground the reference of an artifactual kind term actually establish what sorts of features are relevant to unifying that kind. As Thomasson puts it, "the grounders of a term's reference must at least intend to refer to a certain *category* of kind, where this is a matter of intending some rather than other *sorts* of common features to be relevant to unifying the kind."[39] Thus, the "grounders" of the term themselves determine both the nature of the kind and the term's extension. An important consequence of this fact is that those who ground the term cannot turn out to be wrong about either the nature of the kind or the term's extension since they themselves establish both in virtue of their intentions to refer to the particular sorts of features relevant to unifying the kind.

Now, according to Thomasson, the question becomes: What intentions are relevant in determining the nature and extension of an artifact kind? We have already seen that such intentions cannot necessarily be characterized in terms of function, since not all artifacts are intended to have the function of other artifacts in their kind. Some screenplays, we noted, are not created with the intention of having the characteristic function of specifying the constitutive elements of a film. Similarly, Thomasson notes that an artifactual kind like "sculpture" does not have an essential intended function. But if artists like sculptors do not create sculptures with the

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[37] See Michael Devitt and Kim Sterenly, *Language and Reality, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 90-93.
[38] Thomasson, 55.
[39] Ibid.

intention that they function in a certain way, they do, at least, intend to create things that are sculptures. For as Kendall Walton argues in his famous essay, "Categories of Art," artists' intentions partly determine the categories to which their works belong.[40] Likewise, Thomasson suggests of artifacts in general, "The creator's intentions generally (whether or not they specify an intended *function*) are most relevant to determining whether or not her product is in the extension of an artifactual kind term."[41] More specifically, Thomasson argues, "what seems to be relevant is the intention to create something of that kind" where "the relevant sort of intention to make a thing of artifactual kind K…involve[s] a substantive (and substantively correct) concept of what a K is, including an understanding of what sorts of properties are K-relevant and an intention to realize many of them in the object created."[42] In addition, Thomasson stipulates that this intention to create a K must be successful for a K to actually be created.

If Thomasson's argument is right, two conclusions follow that have important consequences for how we think about the nature of the screenplay and the extension of the concept. First, Thomasson concludes, "one cannot argue that, although we commonly treat creators' intentions as relevant to membership in an artifactual kind, this is not what is truly relevant."[43] That is to say, if a person has a substantive and substantively correct concept of what a screenplay is and this person successfully realizes her intention to create "one of those," it is not possible that she has actually failed create a screenplay because there is some other mind-independent feature that unifies the kind, "screenplay," whether that feature is construed as a formal element, a function, or so forth. On the contrary, Thomasson writes, "*makers'* concepts of what features are relevant to being a member of the kind (whether function, shape, etc.) determine what *specific* features (shape, function, etc.) are relevant to being a member of a particular artifactual kind, and thus collectively determine the boundaries of the kind and the kind's specific 'nature.'"[44]

For our purposes, the crucial point about Thomasson's first conclusion is this: Our definition of the screenplay does, in fact, need to accommodate all of the hard cases I have mentioned if the creators of those works have substantive and substantively correct ideas of what a screenplay is and successfully realize their

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[40] Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 3 (July 1970): 334-367.
[41] Thommason, 58.
[42] Ibid, 58; 59.
[43] Ibid, 59.
[44] Ibid, 59-60.

intentions to create "one of those things." Thus, one cannot, by fiat, decide that the unusual screenplays created by Beckett, McCarthy, Friedrich, and fan-fiction authors are simply not screenplays properly so called. We have good reason to think that all of these writers know what a screenplay is and intended to create something of that kind. Therefore, it is crucial that any descriptive definition of the screenplay take outliers or hard cases into account. Such outliers are not "exceptions" to the rule, but, rather, determine the rule.

The other conclusion Thomasson makes that has important consequences for us is this. If the producers of a given artifact kind determine the boundaries of the concept, then they themselves can change the concept. Indeed, this is presumably what people like Beckett, McCarthy, Friedrich, and fan-fiction screenwriters have done. Not only have they successfully created screenplays, but they have also changed what it is for something to be a screenplay. It is for this reason that Thomasson writes, "artifactual kinds are notoriously malleable and historical in nature."[45] Yet, this malleability has its limits.

The possibilities for what can count as a member of a given artifact kind are circumscribed, as noted above, by the fact that a would-be creator of a given kind must have a substantive and substantively correct idea of what it is to be a member of that kind at a particular moment. Within those boundaries, however, a would-be artisan could potentially create an artifact of a given kind that also significantly differed from prior members of that kind in terms of form, function, or whatever. As Thomasson puts it:

> For each subsequent maker needs only have a concept of which
> features are K-relevant that *largely* matches those of prior makers of
> Ks (if any there be). Thus, over time, the concept of Ks, spelling out
> which features are K-relevant, may gradually change. Note that what is
> essential (or indeed relevant) to being a K is still determined
> *stipulatively* by the features makers consider relevant to being a K; it is
> not a matter of discovery of a mind-independent nature. It is just that
> the process of stipulation has become much more gradual and diffuse,
> as it is responsive to the intentions of a great number of makers over an
> extended period of time.[46]

Here we see the importance of history in Thomasson's account of artifacts. Clearly, possibilities for the sort of k a would-be k-maker can actually make at any given time are determined by prior k-makers.

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[45] Ibid, 62.
[46] Ibid, 62-63.

Thus, Thomasson's theory of how artifact concepts change provides us with a way of explaining how it is that the concept of the screenplay evolves historically. If a would-be screenwriter at *t* has a concept of the screenplay that largely matches the concept as prior screenwriters have determined it to be at *t* and she intentionally and successfully creates something that realizes her conception, then she has created a screenplay. This allows that would-be screenwriters can successfully create screenplays that do not share all of the same formal and/or functional features of prior screenplays. Furthermore, if this is right, it seems clear that the concept can evolve in such a way that necessary conditions regarding form and function may become so loose over time that what becomes most relevant to the concept's identity is its history. In other words, Thomasson's account supplies us with a fine-grained argument that bolsters the points I suggested we take from Carroll and Levinson— namely that (1) practitioners of a given cultural practice can transform that practice and its products over time, and (2) that a given cultural practice and its products may so be transformed in such a way that what is most relevant to their identities is their concrete history.

In addition to offering a coherent theoretical explanation of how it is that artifact concepts evolve historically, Thomasson's theory lines up nicely with what I imagine are the intuitions about the screenplay that most of us hold. Specifically, I take it that, in the first place, the screenplay is thought of not as a form of writing that is permanently fixed by its very definition—like a villanelle—but rather as a constantly evolving form of writing like poetry—the norms and standards of which change as practices change over the course of history. Second, I take it that that there are certain objects that we acknowledge in 2010 as screenplays, but which would not have counted as screenplays in 1950. And this is not just because our concept of the screenplay has changed (for we still regard those objects from the 1950s as screenplays), but because the concept of the screenplay is essentially backward looking insofar as our present screenplays are screenplays partly in virtue of what screenplays have been in the past. These two intuitions, I submit, can only be provided for by a definition of the screenplay that treats the screenplay as an historical concept.

Having now sketched both the intentional-historical formalist definition and the theory that undergirds it, let us see how well it does, in fact, line up with our practices. For if Thomasson's core argument is correct, artisans and artists have an

epistemic privilege over theorists. According to her analysis, it is the artisans and artists who produce a given artifact kind that determine the nature of the concept. In other words, if we find that our practices do not match up with the theory of the screenplay as an historical concept and the definition that I have proposed, it cannot be the case that I have discovered "the true nature" of the screenplay and practitioners are just naïve. On the contrary, practitioners determine the nature of the concept, and it is up to theorists like me to work out theories and definitions that line up with their practices.

Testing the Theory

To reiterate, my definition of the screenplay regards the screenplay as an historical concept inasmuch as the screenplay has evolved historically. Moreover, it has evolved historically in such a way that necessary conditions regarding form and function have become loose enough that the history of the screenplay is now the most relevant feature in determining the boundaries of the concept. To test this theory, two related questions must be asked: (1) Has the concept of the screenplay actually evolved over the course of history while persisting as the same concept? (2) Does our present concept of the screenplay essentially involve its history? Does what counts as a screenplay now depend upon what has counted as a screenplay in the past?

I think the answer to the first question is, indisputably and uncontroversially, "yes." Consider, for example, the first ever winner of the Academy Award for Best Screenplay, Preston Sturges's "The Great McGinty," completed in 1939, alongside two screenplays nominated for the 2010 Award: Joel and Ethan Coen's "A Serious Man" and Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds."

Sturges's "The Great McGinty" is an instance of what Janet Staiger has identified as the Hollywood Golden Age "continuity" or "continuity script."[47] As the title of Staiger's article indicates, these continuities were like blueprints for films insofar as they precisely specified nearly all of the information needed for the production of a film. Needless to say, the continuities included basic elements like dialogue, but also very specific instructions about things like camera angles, camera distance, and even focus. As Staiger notes, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and

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[47] Janet Staiger, "Blueprints for Feature Films: Hollywood's Continuity Scripts," in *The American Film Industry, Revised Edition*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 173-192.

Sciences standardized the format for continuity scripts shortly after the studios transitioned to talking pictures. A 1932 Academy Research Council document cited by Staiger declares:

> As a result [of the change to talking films] the placement, order, numbering and display of the various parts [of the script]—dialogue, action, set description, camera instructions, etc. vary widely among the studios and are constantly subject to change. This unnecessarily complicates the work of those who handle the scripts during production…
>
> Proposed: To conduct such surveys as may be necessary to establish the basis for the various present practices. To correlate this information and secure general agreement on a recommendation form of script that will be most legible, graphic, and convenient in practical use by actors, directors, writers, executives and the various production departments.[48]

Eventually, then, there was agreement to a standard script format that was comprised of various elements and details that are, in some cases, still recognizable in our contemporary screenplays.

Sturges's "The Great McGinty" is an exemplar of the continuity script. Looking at the first page quickly reveals the extent to which specification of detail is efficiently communicated through the standardization of format. It is neatly divided into lettered sequences and further sub-divided into numbered shots such that a reader can quickly orient herself by glancing at the left-hand margin to find every shot consecutively labeled, "A-1, A-2, A-3," and so on. To the right of each of these shot listings is a description of the shot in Courier, 12 point, block capital letters. So, for example, A-2 is "THE RUMBA DANCER FROM WAIST DOWN" and A-3 is "LOW CAMERA SHOT UP AT A TABLE OF MEN."[49] Underneath the shot headings is prose that describes the dramatic action of the scene as well as any instructions for camera moves within the shot. For example, the scene action for shot A-2 is: "Slowly she starts to pull up her skirt. The CAMERA FOLLOWS her as she dances."[50] For shot A-3, the scene action is:

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They are not paying any attention. One of them
is lighting a pipe. As he turns his head away
to escape the cloud of smoke his eye catches
the legs on the floor. There is a slight
double-take, then he gives the legs his
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[48] Ibid, 192.
[49] Preston Sturges, "The Great McGinty," draft dated November 28, 1939, reprinted in *Five Screenplays by Preston Sturges*, ed. Brian Henderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 50.
[50] Ibid.

> undivided attention. A second later the other
> men at his table follow his gaze. Now the whole
> table looks on stonily. In the BACKGROUND we
> see McGinty working <u>at the bar</u> but he is <u>OUT OF
> FOCUS.</u>[51]

At the bottom right-hand corner of the page, we see the note. "(Continued)," which corresponds with the note "(Cont'd)," in the upper left-hand corner of the following page, so as to let the reader know that a single shot is continuing across multiple pages.[52] Finally, note that every different piece of information has a distinct margin setting that separates it from adjacent pieces of information.

Now let us turn to The Coens's "A Serious Man" and Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds." Neither of these two contemporary screenplays is nearly as rigidly formatted as "The Great McGinty." Whereas Sturges breaks his screenplay down into shots, Tarantino divides his screenplay into scenes with "sluglines" that indicate whether the scene is interior or exterior, the locale, and whether it is day or night: "Ext – Dairy Farm – Day."[53] (Sluglines were in use even before Sturges wrote "The Great McGinty," and have historically been a common feature of the screenplay.) On occasion, Tarantino indicates specific shots within a scene by using a sub-heading like "JULIE" or "JULIE'S POV," but for the most part he simply describes the scene in the blocks of prose that screenwriters call "scene action."[54]

The formatting of "A Serious Man" is even looser. The Coen Brothers use a sort of abbreviated slugline that often only includes a rough locale: "HEBREW SCHOOL."[55] They also specify specific shots, but as part of the prose scene action. For example, they write: "The flakes drift down lazily towards us. Our angle looks straight up."[56] In addition, both contemporary screenplays have some idiosyncratic qualities. Tarantino, for example, begins his screenplay with a table of contents. The Coen Brothers demonstrate an indifference to the more pedantic points of conventional screenplay formatting on occasions like this one, in which they abruptly move from one scene to another:

> Teacher
> Mee yodayah? Reuven? Rifkah? Mah zeh "anakim"? Efsheh
> mashooach ba-avodah?

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid, 50-51.
[53] Quentin Tarantino, *"Inglourious Basterds": A Screenplay* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 8
[54] Ibid.
[55] Joel and Ethan Coen, "A Serious Man," unpublished draft dated June 4, 2007, 10.
[56] Ibid, 1.

A BLINDING LIGHT

> At the cut to the light the Jefferson Airplane music jumps up full. The
> light resolves into a multi-flared image of a blinking eye.
>
> Reverse: The inside of a human ear. Fleshy whorls veined, a cavity
> receding to dark.
>
> Objective on the doctor's office: the doctor is peering through a
> lightscope into the ear of an early-middle-aged man, Larry Gopnik.[57]

My intention in highlighting these formatting differences between the three

screenplays is not to suggest that these particular contemporary screenplays could not

have been understood as screenplays as the concept of screenplay existed in 1939. On

the contrary, I suspect that they bear enough similarities to the screenplays of that

time that they would have been recognized as screenplays—albeit extremely

unconventional or ill-formed ones.

The point I want to make by juxtaposing these screenplays is simply that

between 1939 and 2010, our practices have changed our concept the screenplay. I

hope this proposition is uncontroversial since the changes I have underlined are

relatively minor—indeed, so minor as to warrant my speculation that the

contemporary screenplays would be recognized as screenplays in 1939. Furthermore,

I do not think such a speculation should be controversial either. It is precisely because

the screenplay has evolved historically that some contemporary screenplays bear

sufficient resemblance to prior screenplays that even someone from 1939, who has a

different concept of the screenplay, could recognize some 2010 screenplays as falling

under her concept.

But have our screenwriting practices caused the screenplay to evolve in such a

way that necessary conditions regarding function and form are really as loose as I

have suggested? Let us look briefly at some other recent screenplays. First, consider

the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan-fiction screenplay "Buffy: Original Syn" by Lee

Chrimes. I will explore the case of fan-fiction screenplays in more detail in a later

chapter, but for the moment it will suffice to know that the intended function of this

screenplay was not to specify the constitutive elements of any possible film, but solely

to offer a reading experience for an online fan community. Here is how it begins:

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[57] Ibid, 9.

INT. UNDERGROUND TUNNELS - NIGHT

Deepest, darkest underground. We're pushing slowly forward through a man-sized, circular tunnel, passing jagged rock formations and roots, with nothing but darkness ahead of us.

Suddenly, we hear a distant CLINK, the sound of metal scraping against stone. We continue pushing forward - and now, a dim LIGHT can be seen, flickering like a torch flame in the distance.

> BUFFY (V.O.)
> I knew... Before we even set off,
> back when we were still just making
> the plans, even without that
> prophecy, I just... I just knew.

Still pushing in, but the tunnel is starting to narrow, tapering down into a crawlspace. We continue to progress through the gloom, the dancing orange light cast by the torch up ahead now illuminating what looks like a small, round cavern up ahead of us.[58]

Here we have a case in which our practices have changed our concept of the screenplay in an important way that is not perceptible. This looks like a prototypical screenplay. It was written with Final Draft, the industry standard screenwriting software, and, therefore, exhibits all of the same formal features of contemporary Hollywood screenplays. So, I take it that we have no problem saying that "Buffy: Original Syn" counts as a screenplay by allowing that having a particular function cannot be a necessary condition for something to be a screenplay. If we accept that our concept of the screenplay used to be (at whatever point in time) essentially functional—that it used to be the case that for something to be a screenplay it had to be intended to specify constitutive elements of at least a potential film—then the fan-fiction screenplay represents one important way in which the concept has evolved.

Now consider Su Friedrich's screenplay "But No One" for her 1982 movie of the same title. Here is the entire screenplay as published by Friedrich on her website:

BUT NO ONE
by Su Friedrich
1982, 9 minutes, b&w, silent

Dark sky
Fat boy stands on a ledge
Women stand grief-stricken by the canal
Babies of all races float by

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[58] Lee Chrimes, "Buffy: Original Syn," draft dated July 25, 2005, MZP-TV website, accessed December 10, 2010, http://www.mzp-tv.co.uk/virtual-mutant/buffy/originalsyn.html.

In colorful clothes
All dead or dying
Little mouths crying above the water
The must grab
Grab the live ones
He
She
He can't won't doesn't
Grab the live ones
But
No more float by[59]

Now, I imagine that calling this a screenplay will grate against the intuitions of some because it does not look like a prototypical screenplay. Indeed, it seems quite clear that it is a kind of poem and we do not typically think of poems as counting as screenplays. But I think that upon reflection, we have good reasons to think that this is a screenplay after all. First, we know that Friedrich, as a filmmaker and teacher, does have grasp of what a screenplay is; it is not as if she has attempted to write a screenplay and failed. On the contrary, it seems clear that she has written something that she intends to have the characteristic function of screenplays. That is, "But No One," is recognizable as a screenplay in virtue of the fact that it is intended to specify the characters and constitutive images of a film in the way other screenplays do. The idiosyncratic form of the piece should not obscure the fact that Friedrich has a substantively and substantively correct conception of what a screenplay is, and she has intentionally made "one of those things"—with a conscious effort to simultaneously challenge conventions regarding screenplay form. Moreover, Friedrich's rejection of standard screenplay form does not seem like such a radical move if we consider earlier challenges from the avant-garde—say, for example, Beckett's "Film" screenplay. Thus, Friedrich's screenwriting offers another example of how our practices have caused our concept of the screenplay to evolve—in this case, in terms of a slackening of necessary conditions regarding form.

But now that we have seen that our concept of the screenplay has evolved in such a way that necessary conditions regarding both function and form are quite loose, it seems plausible that we could have a kind of hybrid of the previous two cases—something that is a screenplay properly so called, but which cannot be correctly identified as such in virtue of either function or form. Consider the web-

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[59] Su Friedrich, "But No One," undated draft, Su Friedrich's homepage, accessed December 10, 2010, http://www.sufriedrich.com/content.php?sec=scripts.

based fan-fiction work, "A Blast From the Future." "A Blast From the Future" is one episode in fan-authored "virtual series," *Charmed: Reset Reality*, that re-writes the events of the real television show, *Charmed* (The WB, 1998-2006). Here is how the episode begins:

A Blast From The Future

Teaser

[Scene: Golden Gate Bridge. CHRIS HALLIWELL is standing on the middle of the rust colored beam with his eyes closed and his index fingers pressed to his temples. A spiral of white lights coalesces behind him, transforming into MELINDA HALLIWELL. CHRIS opens his eyes.]

MELINDA: Anything?

CHRIS: No.

MELINDA: *(frustrated)* Why?

CHRIS: Do I look like I have the answers?

MELINDA: *(snapping)* Rhetorical! *(She stomps her foot and it echoes on the beam.)* I just don't understand it; how can your powers not sense him? Your sensing is more advanced than any whitelighter's ever was. It's not like he has the means to go cloaking himself-[60]

First, note that like other fan-fiction screenplays, "A Blast From the Future" does not have the function that characterizes most screenplays. "A Blast From the Future" was written with the sole intention that it be read, enjoyed, and discussed by a web-based community; there is no sense in which it was intended ever to lead to an actual episode of television. Secondly, "A Blast From the Future" does not have the form that characterizes most screenplays. In fact, the form of "A Blast From the Future" more closely resembles that of a prototypical theatrical script than that of a screenplay.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is a good reason to think that "A Blast From the Future" does, in fact, count as a screenplay. Again, to borrow Thomasson's

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[60] Camille, "A Blast From the Future," *Charmed: Reset Reality* Season 6, episode 17, dated November 15, 2009, accessed December 10, 2010, http://resetreality.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=showroom&action=display&thread=868.

terms, the author has a substantive and substantively correct concept of what a screenplay is. The author is aware that *most* screenplays are intended to have the function of specifying certain constitutive parts of a film or television show. But she has made a conscious decision that, as part of a fan-fiction virtual series, her screenplay will be a rejection of this function. Furthermore, she seems to have a rough (substantively correct) idea of the prototypical formal features of a screenplay. We should not, I submit, be terribly bothered by the fact that the *format* does not closely adhere to the current Hollywood standards. After all, the Coen Brothers do not use Courier font, but no one suspects that they do not have a substantively correct notion of what a screenplay is! More worrying, perhaps, is the fact that, in terms of form, "A Blast From the Past," looks closer to a prototypical theatrical script than a prototypical screenplay. But I do not think this fact should unduly trouble us either if we think about the relative similarity of theatrical scripts and screenplays in the larger scheme of things. It is not as if the author has offered up a still photograph as a screenplay—which would indicate that she did not have a substantively correct concept of what a screenplay is at present. Moreover, she knows that *Charmed* is a television series and not a theatrical play.

Most important is that she seems to have a conception of the screenplay that cashes out as something like "a dramatic manuscript for a film or television show," which is, of course, what the screenplay has historically been. In short, despite the fact that "A Blast From the Future" does not seem to count as a screenplay in virtue of its intended function or its formal features, we ought to acknowledge that it should count in virtue of the fact that its author, who appears to have a substantive and substantively correct grasp of what a screenplay is, has intended to make "one of those things" by connecting her object to prior screenplays. Specifically, she has created an object that is intended to both repeat and change the ways in which the constitutive elements of screen works have historically been specified by screenplays.

Therefore, I submit, we have good reasons to think that our present concept of the screenplay is not simply historical in the sense that it has evolved, but, furthermore, in the Levinsonian sense that whether something is a screenplay now depends on what has been a screenplay in the past. Recognizing "A Blast From the Future" and other works like it as screenplays requires understanding the ways in which they invoke the relatively recent history of the concept—specifically, screenplays that do not exhibit a particular function or a particular form. Certain

rough formal features make it *possible* for "A Blast From the Future" to be a screenplay, but what secures its status as a screenplay is the fact that its author intentionally connected it to prior screenplays. What binds together Sturges's "The Great McGinty" and "A Blast From the Future" is neither function, nor form, but an extrinsic, relational feature that they both share—namely, being intentionally connected to the concrete history of the screenplay.

Note here, though, that merely *identifying* screenplays does not always require us to check their history to see if they have been created with the right sorts of intentions. For in most cases, the intention to connect a would-be screenplay to prior screenplays is manifest in the formal features of the candidate object. In most instances, we can tell whether something is a screenplay simply by looking at it because its formal properties indicate that its author intended to create "one of those things" that were screenplays in the past. In addition, as I suggested when discussing Friedrich, we can also usually identify something as a screenplay by determining its intended function and checking it against its formal features. Again, this usually does not require us to delve in to the history of the candidate object since being intended to specify the constitutive elements of a screen work is an intended function that we know has historically characterized the screenplay. So, I am not proposing that my definition ought to change anything about how we typically identify screenplays.

I am suggesting, however, that my definition is useful in thinking about what the boundaries of our present concept of the screenplay actually are and, therefore, adjudicating hard cases. For instance, although checking an object's intended function can usually allow us to correctly identify whether it is a screenplay, this is not always the case. As I argued in the previous chapter, having the function of specifying constitutive elements of a screen work or potential screen work cannot be sufficient for something to count as a screenplay because this is a function shared by shot lists, treatments, and so forth. On the other hand, I think we want to say that having certain formal features could not, alone, ever be sufficient for something to count as a screenplay, even if in most cases we can correctly identify a screenplay by observing such features. Suppose, for example, a monkey at a typewriter eventually types out something that is physically identical to Sturges's "The Great McGinty" screenplay. What the monkey has (accidentally) typed cannot, I submit, be regarded as a screenplay (let alone the same thing Sturges wrote) as we presently understand it. For

a screenplay is a kind of artifact—the product of intentional human activity.[61]
Moreover, if I am right, it is an historically situated artifact kind and, furthermore, one whose history is an essential part of its identity.

First Screenplays, Ur-Screenplays, and Objections Regarding the Putative Teleological Nature of an Evolutionary Approach

As mentioned previously, an intentional-historical definition like mine requires a first step that defines the first instances of object under investigation in non-intentional-historical terms. With regard to the screenplay, I think this challenge is easily met. My hypothesis—and it is just a hypothesis—is that first screenplays (whenever they were) were, like many other (but not all) artifact kinds, defined in terms of an essential function and some necessary conditions regarding form. They were essentially functional insofar as they had an essential intended function, which was to specify the constitutive elements of a film. Whether a given screenplay ever performed that intended function—whether it was actually used to specify the constitutive elements of a film—mattered not.

However, in the same way that intended function alone is not enough distinguish chairs from benches, it is not enough to distinguish first screenplays from other objects like shot lists, treatments, and so forth. I need to be a little vague about what those *other* objects were because I want to leave the question of exactly what counted as a first screenplay to be decided by historians. But, the general claim here is that first screenplays are defined not only by function, but also by form. Being one of those first screenplays meant having the essentially intended function of specifying the constitutive parts of a film and conforming to certain (perhaps variable) necessary conditions regarding form. Again, just what those necessary conditions regarding form were is a question better left to historians, but I take it that relevant features probably included being a verbal object of (roughly) a certain length, printed on a certain kind of paper, with certain margins and spacing, specifying some (but not other) constituent parts of a film, and so forth. Specifics aside, the gist of my proposal should not be controversial: It seems clear that competent users of terms like shot list,

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[61] Hilpinen, "On Artifacts and Works of Art." I have in mind here our common conception of artifacts as essentially human kinds. I do not wish to enter the debate about whether the "tools" created by some animals species are kinds of "artifacts."

treatment, and screenplay differentiated (and still do) those objects according to the formal features of each.

In any event, my hypothesis about what specific function and form first screenplays actually had could be somewhat erroneous without doing damage to my intentional-historical formalist definition. Indeed, my project here is not an historical one. For my definition of the screenplay to stand, all I require is the existence of a plausible account of the origins of the screenplay, where the concept of the screenplay is understood concretely rather than in relation to some previous screenplay. This is a thorny problem when it comes to first art, but not for first screenplays. Whether my characterization of first screenplays is completely accurate does not matter as much as the fact that historical research has given us a rough sense of what first screenplays are, and we are able to do the historical spadework to construct a more nuanced understanding of them.

Nevertheless, some might find my reluctance to develop a more robust account of first screenplays disappointing because we want to be able to tell the difference between first screenplays and earlier screenplay-like objects that are not screenplays properly so called. In other words, we might wonder, at what point and under what conditions do ur-screenplays become first-screenplays? In fact, I want to steer relatively clear of this subject precisely because it raises some vexed questions whose answers depend on careful historical work. But although I want to avoid getting into the specifics of the matter, I do want to briefly defend the view that the screenplay did, in fact, evolve out of earlier screenwriting forms.

Many writers, including historians, have used phrases like "early cinema screenplays" and "some format of the screenplay" to describe screenplay-like objects (photoplays, scenarios, continuities, screen plays) that predate the invention of the term "screenplay."[62] Historians who have assumed there is a causal link between such earlier objects and screenplays have roused the ire of critics like Steven Maras, who chastises them for offering putatively teleological accounts of the history of the screenplay.[63] For example, Maras writes that historian Edward Azlant's "phrase 'some format of the screenplay' [to refer to scenarios and the like] suggests that the screenplay is the predetermined end point of the script. He examines the treatment of

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[62] Quoted in Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 80-81.
[63] Maras, 81.

the screenplay in early film theory and practice, even though that specific term is rarely used. This teleology is not questioned in his work."[64]

There are a couple of points to be made here. First, Maras is right to suggest that we ought to be careful about using the term, "screenplay," anachronistically. There is no question that "screenplay" was not a widely used term before the 1930s and it would be a mistake to think that early writers of movie scripts literally wrote "screenplays" insofar as this was not a term they themselves could have used to refer to their creations. Moreover, it is clear that the concept picked out by the term "scenario" in 1915 could not have been the *exact* same concept (in qualitative terms) picked out by the term "screenplay" in 1940.

However, the more substantive question is whether the different terms indicate that drastically different concepts were in play or if both terms picked out a single, continuous concept that evolved over the course of history. In other words, acknowledging that, in 1940, the term, "screenplay," did not pick out the qualitatively exact same concept as picked out by the term, "scenario," in 1915 does not necessarily mean that the terms did not pick out a continuous concept—which, presumably, could have evolved between 1915 and 1940.

Yet Maras denies that the scenario and continuity script are "first-screenplays" or steps in the evolution of the screenplay as we presently understand it. He allows that in the years before the use of the term, "screenplay," became standardized, the terms "scenario," "photoplay," "continuity," and "screen play" all referred to concepts of movie scripts. But he emphasizes that these terms were used unevenly and were somewhat ambiguous—each having multiple senses. "Screen play," for example, could refer either to a movie or a movie script. Furthermore, it is true that there are clear differences between the formal features of a scenario from 1915, a screen play (*qua* manuscript) from 1935, and a screenplay from 1940. But does this in fact show that these terms referred to discrete concepts rather than a single concept that evolved over the course of time? Does a change in terminology necessarily indicate the invention of a new concept rather than the evolution of a previously existing one?

Maras thinks so. On his view, "the screenplay is not some object that is discovered pre-existing in reality, so much as constructed or 'invented' in language."[65] This is why he objects to the idea that an earlier term, like "scenario,"

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 80.

refers to a concept that evolved into the concept referred to by the term "screenplay." Maras seems to believe that a distinct concept, "screenplay," was invented *ex nihilo* with the creation of the term, "screenplay." Or, if *ex nihilo* is not quite right, the concept seems to emerge out of a sort of Big Bang of nebulous "discursive struggle": "the script as screenplay was a site for discursive struggle in which written compositions were framed and argued for in different ways."[66] This account—if it is not implausible enough on its own—leads to some extremely counterintuitive consequences. For example, Maras's methodology commits him to the view that the terms "screen play" and "screenplay" necessarily refer to two different concepts. In his words, "the melding of the two words ["screen" and "play"] into the signifier 'the screenplay', signals a normalizing process in discourse. It is linked to a broader discursive act or process; part of a transformation in the nature of practice [sic]."[67] Yet since Maras acknowledges that there is a continuity in screenwriting practice—a transformation—it is not at all clear why he should object to the notion that there is a continuity in the artifacts created by that practice. Why think that the practice can evolve, but the objects it produces cannot?[68]

In any case, it is not at all clear that these two different terms, "screen play" and "screenplay," never referred to the same concept. For example, although the term "screenplay" became somewhat standardized when the Academy instituted the Award for Best Original Screenplay in 1940, some screenwriters and studios continued to use the term "screen play" to refer to their movie scripts into the 1950s. Yet it seems very implausible that writers who used the term "screen play" in 1950 referred to a different concept (the concept picked out by "screen play" in 1930?) than that referred to by writers who used the term "screenplay" in 1950. Indeed, one supposes that a "screen play" written in 1950 would have been eligible to win the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay precisely because the two terms referred to the same concept. So, the change in terminology cannot be assumed either to indicate a transformation in practice or to indicate a change in the concept picked out by the terms, let alone to suggest that the creation of a new term necessarily constitutes the invention of a new concept.

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid, 86.

[68] It is also unclear why the formation of a compound word is necessarily normalizing. As Maras tells us, "compound words are usually formed as a result of social and cultural forces." Letting alone the question of what words *are not* formed as a result of social and cultural forces, we might wonder why such social and cultural forces could not be radical in nature. Ibid, 80.

Maras also revels in the potential ambiguity of the term "scenario," which he claims "complicates an 'evolutionary' idea of its development directly into the 'continuity.'"[69] But from the fact that the term "scenario" had several senses, it does not follow that none of those senses picked out a concept that was roughly the same as the concept picked out by the terms "continuity" or "screenplay" or that did in fact evolve into the concepts picked out by those later terms. Perhaps Maras is right that the ambiguity of the term "scenario" complicates the story of how the scenario evolved into other script forms, but this is hardly the same thing as showing the evolutionary narrative to be false.

In short, there is, underlying Maras's rejection of the idea that earlier script forms evolved into the screenplay, a belief that different terms (like "scenario" and "screenplay") necessarily picked out different concepts. However, as I have shown, the reasoning behind this belief is erroneous. Moreover, there is good reason to think that these different terms (according to certain senses of them) did, as a matter of fact, refer to a single, continuous concept even if that concept changed somewhat over the course of time: To wit, all of these terms refer to objects that Maras and others are comfortable calling "scripts" or "script forms"—short for "dramatic manuscripts intended to specify the constitutive elements of a film." Despite the differences in formal features between scenarios, screen plays, screenplays, and so forth, it is not at all clear to me that these terms did not pick out a single concept—a concept that was essentially functional and had some necessary conditions regarding form that may have been variable and/or evolved. If this is right, then although historians are wrong to use the term "screenplay" to refer to script forms that predate the existence of the term, they are not committing a serious conceptual error. For we can understand Azlant's phrase, "some form of the screenplay," as referring to those things which fell under the concept "film script" before that concept was standardly referred to by the term, "screenplay."

The other crucial point here is that whether or not I am right about the preceding matter, Azlant's account is not teleological. Maras's claim that Azlant's phrase "suggests that the screenplay is the predetermined end point of the script" is so wildly off the mark that it is hard to understand the reasoning behind it. From the fact that Azlant uses the term "screenplay," which is the term we currently use to refer to

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[69] Ibid, 91.

our present concept of the film script, it does not follow that Azlant believes that our present concept was predetermined—the only possible one that we could have had. Neither does it follow that Azlant believes that our present concept is some kind of end point—that the concept will not continue to evolve in the future. To attribute either of these positions to Azlant is bizarre. What Azlant's phrase does assume is that the screenplay has, in fact, evolved historically out of earlier, similar script forms. And, as I suggested above, if he is right about this (and I think he is), then using the phrase "some form of the screenplay" to refer to objects that predate the existence of the term does not necessarily entail a conceptual error, but simply acknowledges the fact that the term picks out a concept that changed over the course of history.

Teleological accounts of screenwriting history constitute the boogeyman in screenwriting studies these days.[70] This is not to say that we should not be wary of such accounts. The problem with constructing a boogeyman, though, is that one thinks he is in all sorts of places where he is actually not. In a recent article on the intermediary links between playwriting and early screenwriting, an otherwise careful scholar writes, "It is tempting to make teleological connections about a medium [sic], to understand practice in terms of simple and direct cause and effect."[71] Teleology and causality are conflated in a very odd way here. The suggestion seems to be that understanding the evolution of an art practice in terms of cause and effect logic—let alone a problem/solution model—is tantamount to making teleological connections. But this is obviously false: reconstructing the causal links that led to an object, event, or whatever, in no way supposes that that object or event was somehow predetermined.

Similarly, Maras runs together teleology and with evolutionary accounts of the emergence of the screenplay. In addition to Azlant, Margaret Mehring is excoriated for offering a putatively teleological "account of the evolution of the screenplay [that] sees the scenario and the continuity script as the 'first screenplays.'"[72] This is a baffling claim. Imagine criticizing an evolutionary biologist, who referred to *Homo erectus* as the "first human," for offering a teleological account of the origins of

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[70] See, for another example, Torey Liepa, "Entertaining the Public Option: The Popular Film Writing Movement and the Emergence of Writing for the American Silent Cinema," in *Analysing the Screenplay*, ed. Jill Nelmes (London: Routledge, 2011), 7-23. According to Liepa, "Contemporary understandings of 'screenwriting', or 'the screenplay', moreover, tend to skew perceptions of early film writing by imposing contemporary models of production on past events and working backwards to locate the starting point of a telos" (9). One wonders, then, why Liepa has assented to having his essay on "early film writing" published in a collection entitled *Analysing the Screenplay*.
[71] Ian W. Macdonald, "Forming the Craft: Play-writing and photoplay-writing in Britain in the 1910s," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 1 (February 2010): 75.
[72] Maras, 81.

Homo sapiens sapiens. Such a claim does not, of course, assume that *Homo sapiens sapiens* was (or is) the predetermined end point of human evolution. On the contrary, it acknowledges that, as a matter of fact, *Homo erectus* was our early ancestor—the "first human" (arguably) as we presently understand the concept, "human." To suggest that this evolutionary biologist has offered a teleological explanation of human origins is to conflate theorists of evolution with proponents with intelligent design. But as most scientists and philosophers of science have been at pains to show, it is utterly erroneous to assume that evolutionary theory implies intelligent design.[73] So, too, it goes with theories of how the screenplay and other artifacts have evolved: Making an argument that the screenplay has evolved is simply not tantamount to making a teleological claim.

If I have belabored this point, it is only because it seems that it takes very little to be accused of teleological thinking these days. Just as Levinson makes clear that his theory *does not*—in the manner of a Hegelian or Dantoesque theory—"ascribe to the development of art an inherent goal, or view the development of art as governed by inherent laws of stylistic evolution," I want to make it clear that neither is my definition of the screenplay teleological in nature.[74] My definition offers an account of our present concept of the screenplay without suggesting either that the screenplay is any sort of end point or that the screenplay is in the process of evolving towards some ultimate goal. It does claim that the possibilities for what the screenplay can be in the future logically depend upon what the screenplay has been in the past—but again, this does not presuppose some inherent purpose or goal, and it is not a teleological claim.

Conclusion

Finally, I should say that my interest in defending evolutionary accounts of art practices and artifacts, as well as rational, causal reconstructions of historical change, looks ahead to the chapters in the next section. I will argue that one of the ways in which screenwriting practice can be identified as an art practice and (some) screenplays can be identified as artworks is by offering an historical narrative that traces an evolutionary link between screenwriting and the already acknowledge art practice of playwriting. After doing some theoretical ground clearing in Chapter 3, I

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[73] See Lewens, *Organisms and Artifacts*.
[74] Levinson, "Irreducible," 367n2.

use current research on the history of screenwriting to construct the historical narrative in Chapter 4. The historical narrative begins with the origins of writing for the screen and ends in the 1920s. My belief is that exploring this time frame suffices to present a plausible account of how early practices of writing for the screen evolved out of playwriting practices. Relying upon the research of others, I take for granted that the practice of writing for the screen in the 1920s continued to evolve into the practice of writing for the screen in the 1940s and onwards—after the term, "screenplay," came into use. So, my next argument will depend very much upon the ideas that both practices and artifacts can, in fact, evolve historically, and that we can rationally construct true narratives that trace the evolution of those practices and artifacts. Consider the next chapter, therefore, both as a more robust defense of the intentional-historical definition of the screenplay I have developed here as well as a preemptive defense of Chapter 4's historical narrative linking playwriting to early screenwriting.

Chapter 3: The Historical Narrative Approach to Identifying Art: Exegesis and Defense

My goal in the following three chapters is to show that screenwriting is an art practice and at least some screenplays are artworks. On one level, I suppose neither of these claims is controversial. Prima facie evidence suggests that acknowledged literary artists—say, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Derek Jarman—were engaged in an art practice while writing screenplays like "Hiroshima Mon Amour," "Last Year at Marienbad," "Film," the so-called "Proust Screenplay," or "Caravaggio." Some critics may admit that in such cases these writers may have indeed been occupied in an art *practice*, but, they will maintain, the peculiar ontological status of the screenplay militates against the possibility of it being an art*work*. I will address these concerns about ontology in the next section, but it seems that at least Pinter's "Proust Screenplay"—never produced and, thus, shorn of any such ontological complications—demonstrates that it is at least possible for a screenplay to be an artwork. Nevertheless, the argument I plan to make is somewhat bolder. My claim is that even that most disparaged and denigrated form of screenwriting—Hollywood screenwriting—is an art practice and that some Hollywood screenplays are artworks.[1]

At first glance, it might seem that the success of the argument depends on my having a working definition of art that most readers will readily accept. This would be a tall order, indeed. Some readers, assuming that the term "art" is essentially evaluative, might resist the use of the word altogether or deny that there is any objective sense in which it can be used. In informal discussions with film and media scholars, I have found that much skepticism about my claim that some screenplays are artworks owes to the assumption that, for me and others who think about the philosophy of art, being an artwork is essentially a matter of achieving a certain level of aesthetic value or cultural cachet. But very few people working on aesthetics hold this view. The question of art's definition is so vexed precisely because most philosophers of art recognize the need for a definition of art to include not only da

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[1] One might wonder why I do not claim that *all* screenplays are artworks if screenwriting is an art practice. My reasoning here stems from thinking about other art practices (or art forms): Although filmmaking is an art practice, not all films are works of art. So, too, I think it is with screenwriting and screenplays.

Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, but also Tracy Emin's *My Bed* and Jane Doe's seashell collage sold at the county craft fair.

In any case, I am not using the term "art" to pick out solely high art or good art—whatever one thinks those are. Rather, I follow philosophers of art who use the term in its descriptive sense to refer to a cultural practice (or group of cultural practices) and the object(s) produced by it (or them).[2] Now, it is obviously true that in some cases we value a practice or an object differently *because* we recognize it as an art practice or an artwork. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons I think it is worthwhile arguing that some screenplays are artworks; I believe that we have heretofore not properly appreciated their value. However, it is crucial to see that this is not tantamount to claiming that screenplays (or any other cultural objects) are works of art essentially *in virtue of* their putative value—aesthetic, cultural, or whatever.

Perhaps, then, a skeptic will now grant me that my use of the term "art" does not commit me to the kind of aesthetic definition that many cultural critics find so problematic. But then one wants to know what definition of art I do assume. And it appears that any response I give here will be open to renewed objection—in this case from philosophers of art as well as cultural critics. For despite fifty or so years of debate—initiated by the challenge of Morris Weitz's neo-Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism—there is, of course, still no consensus about art's definition. How, then, can I get my argument off the ground? I want to suggest that, in fact, my argument does not require a definition of art at all. For lacking a definition of art does not usually prevent us from identifying instances of it. And when we disagree about the art status of a particular object or practice—say Duchamp's *Fountain* or photography—the dispute is rarely settled by appealing to a definition.

Furthermore, the claim that we can often identify instances of art without a definition of art should be not be controversial because, as Noël Carroll writes, "we are able to identify a great many things without resort to definitions."[3] Indeed, in the previous chapter I was careful to say that I do not claim either that we typically identify screenplays by testing them against the intentional-historical formalist definition or that we ought to use the definition to identify screenplays on a regular

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[2] See, especially, Noël Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63-75.

[3] Noël Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103.

basis. On the contrary, in most cases, we can identify something as a screenplay simply by looking at it. So, too, it is with ordinary objects like roses, hats, and water; usually, we can identify these things without recourse to definitions. For, as I suggested in the previous chapter, defining x and identifying instances of x are two different matters.

Since my task here is to identify screenwriting as an art practice and some screenplays as artworks, I do not require a definition of art, but merely a reliable method for identifying art. The method I shall defend here is Noël Carroll's historical narrative approach. Carroll offers the following rough description of his theory:

> Whereas the definitional approach presumes that we identify art…by means of real definitions, I propose that a compelling alternative view is that we identify works as artworks—where the question of whether or not they are art arises—by means of historical narratives that connect contested candidates to art history in a way that discloses that the mutations in question are part of the evolving species of art.[4]

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall offer an exegesis and defense of this proposal.

Before I begin, though, let me briefly say why I follow Carroll here. In short, Carroll's historical narrative approach is an eminently plausible method of identifying both artworks and art practices. I do not doubt that there are other useful methods, but I find the rationale underlying the historical narrative approach intuitive and Carroll's argumentation convincing. Moreover, the central premise—that art is a cultural practice that evolves, resulting in the evolution of the artifacts it produces—meshes nicely with the account of artifact change I detailed in the previous chapter. Finally, the modesty of Carroll's theory is advantageous to me since my own goals here are quite narrow. Because there is no need for me to commit to a more robust and inescapably controversial proposition regarding the definition of art, I would rather not. Carroll's approach to identifying art offers me that option.

Carroll's Historical Narratives

Carroll begins his argument by explicitly stating his assumptions. First, he assumes that art is a cultural practice (or, more specifically, "a cluster of interrelated practices"), which he takes to be "a complex body of interrelated human activities

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[4] Ibid.

governed by reasons internal to those forms of activity and to their coordination."[5] Secondly, he assumes that cultural practices evolve over time: "Practices sustain and abet change while remaining the same practice…[they] contain the means, such as modes of reasoning and explanation, that provide for the rational transformation of the practice."[6] As I argued in the previous chapter, Carroll presumably understands cultural practices as distinct from many other human kind concepts (e.g. clocks), inasmuch as cultural practices are constituted by intentional human activity and, therefore, have a means of transformation or evolution internal to them. Thus, cultural practices are essentially historical in a particularly strong sense. In Carroll's words, "Art has an inexpugnable historical dimension because it is a practice with a tradition."[7]

Already it should be clear why the historical narrative approach is a cogent way to identify art: If art is essentially historical and constantly evolving, then identifying a candidate work or practice can be accomplished by establishing the ways in which the candidate is linked to, or has emerged out of, prior art. As Carroll puts it:

> Since cultural practices tend to reproduce themselves and to negotiate their self-transformations in ways that sustain continuity between the existing tradition and expansions thereof, the modes of identifying new objects as art make essential reference, though in different ways, to the history of the practice. New objects are identified as artworks through histories of art, rather than theories of art.[8]

Identifying a candidate work in this way—by relating it either to previous art or the history of art in general—is, according to Carroll, most often and effectively done by offering an explanatory narrative. Therefore, Carroll refers to his method as the "narrative approach," and he calls the narratives through which art is identified "historical narratives" or "identifying narratives." In short, when faced with a disputed work, we attempt, according to Carroll, to "place it within a tradition where it becomes more and more intelligible. And the standard way of doing this is to produce an historical narrative."[9]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Carroll suggests that there are three predominant strategies by which someone offering an historical narrative can connect candidate artworks to already acknowledged artworks. In his words, "Primary,

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[5] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 66.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Noël Carroll, "Identifying Art," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.
[8] Carroll, "Art, Practice, Narrative," 71.
[9] Carroll, "Identifying Art," 85.

though, not necessarily exhaustive, examples of these strategies involve regarding whether the objects in question can stand as repetitions, amplifications, or repudiations of acknowledged artistic tendencies in [a given] tradition."[10] That is, in most cases, someone can characterize what Carroll calls the "genetic links" between prior art and new art in terms of the ways in which the latter repeats, amplifies or repudiates some element in a particular work, tradition, movement, or practice.[11] As Carroll says, historical narratives do not necessarily have to explain these links in terms of repetition, amplification, or repudiation. He suggests synthesis and radical reinterpretation as other categories, and one could think of additional examples.[12] In addition, he notes, "these strategies are not necessarily mutually preclusive."[13] Thus, a given work or practice can simultaneously repeat certain elements of a particular practice or movement while amplifying or repudiating other elements.

If historical narratives can do the work Carroll thinks they can—that is, if they can "establish the art status of a work by connecting [its] production…to previously acknowledged artistic practices"[14]—then they are powerful tools indeed. So, we need to know precisely what counts as an historical narrative. Carroll offers a summary of the concept in the following formula:

> *x* is an identifying narrative only if it is (1) an accurate (2) time-ordered report of a sequence of events and states of affairs (3) that has a beginning, a complication and an end, where (4) the end is explained as the outcome of the beginning and the complication, where (5) the beginning involves the description of an initiating, acknowledged art historical context and where (6) the complication involves tracking the adoption of a series of actions and alternatives as appropriate means to an end on the part of a person who arrived at an intelligible assessment of the art historical context in such a way that she is resolved to change it in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of the practice.[15]

Some explanation of each condition is in order. Conditions (1) and (2) attempt to jointly ensure the validity of the account as an historical (rather than fictional) narrative. By accurate, Carroll means "that the reports of events and states of affairs that constitute the narrative must be true and that the asserted connections between those events and states of affairs must obtain."[16] Condition (2) requires that an

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[10] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 71.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, 402n8.
[13] Ibid, 71.
[14] Carroll, "Historical Narratives," 107.
[15] Ibid, 113.
[16] Carroll, "Identifying Art," 88.

historical narrative make available the actual chronology of events. Conditions (3) and (4) stipulate the minimum conditions required for the account to succeed as a narrative. Conditions (5) and (6) are what give art historical narratives, in particular, their explanatory power. Two key assumptions should be noted here. Condition (6) assumes that the artist is a rational agent. Conditions (4) and (5) depend on that assumption for they require that the end be explained as a result of the beginning and complication by tracking the artist's practical reasoning. That is, we need to be able to track the artist's reasoning to determine if (and how) the candidate work produced by the artist at the end of the narrative is an intelligible response to the situation she assessed at the beginning and resolved to change in the complication.

Historical narratives' dependence on practical reasoning, Carroll hastens to add, does not mean that they can only be used to explain the actions of individuals or identify individual works of art. Rather, he thinks that historical narratives can be deployed to explain art movements (e.g. Dada) as well as art practices or artworld systems of presentation (e.g. cinema). In Carroll's words, "Novel artworld systems of presentation do not simply appear on the landscape by magic or acts of nature. They are evolved from preexisting artistic practices by their proponents through self-conscious processes of thinking and making."[17] This idea will be crucial to my argument that not only are some screenplays artworks, but that Hollywood screenwriting practice evolved out of preexisting artistic practices—especially playwriting.

In sum, if and only if a narrative fulfills all of the above conditions it is an historical (or identifying) narrative. And, "if such a narrative connects a disputed work to antecedently acknowledged art by way of narrating a satisfactory historical account of the way in which the work in question emerged intelligibly from previous artistic practices, then its defender has established its art status."[18] Having sketched Carroll's historical narrative approach, I now turn to defending it against some objections. Because Carroll himself has responded to several objections elsewhere, I shall limit my focus to three to which he has not responded and which are most threatening to my own project.[19]

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[17] Ibid, 94.
[18] Carroll, "Historical Narratives," 106.
[19] See Carroll, "Historical Narratives," 114-118. Here he replies Stephen Davies's objection that intentional-historical approaches place too much emphasis on artists' intentions. He also discusses the possible objection that identifying narratives are "too powerful—that they can be deployed in such a way as to defend the art status of objects and performances that are not art" (116).

Claire Detels's Objections: "Totalizing" Narratives

I suspect that the most frequent objections to Carroll's historical narrative approach—and the ones I most anticipate being leveled at my own historical narrative—derive from suspicion of what critics influenced by postmodern theory call "grand" or "totalizing" narratives.[20] This cluster of objections, predicated upon skepticism regarding the epistemic reliability of historical narratives, has been most directly put to Carroll by Claire Detels. Because Carroll has not replied directly to Detels's charges—and because most of those charges could be leveled at my own account—I will respond to them directly here.

Detels's first concern regards the accuracy condition (1) in Carroll's definition of an identifying narrative. Detels suggests that "a single 'correct' narrative may be impossible."[21] This impossibility, she thinks, arises because a narrative is always shaped and influenced by its narrator's "imagination and perspective."[22] Detels asserts that Carroll does not recognize these issues and she concludes that his approach does not appreciate "the complexity and relativity in art-historical practice, as each historian approaches the necessity of preserving, organizing, and telling a coherent story of art's past."[23]

To begin with, we should note that Carroll—contrary to Detels's assertion—plainly admits that imagination often goes into the creation of historical narratives.[24] But in any case the historian's use of her imagination in constructing an historical narrative should not—in itself—cast doubt on the accuracy of the narrative. Plenty of scientific discoveries—Einstein's general theory of relativity, for example—required a great deal of imagination. This does not necessarily mean such discoveries are invalid or inaccurate. The crucial test of their validity and accuracy is whether they are supported by empirical evidence. Likewise, it may require imagination on the part of the art historian to arrive at an understanding of Pierre Pinoncelli's urination on a copy of Duchamp's *Fountain* as a work of performance art rather than an act of

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[20] The seminal critique of such narratives is Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For various critiques of historical narratives, in particular, see the essays in Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997). Also see Hayden White and Robert Doran, ed., *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[21] Claire Detels, "History and the Philosophy of the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:3 (Summer 1993), 370.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Noël Carroll, "Interpretation, History, and Narrative," in reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147.

vandalism. Yet this in itself does not invalidate an historical narrative that explains Pinoncelli's performance art as part of a tradition of avant-garde art that includes ready-mades and Viennese Actionism. On the other hand, if evidence revealed that Pinoncelli had no understanding of Viennese Actionism and did not realize that the urinal into which he relieved himself was Duchamp's *Fountain*, then obviously such an historical narrative would be inaccurate. As historian Bernard Bailyn has put it, "history is an imaginative construction…but [it] must be…closely bounded by the documentation—limited by the evidence that has survived, and…by the obligation to be consistent with what has previously been established."[25]

It should surprise no one that some historical narratives do a better job of accurately representing past events than others if for no other reason than some historians are more careful or better trained than others. Carroll himself concedes this point and admits that historical narratives "may be challenged epistemically."[26] Furthermore, he writes, "they may be rejected where they are factually flawed or where the modes of thinking and making to which they advert are anachronistic."[27] This provision diffuses Detels's putative counterexample of the marginalization of women in art-historical narratives, which has been the "focus of much feminist revisionary work since the 1970s."[28] But Detels's counterexample does not even show what she thinks it does because from the fact that bad scholarship and inaccurate historical accounts exist, it clearly does not follow that art-historians or the historical narratives they construct are inherently incapable of accurately representing historical events. Detels must implicitly accept this fact for, if she did not, her endorsement of 1970s feminist revisionary work—a corrective narrative to previously inaccurate accounts—would be nonsensical.

Furthermore, having a particular "perspective," such as that of an art historian who believes, for example, that in the wake of the marginalization of women in art-historical narratives it is important to affirm the contributions of female artists, clearly does not necessarily make an historical narrative inaccurate. Perspective, in itself is not a problem. How could it be? Every historical account is somehow mediated. Rather, an art historian's distortion of historical facts to suit her perspective is a

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[25] Quoted in Perez Zagorin, "History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now," *History and Theory*, 38:1 (February, 1999), 19.
[26] Carroll, "Historical Narratives," 106.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Detels, 370.

problem. But it is not a problem inherent in historical narratives. As Carroll himself puts it,

> Some historians may select the events they highlight in dubitable ways, but there are procedures for ascertaining whether the processes of selection a given historian employs are questionable. That is, historians may produce distortive representations of the past because of biased procedures, but this only goes to show that the selective attention of a given narrative may be distorting, and not that selectivity, in and of itself is problematic.[29]

Nevertheless, Detels thinks that Carroll's concession that historians sometimes create "incorrect narratives" belies a dismissive attitude.[30] On her view, the suggestion that "a single 'correct' narrative may be impossible is thus not admitted or seriously considered in Carroll's philosophy of art."[31] Put this way, the issue is perhaps not accuracy, but rather singularity. However, there is no such condition of singularity in Carroll's definition. Moreover, Detels's assertion that Carroll does not admit (or even consider) the possibility that in some cases there may not be a "single 'correct' narrative" is simply false. Carroll writes, "it is obvious that there are multiple stories that can be derived from a given set of events, but…there is no reason to presume that these different stories must conflict, and, therefore no reason to believe that they cannot be assessed in terms of literal truth."[32] That is, there is no reason, in principle, to think that offering one correct narrative implies that it is the *only* correct narrative.

Detels has a second, related objection, which roughly contends that on Carroll's account, fulfillment of the conditions (3) and (4) for something being a narrative precludes the fulfillment of (1) the accuracy condition. In other words, she speculates that since narrative form forces structure upon naturally unstructured sequences of events, it is epistemically unreliable. Respecting "a recent caveat from narrative theory," Detels suggests "the structure of narrative inherently functions to impose unities over experience, unities which correspond more to the controlling myths of the time than to the experience narrated."[33] Several factors make it difficult to respond to this charge. First, Detels does not provide a footnote to indicate precisely from where this caveat comes or how it was originally formulated. This is

[29] Carroll, "Interpretation, History, and Narrative," 146.
[30] Detels, 370.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Carroll, "Interpretation, History, and Narrative," 150.
[33] Detels, 370.

not merely an academic quibble, either, for when Detels wrote this piece in 1993, several strains of narrative theory were being applied in a myriad of manners in analyses of narrative within the disciplines of both literature and history. So, rather than guessing at which formulation of the charge to refute, suffice it to say that whether it is that of Teresa de Lauretis or that of Hayden White, the theory behind this caveat has been debunked at length elsewhere.[34]

Detels's objection to narrative structure is also confusing because later in the same article she actually appeals to philosophers and historians to construct narratives. Why? She believes that popular music has been overlooked by the academy and that "philosophers and historians…are the ones who can ask the questions and construct the narratives which may put popular music into perspective as part of a tradition of musical practice, a tradition whose meanings—like other cultural meanings—we ignore at our own risk."[35] This inconsistency points, I think, to the fact that historical narration is deeply ingrained as the primary means by which we contextualize and explain many phenomena both in and outside of the artworld—despite much theorizing about the putative dangers of doing so.

So, what of Detels's assertion itself? In the first place, there is a logical objection to be made. In the same way that neither the use of one's imagination nor one's particular perspective precludes one from constructing an accurate historical narrative, the structuring of events into a narrative does not necessarily entail a distortion of those events. As Andrew P. Norman has noted, "the fact that a discursive representation has a structure that that which it represents does not, does not itself entail that a falsifying imposition has taken place."[36]

Furthermore, it should be clear that narrative structure is not necessarily something imposed upon events, but can often be found within sequences of events themselves.[37] For example, when I apologized to my students for missing class last week, I told them the following story: As you know, it snowed a few inches the other night. The following morning I went to my local train station in Brixton to catch a train to Canterbury as I normally would. Needless to say, I did not expect that a little

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[34] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), especially chapter 5; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). For counterarguments, see David Carr, "Narrative Explanation and Its Malcontents, *History and Theory* 47 (February 2008); David Carr, "Getting the Story Straight: Narrative and Historical Knowledge," in *The History and Narrative Reader*, Geoffery Roberts, ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 197-208; Andrew P. Norman, "Telling it Like it Was: Historical Narratives on Their Own Terms," *History and Theory* 30:2 (May 1991).
[35] Detels, 373.
[36] Norman, "Historical Narratives," 131.
[37] On this point, see Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33.

snow would paralyze the country. But when I arrived at the train station, I found that it was closed and trains were only running from central London due to the snow. I tried to catch a bus into central London, but the buses were not running. So, I walked to the Tube station and caught the Tube instead. After arriving at the train station, I found out that because the trains were not running their normal routes, I would have to switch trains en route to Canterbury. When it was time to switch trains, I had to wait on the platform for an hour because my connecting train was delayed due to the weather. It finally came, but by the time I arrived in Canterbury I had missed class.

My historical narrative represents this sequence of events as unified. But is it really the case that I have *imposed* unity upon the events—let alone in an arbitrary or disingenuous manner or in such a way that corresponds to some "controlling myth of the time"? This seems like a stretch. It would be more apt to say that these events just are unified insofar as they collectively relate to the fact that I missed my class. This is not to say that the events themselves have a narrative structure or that they unfolded exactly as my narrative describes. My narrative omits a number of events that occurred: I read the newspaper on the Tube, I drank a coffee while waiting for my train, and so forth. But to omit such inconsequential events in order to condense my narrative neither constitutes any sort of distortion on my part, nor does it imply that I have imposed unity upon the events.

On the contrary, including in my historical narrative every single event between leaving my apartment and arriving in Canterbury would be distortive because it would obscure the reasons I missed class; however, selecting for my narrative the set of events that were causally linked to my missing class is not distortive. Furthermore, the reason I can offer my students a coherent story that explains why I missed class is that the salient events themselves have a coherence and unity to them extrinsic to my narrative. For if a narrative about why I missed class was never constructed, it would still be the case that that the sequence of events was unified insofar as the events in the sequence together led to my missing class.[38] Of course this does not mean that historians never incorrectly impose structures of unity and coherence upon historical events; but it does show that such structuring of events need not necessarily be either an imposition or a distortion.

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[38] On these points, especially, see Carr, "Narrative Explanation."

In the next chapter, I will offer an historical narrative that traces the emergence of Hollywood screenwriting practices out of contemporaneous playwriting practices. This narrative will deliberately emphasize the links between screenwriting and playwriting while largely remaining silent about screenwriting's connection to other artistic and non-artistic practices of the time period—specifically comic writing, short story writing, and journalism. I recognize that these links to other practices exist and that other accurate narratives about Hollywood screenwriting's origins could be told, but my focus will be limited to the relationship between screenwriting and playwriting just because I want to emphasize the ways in which the former emerged out of the latter. As the preceding discussion has shown, however, it would be incorrect to construe my narrative as biased, inaccurate, distortive, or fictitious.

Stephen Davies's Objection: Artworld Relativity

The idea of unity is also a point of departure for Stephen Davies's criticisms of Carroll's theory. But whereas Detels worries that art historians will choose flawed structuring principles, impose fictitious unities and create inaccurate narratives, Davies expresses concern that without presupposing a single, unified tradition of art making, such narratives will lack structuring principles that make them meaningful and explain the unity of the concept of art. However, such a presupposition would be erroneous because there is clearly more than one artworld and more than one tradition of art making. So, Carroll's theory (as well as the historical definitions of art offered by Jerrold Levinson and James Carney) appears to be on the horns of a dilemma, which Davies calls "the Artworld relativity problem."[39] Carroll must either maintain the apparent falsehood that there is a single Artworld in order to secure the continuity and unity that his narrational strategy requires, or—if he admits that there are multiple artworlds, each with a different tradition of art making—he must accept that his theory is incomplete until he can "explain how artworlds are of a single type. An account is required of what makes the various artworlds *artworlds*."[40] Davies elaborates:

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[39] Stephen Davies, "Definitions of Art," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 174.
[40] Stephen Davies, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition," in *Theories of Art Today*, Noël Carroll, ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 212.

> Unless Carroll's narrational strategies are themselves structured by the
> Artworld context, appeal to them cannot easily explain the unity of the
> concept of art in view of the long and varied history of art practices
> and the many non-art practices repeated, amplified, or repudiated
> within art practice. Carroll's narrational strategies must reveal the
> organizing principles that underlie art practice if they are to account for
> the concept's unity.[41]

Or, to put the problem as Robert Stecker has, "Although historical definitions can explain how later items are artworks by relating them to a given tradition, such definitions are incomplete until a basis is provided for distinguishing art traditions from other historically continuous cultural processes or practices."[42]

Stecker is careful to limit his objection, with good reason, I think, to historical *definitions* of art. For although it may indeed be the case that the Artworld relativity objection threatens historical definitions of art, it is not clear that the objection poses any serious problems to the historical narrative approach to identifying art. What underlies this objection is an insistence upon the revelation of an essential feature of art (or art practices or art traditions). But this is precisely the problem that Carroll attempts to eschew by openly admitting his approach is *just* an approach to identifying art and does not offer an essentialist definition. In fact, Carroll anticipated this sort of objection when he first developed his idea of identifying narratives: "[I]f we deflect the demand to supply an account of the essential nature of the artwork by an invocation of the practice of art, we will soon be asked to specify the conditions that differentiate the cultural practice of art from other cultural practices."[43] But since Carroll's goal is precisely to avoid offering an essential definition of art, it should not be surprising that when pressed to provide an essential feature of art practices, he will again demur on the grounds that the historical narrative approach is sufficient for reconstructing the continuity and unity of various art practices. "That is," he writes, "pressed to portray the unity and coherence of the practice of art, we propose rational reconstructions of the way in which it historically evolved."[44]

Perhaps here it will be charged that in this reply Carroll does in fact erroneously presuppose a single practice or tradition of art. But this accusation is also off the mark; Carroll's theory clearly allows that there may be multiple practices or

[41] Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 169.
[42] Robert Stecker, "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?," in *Theories of Art Today*, Noël Carroll, ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 50.
[43] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 72.
[44] Ibid.

traditions of art. Furthermore, this qualification does not change his approach: "At any point in the history of the practice (or practices), the unity of a later stage of development is rendered intelligible or explained within the practice by filling in the narrative of its emergence from an earlier stage by means of such processes as repetition, amplification, and/or repudiation."[45] Rather assuming that there is a single Artworld into which all art properly so-called may be placed, the historical narrative approach recognizes that there are multiple artworlds, which have their own traditions and practices of art.

It is here that Davies presses Carroll that the historical reconstructions he offers are really vacuous since they are not structured by a single, continuous and unified tradition of art. If the link between a candidate work and past art "resides in a narrative that encompasses the two"[46] and the narrative relies upon identifying instances of repetition, amplification, and repudiation, then it still appears that the narrative could easily mistake non-art for art since there are many other historically continuous practices that exhibit repetition, amplification, and repudiation. A specific problem would seem to be raised by a practice that counts as art in one artworld context but not in another. How can a narrational strategy that relies upon repetition, amplification, and repudiation as means of identifying links between past art and present art candidates correctly identify an art practice in one artworld when the same practice is not an art practice in another artworld?

Carroll adds a constraint to dodge this problem:

> One [also] needs to establish that the thinking and making that the identifying narrative reconstructs be localized to activities that occur within recognizable artworld systems of presentation—that is, artforms, media, and genres that are available to the artist and the artworld public under discussion. That is, identifying narratives must be constrained to track only processes of thinking and making conducted inside the framework of artworld systems of presentation or recognizable expansions thereof.[47]

In other words, granting that there are multiple artworlds with different art traditions does not mean that we have no basis for sorting out art from non-art unless we provide some essential feature of artworlds. On the contrary, a candidate work may be identified as art if it can be correctly placed within an art tradition or, more specifically, artworld system of presentation that was available to its creator in her

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Davies, "Definitions of Art," 174.
[47] Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," 116.

particular artworld. To make this a little more concrete, Carroll offers an example. As is well known, Vincent van Gogh cut off part of his ear after an argument with Paul Gauguin. Carroll supposes that even if it were the case that van Gogh "mutilated himself in order to symbolize the plight of his artistic convictions in the face of Gauguin's criticisms,"[48] it would be wrong to regard this act of mutilation as art. However, Rudolf Schwarzkolger's (alleged) self-castration would properly be regarded an instance of the Body Art subgenre of Performance Art. As Carroll points out, "what Schwarkolger [sic] had at his disposal—which van Gogh lacked—was a recognized framework in which self-mutilation could be presented as art. Van Gogh's act occurred outside any artworld system of presentation—outside any of the artforms, media, and genres known to him and his public…"[49] That is, we can identify self-mutilation as an artworld system of presentation in Schwarzkolger's artworld by tracing its evolution from prior forms of Body Art and Performance Art. However, in the artworld within which van Gogh worked, self-mutilation was not an artworld system of presentation, and we know this precisely because we cannot trace its emergence from prior artworld systems of presentation.[50] Historical narratives predicated upon repetition, amplification, and repudiation can thus sufficiently distinguish art from non-art despite the existence of multiple artworlds.

Nevertheless, it may appear that Carroll's theory is circular because we have now returned to the question of what makes artworlds a single type. With regards to the example above, one may ask: if self-mutilation is an art practice in Schwarzkolger's artworld but not van Gogh's, what do those artworlds each have in common that makes them artworlds? However, we need to remember that the charge of circularity would only hold sway if Carroll were offering a definition of art. Davies seems to forget that Carroll is not offering a definition. He thinks that Carroll "sees the link between [a] present piece and past art as residing in a narrative that encompasses the two,"[51] and that art's "unity is preserved in the strategies that structure the narration and its historical continuity."[52] Here Davies implies that Carroll

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Perhaps it is worth reiterating here how the historical narrative approach deals with extremely abrupt, revolutionary innovations in an artworld. The approach supposes that no matter how revolutionary a work or practice is, such a work or practice cannot be a complete break with the past if it is actually art. For if it were truly a *complete* break, then we would have no reason to think that it was art. Assuming, however, an extremely revolutionary work does have *some* connection to prior works and practices, then the problem of elucidating that connection is simply an epistemological problem—not one that threatens the intentional-historical theory itself. See Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 70.

[51] Davies, "Definitions of Art," 174.

[52] Davies, *Definitions*, 168.

thinks the ability to construct an historical narrative to identify a work of art or an artworld system of presentation is a *necessary* condition for something to be art, and this troubles him because he doubts such narratives can unify the concept of art. But Carroll only claims that the ability to construct such a narrative is *sufficient* to identify something as art. So Davies's worry that the "strategies that structure the narration and its historical continuity" cannot account for the unity of the concept of art is off the mark. The links between present and past artworks do not "reside" in historical narratives themselves; historical narratives merely elucidate those links. Likewise, historical narratives do not "preserve the unity" of the concept of art, but "reveal unities within the practice of art."[53]

To Davies's demand that "Carroll's narrational strategies must reveal the organizing principles that underlie art practice if they are to account for the unity of the concept of art,"[54] we can respond that it is precisely through the process of historical narration that the unity of the concept can be revealed. But this response should not be misunderstood as a claim that historical narratives themselves structure the unity of the concept. If Davies objects that since there are multiple artworlds and art traditions, such an approach can only show the unity of certain artworlds and art traditions rather than the unity of the concept of art (i.e. what makes artworlds *artworlds*) as a whole, we can respond to that in two ways: In the first place this may be really be an epistemological problem and thus beyond our purview since one could conceivably construct an historical narrative that did link all artworlds and art traditions and unify the concept of art. In other words, there is no logical reason to suppose that historical narration is incapable of such a project. The second point is that even if this response is an insufficient defense of a definition of art, it is not a problem for our approach to identifying art. That is, if we can only show the unity of the tradition in which we want to situate a candidate work, then so be it for this is our only goal. As long as we are able to explain why the exact same work may be an artwork in one tradition and not another tradition, thus surmounting the practical problem of identifying the work as art or non-art, the ways in which the two traditions relate to one another need not concern us.

To put it succinctly but not dismissively, Carroll's goal—and mine—is to identify art rather than to define it. My point in rehearsing Davies's objection is in

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[53] Carroll, "Art, Practice, Narrative," 72.
[54] Davies, *Definitions*, 169.

large part to demonstrate that Carroll and I are insulated from most of the objections that have troubled intentional-historical definitions of art like Levinson's. More specifically, I hope my rebuttal of Davies's objection will immunize me from the kinds of criticisms that usually accompany the question of *what* or *whose* concept of art I have in mind when I say that screenwriting is an art practice and that some screenplays are artworks. Simply put, it is our, Western one. But to say that screenwriting falls under *that* concept of art hardly commits me to a definition of art that privileges *our* concept of art over any other concept of art. That is, I want to stress that identifying an art practice in the Western tradition is not tantamount to defining art in Western (or Eurocentric, or totalizing, or whatever) terms, much less claiming that this concept of art is the *only* concept of art.

Robert Stecker's Objection: Intentionality as a Necessary Condition for Art

Readers will have noticed by now that despite the fact that Carroll does not explicitly state it, his historical narrative approach to identifying art seems to imply that a necessary condition for something to be art is that it is the result of a person's intention to create art. For Carroll's narrational strategy identifies a work as art by tracing its production back to its maker or performer's assessment of some art context or situation, her resolution to respond to it (if not change it), and the choices and actions she took to do so. Indeed, Carroll admits that his approach, "though not definitional…places decisive weight on the artist's intentions for the purpose of identifying artworks."[55] But because Carroll does not claim that our ability to construct this sort of intentionality-dependant narrative is a necessary condition for something to be art, it appears he cannot be said to claim that intentionality itself is a necessary condition either.

However, there is another way in which intentionality might be a necessary condition for something's being art as Carroll understands it. For Carroll, art is a cultural practice. To engage in a cultural practice, one needs to possess some sort of base-level understanding of its conventions, its history, and so forth. In addition, one needs to understand oneself as engaging in that practice—even if such understanding is primarily tacit. As Carroll puts it, "one mark of a practice is that participants be able

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[55] Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," 114.

to self-consciously identify themselves as participating within the practice."[56] Furthermore, "if practices change, this requires that the participants have the means to self-consciously identify themselves as partaking of the same practice through change and transition."[57] But is this not tantamount to claiming that to engage in a cultural practice, one must intend to do so? I think it is. How could one "self-consciously identify [oneself] as partaking of [a] practice" yet partake of that practice unintentionally? Such a notion courts incoherence. Since art is a cultural practice (or a collection of cultural practices), then, it looks like one cannot create art without intending to do so. In short, we have a syllogism: A necessary condition for engaging in any cultural practice is intentionality; Art is a (a cluster of) cultural practice(s). Therefore, a necessary condition for engaging in art practice(s) is intentionality.

Now, two concerns might be raised with regard to the intentionality condition. First, it may appear that this condition will confound my attempts to identify screenwriting as an art practice and screenplays as artworks because screenwriters (especially in Hollywood) have a long history of denying that they intend to create art. In more general terms, it seems that the theory will have trouble identifying art in all cases in which creators deny that they have intended to make art, or in which knowledge about creators' intentions is not available. On the other hand, one might claim that it seems possible for something to be art without someone intending that it be.

Robert Stecker raises both of these points in his objection to the intentionality condition in Jerrold Levinson's definition of art. Yet I take it that proponents of Carroll's theory also need to address these concerns if I have correctly drawn the conclusion that a necessary condition of intentionality is implicit in his theory. Stecker begins by asking us to consider an object from the distant past or a remote part of the world. "Ignorant or indifferent to the intention with which it is made," he writes, "we are willing to call it 'art' on the basis of knowing that it was fashioned with skill and care…and that it possesses certain striking surface qualities."[58] Furthermore, Stecker suggests that the fact that "whole sections of art museums are devoted to such objects" indicates that "we are willing to call objects of this sort 'art.'"[59]

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[56] Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," 67.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Robert Stecker, "The Boundaries of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30:3 (July 1990), 267.
[59] Ibid.

However, this is a problematic counterexample. First, it seems to me that unless we know that the objects were artworks in their makers' eyes, we would do better to place the works in a museum of natural history than in an art museum (assuming we were obligated to place them in a museum at all). I think it is very likely that many such objects sit in art museums as a result of ignorance or error. On what grounds is it acceptable to suppose a tribal artifact—about which we know nothing, but which has impressive aesthetic features—is art? Such suppositions have, if I am not mistaken, caused great consternation among Native American tribes who have been outraged to discover non-art objects from their cultures being displayed in art museums. Moreover, such complaints are not solely about the expropriation of their cultural artifacts; they are also about the misunderstanding what those artifacts are.

In any case, adjudging an object, about which we know little, to be art on the grounds that "it was fashioned with skill and care…and that it possesses certain striking surface qualities"[60] will lead to considerable difficulties. Imagine there are some Martians who find my running sneakers and place them in a Martian art museum because they are able to tell that the sneakers had been made with "skill and care," and they think the sneakers have extraordinarily impressive aesthetic qualities. Now, let us imagine two further possibilities leading up to the Martians placing the sneakers in their art museum. First, suppose that the sneakers are utterly unrecognizable to the Martians. They have no idea what the sneakers are, but the fine craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities lead the them to assume the sneakers are art in my culture so they believe the sneakers ought to be in an art museum. In this case, I think we want to say that the Martians incorrectly regard my sneakers as art because they are ignorant of my culture.

Now, let us back up a step and consider the other possibility. Imagine that the Martians place my sneakers in their art museum not because they assume the sneakers to be art in my culture (for they are not interested), but because sneakers are artworks for Martians and my pair is a beautiful example of Martian sneaker art. In this case, although it is true that my sneakers fall under the Martian concept of art, it strikes me as deeply counterintuitive to say that my sneakers are therefore art properly so-called. On the contrary, I am warranted to say that calling the sneakers "art" is a mistake that

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[60] Ibid.

is due to cross-cultural confusion and erroneous Martian-centric thinking. And I think we can imagine our intuitions about this being stronger if the Martian art practice crossed some ethical or moral boundary; imagine, for example, substituting human sneakers/Martian art with (carefully and skillfully) embalmed and restored human bodies/Martian art. Both of my Martian examples, then, lead to unhappy conclusions for Stecker's supposition.

However, Stecker has another counterexample that is stronger and more to the point. According to Stecker, it is possible for an object to possess such outstanding aesthetic properties that we are justified in deeming it art regardless of what we know about the intentions with which it was created. As he puts it, "We may never know the intention with which a work such as the *Iliad* was created or even if it was created with a coherent ensemble of intentions… However, the *Iliad* is and always was a work of art (of great literature) whatever the intention with which it was created."[61] That is, Stecker thinks it is a mistake to ascribe an intentional necessary condition to art because in some cases we may grant an object arthood solely in virtue of its aesthetic properties and without any regard for the intentions with which it was created.

But I take that Stecker chooses the *Iliad* in this instance because—in contrast to his weaker counterexample of an object from a remote culture or world—we do know *something* about the intentions with which it was created in virtue of the fact that we know something about its actual history. But if we discovered that the *Iliad* was really the transcribed nonsensical jabbering of a baby Martian, would we not want to revise our assumption that it is an artwork? So, too, if we discovered that what we thought was Van Gogh's *Starry Night* was an accidentally produced super-Xerox copy of the actual painting, would we not admit that we had been mistaken in calling it an artwork? It just is not clear to me how we could determine an object's art status in virtue of the value of its aesthetic qualities without regard for the intentions with which they were created. On the contrary, knowing that the aesthetic features of an artwork are intended to be there seems central to why we value them in the first place. And in any case, it seems hard to imagine the kind of arresting aesthetic features Stecker has in mind making their way into an object completely unintentionally. Even if a work like the *Iliad* was created piecemeal, without coherent coordination or

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[61] Ibid, 267-268.

planning regarding its overall aesthetics qualities, its aesthetic qualities are nevertheless created in virtue of localized intentional actions. And, as Jerrold Levinson argues, there are good reasons for thinking that these specific localized intentional actions constitute artistic practices.

Levinson responds to Stecker's critique of his definition in two ways. First, he points out that even if we really had no way of knowing anything about the intentions with which the *Iliad* was created, this would be an epistemic problem that did not undermine the definition. In addition, although Carroll's theory is explicitly a method for identifying art, I do not think that this case poses any great problems for him either. For Carroll only claims that knowing that a candidate work is intentionally connected to prior art is sufficient to know that it is art—not that such knowledge is necessary to establish the art status of a candidate work.

In any case, Levinson argues, the *Iliad*'s formal attributes so clearly derive from recognizable art practice, it would be hard not to recognize them as indications of intentions to engage in that practice. "How else," Levinson asks, "could we reasonably account for the *Iliad*'s elaborate form, exquisite language, extended imagery, and depth of characterization?"[62] That is to say, since the *Iliad* was not the very first oral narrative—indeed it is perhaps a consummation of the possibilities of oral narrative—we can safely assume that it was created with intentions that "were grounded in and implicitly referred to those of some earlier endeavor [in the practice of oral narrative]."[63] Indeed, Levinson writes, "Given its manifest qualities, we can't *fail* to attribute such intentions to the *Iliad*."[64]

The crucial point here is that oftentimes the intentions with which a work is created can be located as implicit within the work. This means that neither evidence of an artist's conscious intention to create art, nor evidence of an artist's self-conscious ability to identify herself as working within an art practice, needs to be accessible in order to identify her creation as art. Historical evidence—such as an explicit statement by the artist—may help identify an intention to make art if its existence or its nature is disputed, but such evidence is not essential for determining whether the intention existed. Indeed, we are often able to identify paintings, sculptures, poems, and so forth as works of art without any historical evidence

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[62] Jerrold Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 414.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

regarding their creators' intentions to make art because those intentions are manifest in the formal features of the objects.[65]

Furthermore, however, we ought to borrow an insight from Levinson and recognize that an intention to make art need not take the form of a conscious and deliberate effort to do so. It may be true that one way for someone to make art is, in Levinson's words, by "intentionally relating his or her activity to some existent artwork or artworks, or to the domain of existing art as a whole, conceived or identified as such."[66] However, on Levinson's view, one can also make art "in virtue of directly intending his object for a complex of regards (approaches, attitudes) such as: {*with close attention to form, with openness to emotional suggestion, with awareness of symbolism…*} without having in mind or invoking intentionally any particular past artworks, genres, movements, or traditions."[67]

In other words, the intention that is necessary for art making should not be understood as necessarily being a conscious intention "to make art" or "to make something in the style of *that* artwork/that movement/etc." Rather, one can make art in virtue of a more localized intention—to establish a certain rhyme scheme, a certain style of brushstroke, a certain melody—that implicitly connects one's creation to prior art. Although these sorts of specific intentions are usually implicit rather than explicitly stated, they are no less artistic intentions for it.

Similarly, according to Carroll's theory the kind of intention that is necessary is not a conscious intention to "create art," but rather an intention engage in a practice (that is an art practice—whether the participant knows it or not). Recall that if Carroll's approach implicitly stipulates intentionality as a necessary condition it is in virtue of this argument: A necessary condition for engaging in any cultural practice is intentionality; Art is a (a cluster of) cultural practice(s). Therefore, a necessary condition for engaging in art practice(s) is intentionality. But this conclusion clearly leaves open the possibility that someone could be intentionally engaged in a particular practice—unaware that it is an art practice or that her specific effort to continue, amplify, or repudiate some tendency in the practice in some very specific way constitutes art making. Thus, a disaffected high school student who has (intentionally)

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[65] Recall that this is why we do not need a definition of the screenplay to identify most screenplays.
[66] Levinson, "Extending," 411.
[67] Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 39.

written a haiku for his poetry class has, as a matter of fact, created an artwork despite his protestations to the contrary.

Likewise, we ought to recognize that screenwriters' disavowals of creating art oftentimes belie evidence of art-making intention that is implicit in the formal features of their screenplays—in the careful crafting of plot, the nuanced development of character, the creation of imagery through metaphor and other poetic devices, and so forth. So, our efforts to identify screenwriting as an art practice and screenplays as artworks cannot necessarily be stymied by screenwriters' claims that they are not creating art. In more formal terms, to identify screenwriting as art, it is sufficient to show that it is a repetition, amplification, or repudiation of a given art practice or artworld system of presentation. And showing this does not require showing that any particular screenwriter consciously intends to create art.

Having sketched the historical narrative approach to identifying art and defended it from what I take to be the most salient objections, I turn now to the task of offering a particular historical narrative that traces the emergence of Hollywood screenwriting out of contemporaneous playwriting practices.

Chapter 4: From Playwriting to Screenwriting: The Historical Narrative

Thanks to much important historical work over the past few decades, the influence of the various forms of late nineteenth and early twentieth century theater[1] upon early practices of writing for the screen is now generally recognized.[2] The goal of this chapter is not so much to add to that body of original research, which has established the intermediary connections between these different kinds of theater and early screenwriting, but rather to synthesize the work that has already been done. However, my aim is not synthesis for its own sake, but for the purpose of constructing a narrative that traces the emergence of early Hollywood practices of writing for the screen out of contemporaneous practices of writing for the theater. For if I can show that Hollywood screenwriting has its roots in playwriting, that it was, therefore, first understood by practitioners and critics as a kind of playwriting, and that its establishment as a distinct practice involved the intentional repetition and modification of central narrative and stylistic strategies in playwriting, then we ought to acknowledge that Hollywood screenwriting is—like playwriting—an art practice.

Let me be clear that although my discussion will focus exclusively on the links between theater and early Hollywood practices of writing for the screen, I fully recognize that playwriting was just one of several different influences—including short fiction writing, novel writing, and journalism—upon those practices.[3] My concentration on playwriting should not be misunderstood as a denial of the importance of these other influences, for my intention here is not to offer a

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[1] I use the term "theater" in a broad sense here, following Roberta Pearson in regarding "its varied forms" of this time period to include, at least, vaudeville, burlesque, melodrama, and the so-called "legitimate" theater. See Roberta Pearson, "The Menace of the Movies: Cinema's Challenge to Theater in the Transitional Period," in *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices,* ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 315.

[2] Some of the historical work I have in mind and upon which I will rely in what follows includes (but is not limited to): Edward Azlant, "The History, Theory, and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897-1920," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980); David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990); Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990); Thomas Elsaesser, ed., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI Publishing, 1990); Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking 1907-1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). For examples of more recent work, see Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009); David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D.W. Griffith and the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009); and Ian W. Macdonald, "Forming the craft: Play-writing and photo-play writing in Britain in the 1910s, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8, no. 1 (February 2010): 75-89.

[3] See Kristin Thompson, "The Formulation of the Classical Style, 1909-28," in Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, 163-173; and Azlant, "Screenwriting."

comprehensive account of the origins of Hollywood screenwriting. Rather, I want to limit my scope to what is relevant for the development of my argument regarding Hollywood screenwriting's "genetic link" to playwriting. My hope is that the defense of the historical narrative approach in the preceding chapter will ward off charges that such a deliberate exclusion of certain facts and events for the purposes of foregrounding others is inherently distortive or disingenuous. On the contrary, I submit that my narrow purview is warranted insofar as my specific, stated aim is to trace the connections between playwriting practices and practices of writing for the screen in early Hollywood. Furthermore, it seems clear that although the influences upon those practices and early Hollywood film in general were myriad, it was generally recognized then, as it is today, that both have the greatest affinity with the theater.[4]

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Nearly all historians now accept some version of a periodization of pre-classical Hollywood film history that demarcates a period typified by what Tom Gunning has termed "the cinema of attractions"[5] from a subsequent transitional period marked by a surge in the production of short, fictional narrative films, and, later, a feature-film period that developed the set of devices that finally crystallized in 1917 as what we now call the classical Hollywood style.[6] Although there is disagreement about the dates at which these periods begin and end, there is a rough consensus on some points: Many historians, including Gunning and Charles Musser, date fictional narratives' rise to ascendancy circa 1903-1904.[7] Most concur that the nickelodeon boom began shortly thereafter, around 1905, ushering in the transitional period around 1907.[8] Finally, several scholars mark the transitional period ending around 1913, when feature filmmaking began to take hold and incorporate the characteristic devices of the classical Hollywood style, which was in place by 1917.[9]

For the present purpose, the dates are not as important as is the widespread consensus that as the classical Hollywood cinema developed during these years, it

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[4] See, for example, Keil, 40. I offer further support for this claim in the discussion that follows.

[5] Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," reprinted in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 121; 131n13.

[6] See, for example, Keil, 10-12; Musser, *Emergence*, 2; Thompson, "Classical Style," 159; and Ben Brewster, "Periodization of the Early Cinema," in Keil and Stamp, 66-75, but especially 70-73.

[7] Gunning, 121; Charles Musser, "Pre-Classical Cinema: Its Changing Modes of Production," reprinted in *Silent Film*, ed. Richard Abel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 91.

[8] See, especially, Keil, 11; Musser, *Emergence*, 2.

[9] Keil, 11-12; Brewster, 70-73; Thomson gives the 1917 date, although her dates, in general, diverge slightly from the sketch I offer, which takes more recent research in account. Thompson, "Classical Style," 159.

borrowed forms and narrative structures of other media—especially vaudeville and, later, the legitimate theater. As Kristin Thompson summarizes, "Most historians would agree that between the primitive period and the sophisticated studio production of the twenties, the US cinema moved from a narrative model derived largely from vaudeville into a filmmaking formula drawing upon aspects of the novel, the popular legitimate theater, and the visual arts, and combined with specifically cinematic devices."[10]

However, this periodization must not be misconstrued to suggest that the production of fictional narratives was entirely absent from early cinema before 1903 or so. In fact, the notion that film could be a medium for storytelling originated more or less contemporaneously with the invention of cinema, and this idea was bound up with the recognition that at least one of the uses of the new medium could be the recording and re-presentation of theatrical performances. Among the myriad subjects Thomas Edison and W.L.K. Dickson recorded in their experiments with the kinetoscope in 1894 and 1895 were *Band Drill* (1894) and *Quartette* (1895)—filmed scenes of the plays *A Milk White Flag* and *Trilby*.[11] In 1894, Dickson writes:

> Hitherto we have limited ourselves to the delineation of detached subjects, but we shall now touch very briefly upon one of the most ambitious schemes, of which these scattered impersonations are but heralds. Preparations have long been on foot to extend the number of actors and to increase the stage facilities, with a view to the presentation of an entire play, set in its appropriate frame.[12]

Edison, too, understood the kinetoscope's potential for reproducing theatrical events. Historian John C. Tibbetts writes that in 1895, "Edison was quoted as saying that by linking the phonograph and kinetoscope, the movie could preserve and disseminate the theatrical event so that, for example, grand opera could be presented 'without any material change from the original and with artists and musicians long since dead.'"[13]

Moreover, it was not only the inventors that saw this potential for the kinetoscope, but also the popular press. "From the beginning," Tibbetts continues, "much [critical] commentary presumed that the film medium should be a recording device for theatrical events. As early as 1894, a writer in *The Critic* predicted that

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[10] Thompson, "Classical Style,"157.
[11] Musser, *Emergence*, 78; 86.
[12] Quoted in Patrick Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle* to *Jesus of Nazareth*: Thoughts on the Origins of the American Screenplay," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 277.
[13] John C. Tibbetts, *The American Theatrical Film* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985), 6-7.

Edison's kinetoscope would enable an audience to 'witness and hear shadowplays in which the only real performer will be the electro-magnetic motor behind the scenes.'"[14] Thus, at the birth of cinema, a narrative impulse was present—if not prominent—and it was deeply intertwined with a conception of the new medium as (at least in part) a way to record a theatrical event.

In addition to recognizing cinema's potential for recreating theatrical performances, Dickson may have made a further conceptual leap to think that the way to realize such theatrical films was to follow a dramatic manuscript just as one would in a stage production. At American Mutoscope & Biograph in 1896, Dickson collaborated with actor (and AM&B shareholder) Joseph Jefferson to film eight short scenes in which Jefferson reprised his famous stage performance as Rip Van Winkle. Archivist and historian Patrick Loughney speculates that the script of Jefferson's play, published only a year earlier in 1895, may well have been used as a sort of plan for shooting the film. Whether or not this is in fact the case, Loughney identifies AM&B's *Rip Van Winkle* (1896) series as "the first attempt by an American filmmaker to adapt the complete storyline of a well known play to cinema."[15] As Loughney points out, the film likely expedited the general public's recognition of cinema's potential as a medium for the presentation of dramatic narratives. A reviewer for *The New York Evening Sun* wrote, "The marvelous manner in which Joe Jefferson's toast scene from *Rip Van Winkle* is produced by the biograph merely indicates what an important part this photographic machine is going to take in dramatic affairs…"[16] Furthermore, Loughney suggests that Dickson's idea of "transforming theatrical works to film" presupposed the use of "pre-existing written compositions in the making of movies" insofar as the performance of any theatrical work for filming would itself require following a dramatic manuscript just as it would on the regular stage.[17]

If one finds this a bit speculative, there is widespread agreement that just two years later, in 1898, the script of a passion play by Salmi Morse served as a production manuscript for the filming of Richard G. Hollaman's *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898). In 1879, theater producer David Belasco had staged Morse's play at the Grand Opera House in San Francisco. The following year, Morse began

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[14] Tibbetts, 6.
[15] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 279.
[16] Quoted in Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 279.
[17] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 277.

working on a New York production of the play with theater producer Henry E. Abbey and costumer Albert G. Eaves. In New York, however, religious groups mounted a well-publicized attack on the play, which they deemed sacrilegious, and the production was shut down before opening night. Despondent, Morse eventually committed suicide and Eaves kept the play script. Years later, in 1897, Richard Hollaman of the Eden Musée in New York City decided to create a passion play film to include in the Musée's screening program. Hollaman retained Eaves's services for the production, and, as Charles Musser writes, "the Salmi Morse play was dusted off and generally performed the role of scenario."[18] The use of the play script as a production manuscript for the film is an important indication that, very early on, makers of narrative fiction films conceived of a kind of continuity between the theater and film. Indeed, it was because of this understood continuity that it was assumed that a play script was perfectly well suited to serve as the production manuscript for a different kind of a staging of the play—a filmed staging.

Because two prominent researchers of screenwriting disagree about the implications of this particular incident, it is worth dwelling on the point for a moment. Edward Azlant seems to uncritically accept historian Terry Ramsaye's conclusion that Morse's play script *was* a film scenario—indeed, the *first*. Azlant writes, "Ramsaye accurately observes: 'Salmi Morse's ill-fated script was brought to light, to become the first motion picture scenario.'"[19] Steven Maras contests this assertion, opposing "the view that intentional use of a written 'plan' can constitute an early form of [film] script."[20] He cites Charles Musser's observation that variations in the exhibition of the film (which was screened in conjunction with a lecture and, possibly, lantern slides) meant that it did not have a fixed form, and he claims, "the idea of the scenario serving as a plan is tested by the conditions of performance of the play."[21] Moreover, writes Maras, "It is difficult to imagine how the idea of a 'written plan' operates in a presentational context where spectators respond to both familiar iconography and the narration of the lecturer that links and interprets the images."[22] However, both Azlant and Maras cloud matters here.

Maras is surely right in asserting, contra Azlant, that the use of the play script as a production manuscript for the film does not thereby make it a film scenario (the

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[18] Musser, *Emergence*, 213.
[19] Azlant, "Screenwriting," 62-63.
[20] Maras, 29.
[21] Ibid, 30.
[22] Ibid, 31.

first or otherwise). As I argued in Chapter 2, we typically think of the identity of an artifact as being determined by the intentions of its creator. Philosopher Risto Hilpinen explains, "When a person intends to make an object, the *content* of the intention is not the object itself, but some description of an object or some 'concept' under which the intended object is conceived; the agent intends to make an object of a certain kind or type."[23] Following Amie Thomasson's work, I argued that it is these intentional "type" or "sortal" descriptions that determine the identity of an artifact. In other words, artifact identity owes to the successful realization of an agent's intentions to create an object of a particular kind—of which the agent has a substantive and substantively correct conception. Of course an artifact can be appropriated for an unintended use, but this does not normally change the identity of the artifact, which is fixed by its creator. If I have neglected to wash the dishes, I might use a bowl to drink orange juice. But this does not make the bowl a cup. Morse's script, then, did not become a film scenario, post-facto, when it was used to shoot a film because, as the play's creator, Morse himself fixed its identity as a theatrical script.

On the other hand, Maras seems confused about the function of Morse's script in this context. Maras not only contests the strong claim that Morse's script was a film scenario, but also the weaker claim that the script served as a plan for the film. His objection to the weaker claim is that there seems to be no place for a "written plan" within "a presentational context where spectators respond to both familiar iconography and the narration of the lecturer that links and interprets the images."[24]

But it is obvious that Morse's script was used for planning the scenes to be shot rather than for the exhibition of the scenes themselves. The Hollaman production shot twenty-three scenes on 2,000 feet of film and used Morse's play as a plan to organize this process.[25] How the printed film was then organized and exhibited has no bearing that fact. Maras seems to think that for *x* to serve as a written plan for a film, *x* must be a written plan for the film's production, post-production, and exhibition. But this is a very odd construal of "written plan for a film." As scholars and laypeople use the term (or something like it) when referring to ur-screenplays, early screenplays, and contemporary screenplays, "a written plan for a film" is just shorthand for "a written plan for the *production* of a film." No one imagines that contemporary

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[23] Risto Hilpinen, "Authors and Artifacts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 93 (1993):157. Emphasis in original.
[24] Maras, 31.
[25] Musser, *Emergence*, 213.

shooting scripts necessarily dictate the way the finished film will look; the shooting script is a production plan. So, too, was Morse's script used as a production plan for Hollaman's film.

The importance of teasing out these distinctions is that Morse's script should not be mistaken for a film scenario (the first one or otherwise), but it should be regarded as an important document that links writing for the theater and writing for the screen. The script cannot be a film scenario properly so-called because Morse did not possess the concept 'film scenario,' let alone the intention to create one in 1879. However, the fact that the script was used to make a film has two important implications: First, as already mentioned, it indicates an early conception of a continuity between theater and early fictional narrative filmmaking. *The Passion Play of Oberammergau*, like *Rip Van Winkle* and many other early fictional narratives, was conceived of as filmed theater. Without this conception in place, it would not have occurred to anyone to use Morse's script to shoot the film. Moreover, as we shall soon see, this perceived continuity between theater and early fictional narrative film entailed a further continuity between the constitutive parts of each art. Thus, just as acting in the theater and acting for the screen were conceived as two varieties of acting, so too were writing for the theater and writing for the screen conceived as two varieties of dramatic writing. The second implication of the use of Morse's script is that that the idea of having a written plan for the production of a film—a "film script"—seems to have come directly from the theater.

To be sure, there is no evidence to suggest that the use of a play script as a plan for the shooting of a film was a widespread practice at this time. But if most contemporaneous fictional narratives did not use scripts in their production, they did look to the theater for models of plot structure. Charles Musser has found that as early as the 1896-1897 season, what he calls "the novelty year," some films had simple narrative structures. According to Musser, "The novelty year soon saw the development of narrative through both the elaboration of brief skits (primarily comedies like *Love's Young Dream*) and the sequencing of shots by the exhibitor."[26] Again leaving aside the (admittedly important) role of the exhibitor in early cinema in order to focus on production methods, we should take particular note of Musser's use of the word "skits," which is important because it suggests another way in which

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[26] Musser, *Emergence*, 189.

filmmaking's earliest narrative impulses were rooted in and emerged out of theatrical practices.

More specifically, as Kristin Thompson's research has shown, the very earliest fictional narratives borrowed the vaudeville forms of the skit (or sketch) and the playlet. Prior to 1903, she writes, "the typical [fictional narrative] film resembled a very simple vaudeville skit. The stage skit usually involved a couple of comics performing verbal and sight gags in a relatively static situation."[27] Both contemporary accounts and documents from the period describe the skit or sketch having a duration of roughly twenty minutes, so it is likely that they were often further condensed for these single-shot films. For example, the 1915 manual, *Writing for Vaudeville*, defines a vaudeville sketch as follows:

> A Vaudeville Sketch is a simple narrative, or a character sketch, presented by two or more people, requiring usually about twenty minutes to act, having little or no definite plot, developing no vital change in the relations of the characters, and depending on effective incidents for its appeal, rather than on the singleness of effect of a problem solved by character revelation and change.[28]

The lack of narrative development in these vaudeville skits meant that despite their longer duration, they were still helpful models for single-shot fictional narratives because nothing significant was lost in condensing them. As theater historian David Mayer writes, "The form, brevity, and quasi-legally enforced silence (or limited dialogue) of the sketch had a marked influence on the development of the early silent narrative film."[29] In fact, Thompson adds, some of the very earliest single-shot "skit-like" fictional narratives "are difficult to distinguish from motion-picture records of actual vaudeville comedy performances – a circumstance that reflects the indebtedness of the early narrative film to its stage mode."[30]

Yet historians agree that early cinema's reliance upon vaudeville and other theatrical forms extends well beyond these very early single-shot films.[31] Musser has shown that the prevalence of multi-shot fictional narratives began to increase as early as 1899-1900,[32] but, according to Thompson, "greater lengths and heterogeneous material did not fundamentally change the narrative model derived from the skit"

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[27] Thompson, "Classical Style," 159.
[28] Brett Page, *Writing for Vaudeville* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1915), 150.
[29] Mayer, 29.
[30] Thompson, "Classical Style,"159-160.
[31] On vaudeville's general influence on early cinema, see, especially, Robert C. Allen, "Vaudeville and Film, 1895-1915: A Study in Media Interaction" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1977).
[32] Musser, *Emergence*, 267.

during this period.[33] On the contrary, she avers, if there was another narrative model from which the early multi-shot fictional narratives borrowed, it was that of another vaudeville form—the playlet. The playlet was a kind of condensed play, structured episodically so as to move quickly from one important scene or event to another. Such an episodic structure, which depended upon the interest or action of individual scenes with rather loose causal links, was closely related to melodrama, with its similar focus on the static "situation."[34] Thus, Musser's findings, that early multi-shot films like AM&B's *The Downward Path* (1900) "appropriated situations if not complete narratives from popular melodramas," line up nicely with Thompson's claims regarding the influence of the playlet. Thompson also finds the playlet structuring later films like Edison and Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), in which "the condensation of the narrative into an episodic set of fourteen tableaux suggests…the playlet form."[35]

Here it is important to note that despite the fact that both vaudeville sketches and playlets were intended to be brief, comprising no more than about twenty minutes of a show, they were nevertheless scripted in roughly the same way a play for the legitimate theater was scripted. Writing manuals for both the legitimate theater and vaudeville indicate that it was standard practice to begin the composition of complete, multi-act dramas as well as playlets by writing a scenario. The scenario, as critics of the period frequently pointed out, was first used in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* of the sixteenth century. Writing in 1910, prominent dramatic and literary critic Clayton Hamilton explains that in the *commedia dell'arte*, "A synopsis of the play—partly narrative and partly expository—was posted up behind the scenes. This account of what was to happen on the stage was known technically as a *scenario*."[36] Theater critic W.T. Price, writing in 1913, sketches the contemporary meaning of the term in the legitimate theater:

> Scenario, as the name implies, is the arrangement of a play into its scenes. The dictionaries give it as a preliminary sketch of the Plot. This is too general, for while, in a sense, it is preliminary and often subject to change, the aim is to make it as absolute as the plastic nature of the work will permit. It is meant to serve as a pattern in the manufacture of the product. It represents an amount of labor and thought compared

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[33] Thompson, "Classical Style," 160.
[34] For a detailed discussion of the "situation" in stage melodrama and in film, see Brewster and Jacobs; also see Singer for a general discussion of melodrama.
[35] Thompson, "Classical Style," 160.
[36] Clayton Hamilton, *The Theory of the Theatre and Other Principles of Dramatic Criticism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), 10.

with which the execution is small. It sets limitations and boundaries to the play itself, the acts, the scenes, the dialogue. It fixes locality and time, establishes the Plot and all the working functions of the play. When you have completed it you are sure of the play and not before.[37]

In his 1915 manual, *The Technique of Play Writing*, Charlton Andrews includes a fourteen-page "Specimen Scenario" of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Presumably, Andrews himself wrote the scenario, but it is helpful to see what a scenario for a five-act play for the *fin de siècle* legitimate theater would have roughly looked like. Andrews's scenario divides the play by acts, sketching the action of each in the form of a synopsis interspersed with bits of dialogue.[38]

For Hamilton, Price, and other critics of the legitimate theater, drafting a scenario was an integral part of the playwriting process. Hamilton, for example, champions the significance of good scenario writing at length:

> There can be no question that, however important may be the dialogue of a drama, the scenario is even more important; and from a full scenario alone, before a line of dialogue is written, it is possible in most cases to determine whether a prospective play is inherently good or bad. Most contemporary dramatists, therefore, postpone the actual writing of their dialogue until they have worked out their scenario in minute detail. They begin by separating and grouping their narrative materials into not more than three or four distinct pigeon-holes of time and place – thereby dividing their story roughly into acts. They then plan a stage-setting for each act, employing whatever accessories may be necessary for the action.
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> Only after the entire play has been planned out thus minutely does the average playwright turn back to the beginning and commence to write his dialogue. He completes his primary task of play-making before he begins his secondary task of play-writing.[39]

Price describes the importance of the scenario in equally effusive terms, locating the artistry of playwriting in the writing of the scenario itself: "In fact, until you have mastered the art of writing a good scenario you are not a playwright."[40]

But although the legitimate theater adopted scenario writing as a fundamental element of playwriting, the scenario had its roots in the sketches of the *commedia*

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[37] W.T. Price, "The Philosophy of Dramatic Principle and Method: Chapter XXVII. SCENARIO," *American Playwright* 2, no. 10 (October 15, 1913): 332.

[38] Charlton Andrews, *The Technique of Play Writing* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1915), 235-248.

[39] Hamilton, *Theory of the Theatre*, 12-13.

[40] Price, 368. Interestingly, the tension in claims like Price's, which suggest that scenario writing constitutes an art in itself, and those of critics like William Archer, which describe the scenario as "a set of plans to an architect," seem to prefigure later debates about the screenplay's art status. See William Archer, *Play-Making* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Company, 1912), 54.

dell'arte and, hence, had a more immediate connection to that theatrical form's derivations: the vaudeville sketch and the playlet.[41] Charlton Andrews observes in *The Technique of Play Writing*, "The scenario is in reality a condensed version of the longer play, partaking of the tabloid features of the playlet. Practice in writing either form should help in the other."[42] Despite these similarities, vaudeville still distinguished between the scenario and the playlet itself. Brett Page, the author of the 1915 manual, *Writing for Vaudeville*, claims, "Nearly all playlet writers with whom I have talked during a period of more than five years have with surprising unanimity declared in favor of beginning with the scenario, the summary of dramatic action."[43] However, neither Page nor the legitimate theater critics conceived of the scenario as simply the first step of the writing process. On the contrary, they understood the scenario as embodying the very core of the drama. According to Page, "In a word, the invaluable part of any dramatic entertainment is the scenario."[44]

For our purposes, the significance of scenario writing practice in vaudeville and the legitimate theater is that at the same time the makers of simple, multi-shot fictional narratives looked to theatrical models to structure their films, they also turned to the theater to borrow production methods. Although historians agree on the substance of this point, the dates at which a theatrical model of production took hold in the early American film industry are disputed. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Janet Staiger suggests that from 1896 to 1907, the dominant method of filmmaking was what she calls "the 'cameraman' system of production. According to Staiger, "In general, cameramen...would select the subject matter and stage it as necessary by manipulating setting, lighting, and people; they would select options from available technological and photographic possibilities..., photograph the scene, develop and edit it."[45] On Staiger's account in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, there were exceptions in which the cameraman worked with another individual who staged the action, but it was not until around 1907 that the cameraman system was superseded by a system modeled on the legitimate theater in which director oversaw a group of workers responsible for different tasks.[46] Writing elsewhere, Staiger suggests that this shift towards a theatrical model of production might have begun slightly earlier—

[41] For a comprehensive bibliography of the *commedia dell'arte*'s influence on later theatrical forms, including vaudeville, see Thomas Heck, *Commedia Dell'Arte: A Guide to the Primary and Secondary Sources* (New York: Garland, 1988).
[42] Andrews, 201.
[43] Page, 279.
[44] Page, 280.
[45] Janet Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930," in Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, 116.
[46] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 117.

"after 1904-1906 as the exchange system and nickelodeon boom encouraged manufacturers to increase product output"— but she maintains the same general view of production trends.[47]

However, Charles Musser's research indicates that a "collaborative system" of production existed contemporaneously with the cameraman system—as early as 1896—and was in fact employed more often in the making of fictional narratives.[48] Furthermore, the collaborative system of production of fictional narratives depended on theater professionals to fill parallel roles on the film set. As Musser puts it, "A collaborative method of production was commonly used, particularly for making fiction films, in the United States prior to 1908-1909. This usually involved the uniting of complementary skills—those of theatrical and filmic expertise."[49]

Because the makers of these single and multi-shot narratives were already borrowing the form (and oftentimes the content) of vaudeville sketches and playlets, it should be of little surprise that one element of theatrical production they adopted at this early stage was the writing of simple scripts. Of course, the immediate reasons for their doing so were entirely practical. Musser's evidence shows that even the production of single-shot and simple multi-shot fictional narratives frequently required collaborative planning and organization—which included the writing of rudimentary scenarios. Of American Mutoscope and Biograph's fictional narratives produced between 1899 and 1900, Musser writes, "Even simple gags required scenarios, sets, and careful planning, and the potential expense in wasted stock alone was high enough to concern AM&B executives."[50] In fact, the company had hired Roy McCardell for the sole purpose of writing film "plots" in 1897, and a 1912 account suggests that some form of writing for the screen took place at the company even earlier.[51] Moreover, Patrick Loughney's discovery of an advertising card for an 1897 film suggests that by this time AM&B was soliciting and using ideas for dramatic "scenes" from its customers:

[47] Janet Staiger, "Blueprints for Feature Films: Hollywood's Continuity Scripts," in *The American Film Industry, Revised Edition*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 174.

[48] Musser, "Pre-Classical American Cinema."

[49] Ibid, 90.

[50] Musser, *Emergence*, 267. It is also worth noting here that by 1900 (and continuing through 1903) producers were beginning to wrest away from exhibitors control over the editing and, thus, narrative construction of some multi-shot fictional narratives. See Musser, *Emergence*, 297.

[51] According to a 1912 *Moving Picture World* article on McCardell, he was "the first man in America hired to write plots for motion pictures. It was in 1897 that the Biograph company needed the services of someone to write the fifty foot subjects for the Biograph and Mutoscope. Up to that time anyone around a studio wrote the plays, but the demand for mutoscope [sic] pictures…was strong and McCardell, who was then on the staff of the New York Telegraph, was put on the staff as author, editor, producer and press man." Quoted in Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 281. Also in 1912, Epes Winthrop Sargent famously wrote that McCardell "was the first man on either side of the water to be hired for no purpose other than to write pictures." Epes Winthrop Sargent, "The Literary Side of Pictures," reprinted in *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 270.

> $5.00 for an idea. The Proprietors will pay $5.00 for any suggestion of a good scene adopted and used by them in the Biograph or Mutoscope. Scenes submitted should be minutely described. Comedy scenes are preferred...[52]

Thus, Loughney suggests, "the use of such compositions in the making of narrative movies may have been a routine practice in one or more American companies as early as 1897."[53]

A few caveats are in order here, lest the claim that even before the turn of the century some film studios were borrowing a theatrical model of script writing be misconstrued. First, it must be emphasized that these early scenarios were very rudimentary. At this time a scenario usually consisted of a few lines—or a brief paragraph at most—describing the scene.[54] The early film scenarios did not look anything like scenarios for vaudeville sketches or playlets. Second, it must be noted that McCardell did not come from the theater—legitimate or vaudeville—but rather from newsrooms. His previous writing had consisted of comic strips, serialized stories, and "photo-stories." The latter were simple narratives told through still photographs and written captions, which—as Edward Azlant puts it—constitute "a vital synthesis of cartoon sequencing, photography, and narrative conceit."[55] There is no sense, then, in which McCardell could be said to have been strongly influenced by—let alone engaged in—theatrical script writing practices. Finally, I should emphasize that although I am interested in tracing a link between the theater and the earliest instances of writing for the screen, finding the first scenario is not my concern here. There has been enough lambasting of the putative "fetishization" of firsts elsewhere that I hardly need to point out the objections to searching for firsts here.[56]

With these caveats in place, the point I want to make is this: Evidence suggests that by 1900 it was not uncommon for fictional narrative productions to divide labor according to a roughly theatrical model, which resulted in the demarcation of writing as a discrete area of production just as in the theater. Whether this happened a few years earlier or a few years later, and whether the "first screenwriter" had ties to the theater, ultimately has little import to my present project. For now, my concern is to show that, as a whole, the production practices of this time

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[52] Quoted in Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 281.
[53] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 281.
[54] Staiger, "Blueprints," 174; Isabelle Raynauld, "Screenwriting," in *The Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London: Routledge, 2004), 576.
[55] Edward Azlant, "Screenwriting for the Early Silent Film: Forgotten Pioneers, 1897-1911," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 232.
[56] See, for example, Maras, 81.

were such that the emergence of writing for the screen as a discrete practice was dependant upon the conception of a continuity between it and writing for the theater.

An important discovery by Patrick Loughney lends strong evidence to support this claim. Loughney has found a set of American Mutoscope and Biograph paper prints and their original scenarios submitted to the Library of Congress for copyright protection between 1904 and 1905, along with accompanying correspondence between the company's lawyers and the Copyright Office.[57] The films include *The Suburbanite* (1904), *The Chicken Thief* (1904), *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* (1905), *The Nihilists* (1905), *Wanted; A Dog* [sic] (1905), and *The Wedding* (1905). Loughney notes that the first scenario to be copyrighted, for *The Suburbanite*, was actually printed as part of Biograph Bulletin no. 37. The rest were submitted as typescripts. All follow roughly the same format.

According to Loughney, the scenario for *The Nihilists* is representative of the group. On the cover page is printed:

<div align="center">

THE NIHILISTS

An Original American Drama in Seven Scenes, based
on Recent Incidents in Russia.
By

FRANK J. MARION AND WALLACE
</div>

McCUTCHEON

Property of American Mutoscope & Biograph Co.,
11 East Fourteenth St.,
New York City.[58]

The second page includes a list of characters as well as notes about the setting. The third pages lists and describes the locations for each scene. Then, according to Loughney, for the remaining thirteen pages, "the document shifts emphasis from preparatory instructions to the presentation of detailed scene-by-scene descriptions that explain the actions to be depicted and how they are to be staged."[59]

Moreover, he writes, for every individual scene "two distinct types of information are given that seem to have been written primarily to help the director and

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[57] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*."
[58] Quoted in Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 282.
[59] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 282.

cast more clearly understand how they were to interpret the plot."[60] I will quote
Loughney at length here to give a sense of how the scenario is actually written:

> The first type [of information] supplies specifics of set design and
> briefly describes how the action is to be staged, as in these instructions
> for scene two:
>
>> The dungeon of a military prison; the walls of heavy
>> stonework. Chains fastened to the wall at the back
>> centre. Stage clear, except for a small plain table and
>> several chairs.
>
> The second type describes the actions to be performed by the cast and
> realized on the film by the director:
>
>> The old man appears before a hasty court-martial
>> presided over by the Governor himself, and is
>> condemned without a hearing. At the Governor's
>> orders, he is seized by a couple of burly Cossacks,
>> stripped until his back is bare, and is then chained to he
>> wall, with his arms above his head. He is then cruelly
>> knouted with the many-thonged [sic] whip in use in
>> Russian prisons. He faints under the awful punishment,
>> and is hurriedly released and flung half dead upon the
>> table, from which he falls, writhing in agony, to the
>> floor. [61]

As these passages suggest, *The Nihilists* scenario contains no dialogue—nor, as
Loughney notes, do any of the other scenarios.

Aside from the lack of dialogue, these AM&B scenarios clearly resemble
theatrical scenarios in both their form and content. In terms of content, the scenarios
clearly conform to the standards set out by the theatrical critics. *The Nihilists* scenario,
for example, fits W.T. Price's description of a theatrical scenario as "the arrangement
of the play into its scenes" and as a document that "sets limitations and boundaries to
the play itself, the acts, the scenes…fixes locality and time, establishes the Plot and all
the working functions of the play."[62] As for form, the structure of *The Nihilists*
scenario looks less like Andrews's sample *Cyrano de Bergerac* scenario than the
actual theatrical scenarios I have found in my own research. For example, in the New
York Public Library's William C. De Mille Papers, there is a thirty-four page
handwritten scenario for William C. and Cecil B. De Mille's three-act play, *After*

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[60] Loughney, From *Rip Van Winkle*," 283.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Price, "The Philosophy of Dramatic Principle," 332.

Five. The first page comprises a list of characters, a list of the scenes in which the three acts will take place, and a note about the play's time period. Then, for each act, the brothers first describe in detail the scene, the time, and the appearance of the stage as the curtain rises before giving a synopsis of the action interspersed with dialogue.[63] Loughney summarizes the implications of the similarities between theatrical scenarios and these early AM&B scenarios nicely: "If the nineteenth century play script format was the starting point for experimental narrative films [like *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Passion Play of Oberammergau*], then the scenario—a descriptive work without dialog—was the textual format that served the early need of early filmmakers for brief compositions that could easily be adapted to short narrative films."[64]

If the form and content of the American Mutoscope and Biograph scenarios imply a conception of those documents as closely related to the theatrical scenario, the company's lawyers made the connection in explicit terms by propounding a legal argument that a film scenario was a dramatic composition on the order of a play script. In 1901, the United States Copyright Office had modified its classification system for copyright deposits to include the following categories: Books (Class A), Periodicals (Class B), Musical Compositions (Class C), Dramatic Compositions (Class D), Maps or Charts (Class E), Engravings, Cuts or Prints (Class F), Chromos or Lithographs (Class G), and Photographs—including motion pictures—(Class H).[65] On November 11, 1904, AM&B—in accordance with standard copyrighting procedures of the time—submitted a Class H copyright claim for *The Suburbanite* along with a paper print of the film. But then on November 25, AM&B additionally submitted Biograph Bulletin no. 37, which includes the scenario of *The Suburbanite*, and a Class D copyright claim—the first copyright claim for a film scenario.[66] The Copyright Office granted the Class H claim, but wrote the company questioning the validity of the Class D claim on the grounds that the scenario did not constitute a dramatic composition.

In a letter to American Mutoscope and Biograph dated December 1, the Register of Copyrights, Thorvald Solberg, writes:

[63] William C. and Cecil B. DeMille, "*After Five*: Scenario" (unpublished manuscript dated May 30, 1912), in the William C. De Mille Papers, New York Public Library.

[64] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 281.

[65] Patrick Loughney, "Appendix: Selected Examples of Early Scenario/Screenplays in the Library of Congress," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 291.

[66] Ibid.

> By request of the Librarian of Congress, I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your application for entry of what you term a 'dramatic composition' entitled 'The Suburbanite'.
> The article sent consists of a four-page folder describing a series of moving pictures. The term 'dramatic composition' as used in the copyright law has the ordinary meaning of that term, that is, a play consisting of dialogue and action. Your article is (apparently)[67] not a dramatic composition as the term is used in the law, and it would not be permissible to make entry as a dramatic composition. Possibly protection could be secured for the article if registered as a 'book', and if you wish such entry made and will write a letter authorizing the necessary amendment to your application, the matter will receive prompt attention.[68]

Solberg's construal of "dramatic composition" as "a play consisting of dialogue and action" is important here, for it suggests that his objection to categorizing the scenario under the term could either be quite broad or quite narrow in nature. Because *The Suburbanite* scenario clearly does contain action, Solberg's objection could either be (1) insofar as the scenario contains no dialogue it is not a play (the narrow objection), or (2) the scenario is not the kind of thing that a play is and the lack of dialogue is merely one indication of this (the broad objection).

In their response to Solberg, AM&B's lawyers understood him to be making the narrower objection regarding dialogue and made this point their main focus. In a letter dated December 6, Drury W. Cooper, representing the company, writes:

> As we understand, your position is that the term 'dramatic composition' as used in the copyright law means a play consisting of dialogue and action, and that the composition in question is not dramatic in that it has no dialogue. We take issue with this position, and submit that the article in question is a dramatic composition in the meaning of the law, and that a dramatic composition does not necessarily require dialogue.[69]

Cooper goes on to cite the decisions of several cases, arguing that they constitute precedent for including works without dialogue under the category of dramatic compositions. In what is, for the present purposes, an extremely significant passage, Cooper concludes:

> *Something of a novelty may be presented by the fact that this particular dramatic composition has been photographed in a series of living pictures, and is susceptible of being represented thereby. That however, is true of substantially every drama*, or at least of every drama which depends in large part for its portrayal upon an appeal to

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[67] Loughney notes that the word "apparently" is added in handwriting. "Appendix," 299, n3.
[68] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 292.
[69] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 292.

> the eye rather than the ear, and does not affect the author's right to
> registration or to protection from unauthorized representation by that
> or other means.
> We submit that the certificate of registration should be
> granted.[70]

AM&B's attorney makes two fascinating, interrelated claims in this letter. In the paragraph just cited, the claim is that *The Suburbanite* (as well as many other films) is a drama like any other; it just happens to be photographed. The second claim is that, as a consequence, the scenario of *The Suburbanite* is a dramatic composition or a play, no different (in terms of copyright law) than a theatrical script. In a reply dated December 9, Solberg conceded both of these points and accepted the application for a Class D copyright, thus establishing a precedent for treating scenarios as dramatic compositions for copyright purposes.

As Loughney has explained, Solberg's uncertainty about whether the Class A (book) or Class D (dramatic composition) copyright was more appropriate seems to have stemmed not only from the lack of dialogue in the scenario, but also from the fact that AM&B had submitted an advertising bulletin rather than an original dramatic manuscript. Perhaps in order to avoid additional problems, AM&B subsequently submitted copies of the original typescript scenarios for the other films comprising this 1904-1905 cluster—all of which were awarded Class D copyright registrations. Thus, the legal debate around this set of six Biograph fictional narratives made explicit the conception of the film scenario as a kind of dramatic work or play. The announcements on the Biograph bulletins for these films made the point clear to any potential copyright infringers: "Copyright 1904 [or 1905], both as a Picture and as a Play, by the American Mutoscope & Biograph Co."[71]

Loughney's research has also shown that neither the writing of scenarios nor the conception of them as types of plays was exclusive to AM&B at this time. On May 1, 1905, The Selig Polyscope Company submitted a copy of a thirteen typed-page manuscript, entitled "The Serenade: A Dramatic Composition in Four Scenes," in application for a Class D copyright.[72] What is particularly interesting about this script, authored—according to the cover page—by William Selig, is that it seems to have been created with the intention that it suit either stage or film production. (No corresponding paper print was submitted for a Class H copyright.) The clearest

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[70] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 293. My emphasis.
[71] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 294.
[72] Loughney, "From *Rip Van Winkle*," 283.

indication of this idea (and the way in which this document differs most from the AM&B scenarios) is the fact that the script is dialogue-oriented. In addition, the stage directions, which frequently refer to the "Stage" and "Balcony," seem to assume a theatrical production context. In general, this manuscript seems to be less concerned with organizing production (as the AM&B scenarios were) and more concerned with structuring the narrative. Here is an excerpt based on a transcription by Loughney:

> **The Serenade – Scene One.**
> **Scene**: Garden Scene – with balcony projecting from upper part of house. (to left of Stage).
>
> Enter Freddie, Cornet under his arm stops beneath Balcony, and begins to serenade Fannie, during the serenade, Fannie appears on Balcony.
>
> **Freddie**: (Stops playing) Ah! My loved one, my own sweet Juliet, come fly with me, to a bower of rose's [sic] do not turn me away, but whisper that one dear short but sweet word, that means, all in life to me, say you will this very night, elope with me, and be my wife.
>
> **Fannie**: Yes! I would go with you anywhere, fly with you to the end of the Earth, were it not for my Father.
>
> **Old Man**: {listening behind Balcony window} Ah! Ha! I see it all now, the Villain, that bargain counter three cent Dude, wants my Daughter to elope with him, Oh! the Scoundrel! the Wretch! I'll fix him.[73]

To contemporary eyes, Selig's manuscript may appear to clearly be a play, but he apparently thought of it in more complex terms, assuming a fluidity between theatrical scripts and film scenarios. As Loughney puts it, "The text of *The Serenade* reveals a rather typical farce comedy of the era that well might have been played as either a burlesque stage performance or a split reel comedy."[74] At the bottom of the second page is the following note, which seems to indicate that the document might be used either as a theatrical script or a film scenario: "CAUTION—Stage representation, Moving Pictures, etc. positively prohibited, without the written consent of the author."[75] Nevertheless, Loughney speculates that Selig "intended it primarily as a 'screenplay' for a comedy film. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the scenario is less than thirteen pages in length—including dialogue and

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[73] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 295.
[74] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 295.
[75] Quoted in Loughney, "Appendix," 293.

stage directions—but is divided into four full scenes. It is unlikely that any stage representation of this work, even a full vaudeville staging, would include four full scene changes."[76] And, in fact, Selig eventually used the script to shoot *The Serenade*, which ultimately comprised twelve scenes and was released in September 1905.[77] Understanding how, in 1905, Selig could copyright an original dramatic manuscript bearing resemblance to a theatrical script, warn potential copyright infringers against both theatrical and filmic production, and eventually use the manuscript to produce a film, requires acknowledging that, at this time, "plays" were written for both the stage and the screen.

In sum, Loughney's research indicates that by 1905, two major companies— AM&B and Selig Polyscope—were using scenarios both as written plans for their films' narrative structure and for organizing the production of those films. Although the theatrical term, "scenario," was only first applied to the third manuscript AM&B submitted for copyright—"Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son"—the theatrical lineage of these early film scenarios was established in the 1904 debate about the proper copyright class for *The Suburbanite* scenario. The Copyright Office's decision to regard film scenarios as dramatic compositions made explicit what those scenarios' form and content had theretofore implicitly suggested: Writing for the screen emerged out of theatrical writing practices and, as such, it was understood as constituting a kind of playwriting.

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By 1907, the American film industry was beginning to change in fundamental ways that had profound consequences for scenario writing. These changes and their causes were myriad and complex, and I will not detail all of them here. For the present purpose, it will suffice to sketch out a few relevant developments.[78] The nickelodeon boom, which began in 1905, created a significantly increased demand for product from manufacturers—especially fictional narratives.[79] This increased demand, combined with the interrelated impetuses for increases in profits, efficiency, and quality of product, led to the standardization and centralization of production methods between 1907-1909.[80] As Charlie Keil notes, historians differ in opinion as to the precise dates at which this shift took place, but most agree about the general

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[76] Patrick Loughney, "In the Beginning Was the Word: Six Pre-Griffith Motion Picture Scenarios," in Elsaesser, ed., 215-216.
[77] Musser, *Emergence*, 400.
[78] For two good overviews of the topic, see Bowser, *Transformation*; and Keil. My sketch of events follows Keil closely.
[79] Keil, 20. Musser, "Pre-Classical," 91.
[80] Keil, 26-27. Musser, "Pre-Classical," 91-94.

picture of things.[81] According to Charles Musser's summary, "the increase in fiction film production also encouraged a greater division of labor… It was the increasing rate of film production, a response to the nickelodeon boom, that…forced new management structures that more clearly favored vertical rather than horizontal methods of production."[82] One immediate consequence of this restructuring of production was the proliferation of specialized scenario departments. By the end of 1909, Archer McMackin, writing in the trade paper, *Nickelodeon*, could claim: "now, nearly all the film companies have organized scenario departments, presided over by a dramatic editor, who devotes his entire time to receiving and reading manuscripts and continually soliciting ideas."[83]

In addition to moving to a more hierarchical system of production, another means of maximizing efficiency was increasing and standardizing the length of narrative films.[84] Fictional narrative films gradually increased in length until 1908, when manufacturers agreed to set a uniform length of 1,000 feet for a single reel film. But if the standardization of length increased efficiency, it also created a new problem: ensuring narrative coherence. Audiences had already been losing patience with slapdash, incoherent narrative films. According to Eileen Bowser, "By 1908 it was evident that the popularity of the story film was presenting new problems for the filmmakers. The most common criticism of specific films concerned the need for clarity."[85] Bowser cites a 1908 review in *The Moving Picture World*, which asserts: "'The Devil,' 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' etc., are clever plays but they have been presented in motion pictures in a way that the public does not understand them. The spectators cannot follow the plot and therefore they lose interest."[86]

The further challenge posed by the standardization of length was, according to Staiger, that manufacturers could no longer simply go back and shoot more footage to fill in the plot holes of an incoherent film. Now there was greater pressure to ensure that the narrative worked before shooting began. Hence, the manufacturers came to increasingly rely upon scenarios.[87] Of course, a scenario was of little help if the narrative it contained was not itself clear and coherent. So, the standardization of length not only encouraged the use of scenarios, but furthermore the normalization of

[81] Keil, 26-27.
[82] Musser, "Pre-Classical," 91-92.
[83] Archer McMackin, "How Moving Picture Plays Are Written," *Nickelodeon* 2, no. 6 (December 1909): 171.
[84] Thompson, "Classical Style," 162.
[85] Bowser, *Transformation*, 53.
[86] Quoted in Bowser, *Transformation*, 53-54.
[87] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 126.

narrative principles to be followed by the scenarios. As Charlie Keil writes, "the restrictions imposed by a uniform length encouraged industry-wide adherence to particular formulas of narrative construction and representational strategies."[88] More specifically, the longer standard length led scenario writers to abandon the skit-like, static narrative models they had borrowed from vaudeville in favor of the more dynamic narrative structures of the legitimate stage (and literature).[89]

Related to the standardization of length, and further compelling scenario writers to adopt the narrative models of the legitimate stage, was an increasing emphasis on "quality." According to Staiger, increasing the length of fictional narratives was not only part of an attempt to make production more efficient, but was a conscious effort to position the film as a quality entertainment product on the order of a play.[90] Indeed, the enormous growth of the film industry and the increased duration of films began to put film in direct competition with legitimate theater, and the film industry went to great lengths to present its product as a comparable alternative to its main competitor.[91] Various efforts to encourage the comparison ranged from constructing "quality" theaters and increasing ticket prices to appropriating material and artists, including playwrights, from the legitimate theater itself.[92]

As a consequence of this impetus to develop a quality product that could compete with the legitimate theater, the film manufacturers not only pressed scenario writers to adopt the narrative models of the legitimate theater, but also marketed those writers and their scenarios as the cinematic equivalents of the playwrights and plays of the theatrical world. In 1909, for example, Edison announced that it had signed established literary and dramatic figures Edward W. Townsend, Carolyn Wells, Richard Harding Davis, and Rex Beach to write scenarios. More tellingly, perhaps, Edison's announcement came in an issue of its bulletin, *Edison Kinematograph*, in an article entitled, "Motion Picture Play Writing as an Art."[93]

If the manufacturers adopted elements of the legitimate theater's production methods and narrative principles, and they made a conscious effort to market cinema as a quality theatrical product, then the emerging trade press both documented and

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[88] Keil, 27.
[89] Thompson, "Classical Style," 163.
[90] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 128.
[91] Thompson, "Classical Style," 163-164.
[92] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 129-130.
[93] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 101; 425n18.

amplified these efforts—simultaneously reflecting and shaping industry norms and self-conceptions based upon the model of the legitimate theater.[94] Between 1907 and 1909, this combination of elements "defined cinema as a kind of theater," as Musser has put it.[95] The press—especially the trade press, but also the popular press—played a particularly important role in both registering and promulgating not only this conception of cinema as a kind of drama, but, concomitantly, an understanding of scenario writing as a kind of dramatic writing.[96] For example, a 1907 article in *Moving Picture World* informs readers:

> You will find that the kinetoscope world is much like the dramatic, that it has its actors and actresses, its *playwrights* and stage directors, its theatrical machinery, its wings, its properties, its lights, its tricks, its make-ups, its costumes, its entrances and exits.[97]

Writing in *The Saturday Evening Post* the same year, Joseph Medill Patterson notes parallels in theater and cinema in terms of narrative structure:

> Today a consistent plot is demanded. There must be, as in the drama, exposition, development, climax and denouement…One studio manager said: "The people want a story…we've got to give them a story; they won't take anything else…More story, larger story, better story with plenty of action—that is our tendency."[98]

Interestingly, there is apparently no need for Patterson to explain why cinema should have adopted the narrative model of the drama; he assumes the reasons are self-evident.

The rationale underpinning Patterson's assumption is made explicit in a *Moving Picture World* article by Rollin Summers from the following year. On Summers's view, the "moving picture" is a kind of drama. In the article entitled "The Moving Picture Drama and the Acted Drama," Summers declares, "the moving picture drama is an art" with "a genuine technique, largely in common with the acted

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[94] On the role of the trade press in both reflecting practices and shaping norms, see Keil, 27-44; and Thompson, "Classical Style," 194

[95] Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 402.

[96] In what follows, I focus mostly upon the trade press, but for commentary in the popular press, see Joseph Medill Patterson, "The Nickelodeons: The Poor Man's Elementary Course in Drama," *Saturday Evening Post* (November 23, 1907), 10-11 and 38, which I briefly discuss below, as well as scenario writer Clara Beranger's "The Photoplay—A New Kind of Drama," *Harper's Weekly* 56 (September 7, 1912): 13.

[97] Quoted in Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 117. My emphasis.

[98] Quoted in Eileen Bowser, "Toward Narrative, 1907: *The Mill Girl*," in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John Fell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 331.

drama yet in part peculiar to itself…"[99] Historian Gregory Poggi summarizes the characteristics that Summers believes these two types of drama share:

> The first is "the principle of unity of action"—presenting "a single consistent story without irrelevant matters." Secondly, the motion picture and the drama both require that "adequate motivation be presented for the actions of the characters." Thirdly, the element of "doubt and suspense" is necessary to satisfy "the demands of the 'action'" of the two media. Fourthly, as "the acted drama must explain itself," so the motion picture requires proper construction. The demands of a consistent plot necessitate that a "story must be unfolded bit by bit, without explanation from a prologue or lecture."[100]

In short, Summers argues that, as a kind of drama, the moving picture—despite some important differences from the stage drama—is to be constructed and evaluated according to the same principles: "The authors and experts employed by the [moving picture] producer should be primarily familiar with the technique of the acted drama."[101]

In his 1909 article, "How Moving Picture Plays Are Written," Archer McMackin propounds a similar set of standards but with a particular focus on the scenario. According to McMackin, in the "the motion picture play" just as in the "drama of words,"[102]

> The stories must have situations plainly visible, a clearly defined story, and, with it, an opportunity for artistic interpretation…
> We are told by our masters in short story writing and in drama writing that we must have one theme and one theme only. Too many characters will spoil the spell that grips us when we have but two or three people to watch. We are told to avoid rambling into green hedges off the roadside and to grip the attention of the audience from the very start. The complications should start immediately and the developments come with the proper regard for sequence…
> Complications which are too easily cleared up make the story unsatisfying…[103]

Like Summers, McMackin finds it self-evident that classical principles of short story writing and dramatic writing ought to dictate the norms of scenario writing.

Also of interest here is McMackin's claim that the stories of film scenarios, like theatrical scripts, must offer "an opportunity for artistic interpretation." This assertion suggests an understanding of the film—like the stage play—as a creative

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[99] Quoted in Gregory Poggi, "From Dramatic to Cinematic Standards: American Silent Film Theory and Criticism to 1929," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1977), 32.
[100] Poggi, 32-33.
[101] Quoted in Tibbetts, 8.
[102] Quoted in Keil, 41.
[103] Quoted in Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 107.

interpretation of the writer's script. Charlie Keil suggests that the scenario writer was commonly held to be the creative authority in the filmmaking process at this time (roughly until 1910), and it was the director's job to faithfully interpret the writer's work in film form.[104] In the 1921 edition of her screenwriting manual, Frances Taylor Patterson reflects back on the transitional period:

> Early in the history of photoplay production, therefore, it was realized that this gap between the author and the director must in some way be bridged over. The scenario was finally devised to fulfill this function of telling the director as clearly as possible exactly what the author wanted done. It was found that clearness could best be obtained by dividing the story into a sequence of scenes. Hence the origin of the scenario.[105]

Patterson is not just waxing nostalgic here. Before the rise of the director, a commonly expressed viewpoint in trade papers like *Moving Picture World* was that the director's job was to shoot the film "in a way which graphically interprets the thoughts of the author."[106]

Indeed, for our purposes, one of the crucial consequences of this general conception of cinema as a kind of photographed drama is that the scenario writer was understood as a playwright or author. Just as the stage drama had its authors, so too did the film drama. Writing in 1909, columnist Frederick Starr claims, "A new type of dramatist has arisen—men who search through the literature of the ages and construct tableaux in action which will render vividly the entire contents of famous works of the drama, of the novel, and of history."[107] A 1911 column in *Moving Picture World* encourages the promotion of "picture play" authors in publicity material:

> In the field of the spoken drama, the author of a piece is fully recognized on posters, programs and in its advertising, no matter how little is known or obscure he may be at the time his play is produced. It is this policy that has given to the spoken drama some of its most brilliant authors. It would do the same thing for the picture play.[108]

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[104] Keil, 38.

[105] Frances Taylor Patterson, *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights, 2nd Edition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, Inc., 1921), 96. "Photoplay" refers here to a movie, but the word was also sometimes used to refer to a script. The term was supposedly the winning entry in Essanay's 1910 competition to create a more complimentary name for movies. If this is true, the term must have found widespread acceptance quite quickly; *Photoplay* magazine began just a year later, in 1911. In any case, the industry's adoption of the word seems symptomatic of two facts: First, we see again that cinema (or at least the story film) was conceived of as a dramatic art. Second, it is clear that this conception was promulgated by the industry, which had a vested interest in doing so. For calling movies "photoplays" undoubtedly helped the manufacturers in their efforts to establish cinema as a quality product. Both "photoplay" and its other formulations, like "photoplaywright," clearly tie cinema and scenarios to the theater in the same manner as early terms like "moving picture play" and "silent drama." Evidence shows that the term remained in currency at least well into the 1930s, and *Photoplay* magazine continued to publish under the same title until 1980. For a discussion, see Maras, 132-137.

[106] Quoted in Keil, 38.

[107] Frederick Starr, "The World Before Your Eyes," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Special Features section (February 7, 1909): unnumbered.

[108] Quoted in Keil, 37.

Furthermore, this conception of scenario writers as authors on the order of playwrights found acceptance outside of the film trade papers amongst some (although certainly not all) critics who had knowledge of both the film and theater industries. Writing in *Bookman* in 1911, Clayton Hamilton claims, "The main advantage of the moving-picture play over the traditional types of drama is that the author is granted an immeasurably greater freedom in handling the categories of place and time."[109]

So, too, did the trade press's general picture of a photoplay world that paralleled the stage play world receive some endorsement from professionals familiar with both. Writing in *Outlook* in 1909—shortly after having been brought to Hollywood from Broadway by Edison—the playwright Edward W. Townsend attests to the accuracy of the screen drama/stage drama parallel, claiming:

> Work preliminary to production [in Hollywood] runs parallel with that in a Broadway theater. Plays, some in scenario form, some fully developed, are received in the mail and examined by professional readers who select the possible for managerial consideration. Those fully accepted, if in scenario—the sketch of the play—are given to a playwright to be fully developed. In their final form plays are turned over to a stage manager, who...proceeds as does his brother of Broadway...[110]

In short, all of this evidence gives us good reason to think that by 1910 or so, conceptions of the "moving picture play" or "photoplay" as a kind of play, the scenario as a kind of play script, and the scenario writer as a kind of playwright, were widespread—not only inside the film industry and its press, but, to some extent, outside of Hollywood as well. Undoubtedly, both the manufacturers and trade press had a vested interest in promulgating this set of conceptions; lending the film an air of respectability not only benefited the manufacturers, but also increased advertising revenue in the trade papers.[111] But this does not make those conceptions any less valid. In addition, we have seen that this understanding of the relationship between film and theater had already been in currency as early as 1904—well before the manufacturers were actively positioning cinema to compete with the legitimate theater. Furthermore, Townsend's first-hand knowledge of the production methods of

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[109] Clayton Hamilton, "The Art of the Moving Picture Play," reprinted in his *Studies in Stagecraft* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 230.
[110] Quoted in Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 118.
[111] Keil, 27-29.

both industries suggests that the general conception of the film world as a kind of mirror of the dramatic world was more than just a marketing device concocted by the manufacturers and trade papers.

Of course, not all scenario writers were trained, let alone established, dramatists. Townsend's mention of "plays…received in the mail" is a reference to the industry's increasing reliance on the scenarios of amateur writers at this time.[112] By 1907, the manufacturers were already struggling to keep up with the sharp growth in demand for story films, and they were actively seeking freelance submissions— oftentimes through scenario writing contests or other such means that could simultaneously function as publicity.[113] However, the simultaneous increase in demand for quality films with clear and coherent narratives meant that manufacturers could not simply solicit, accept, and produce amateur scenarios willy-nilly. On the contrary, they needed amateur writers to produce scenarios with the structure, clarity, and coherence they perceived to be demanded by the movie-going public. The lucrative possibilities of this situation were quickly recognized, and soon there emerged a cottage industry of scenario writing manuals that, like the trade press, simultaneously reflected, shaped, and normalized standards of screenwriting practice based on the narrative principles of the legitimate theater. Concomitantly, these manuals followed the lead of the manufacturers and trade papers in further propagating conceptions of the film as a kind of drama and scenario writing as a form of playwriting. As Kristin Thompson writes, "the heyday of the amateur scenarist was actually brief (from about 1907 to 1914), but these were important years in the transition from primitive to classical filmmaking."[114] And, as numerous commentators have observed, much of the advice in contemporary screenwriting manuals echoes that of these early manuals in its insistence upon adherence to classical dramatic principles.[115]

In any case, as the script writing manual market expanded from 1909 or so onwards, these three themes, already established in the trade press, consistently

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[112] Of course, it is also notable that Townsend uses the term, "play," interchangeably to refer to either a play script or a scenario.
[113] Staiger, "The Hollywood Mode," 131; also see Maras, 137-141.
[114] Thompson, "Classical Style,"165. Although most historians agree that the manufacturers' widespread use of amateur scenarios began around 1907, there is some disagreement as to when it subsided and why. In particular, there are differing opinions as to the effect of the 1911 Supreme Court decision that found copyright law applicable to motion pictures. Some historians (Azlant) claim the decision increased the manufacturers' reliance upon original amateur scenarios, while others (Staiger) maintain that the decision made the manufacturers more wary of soliciting and accepting original material from freelancers. For a discussion, see Maras, 139-141.
[115] See, especially, Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

recurred: the film was a new kind of drama; the writer of films was a new type of

playwright; in order to be successful, she or he was therefore obliged to construct

"plays" in accordance with the established techniques of playwriting. Henry Albert

Philips's 1914 manual puts it succinctly: "The man who writes photoplays should

study and master the principles of dramatic construction. Before all things he is a

playwright."[116]

Indeed, several of the earlier manuals made explicit reference to the film

scenario's evolution from the theater scenario. For example, one 1912 manual

explains, "This method of first laying out a play in outline or scenario form comes to

us from the writers of the regular or legitimate drama."[117] A 1913 manual elaborates:

> "Scenario" is a term that has been brought into the photoplay
> vocabulary from the dramatic stage. There it is applied to the bare plot
> of a play—its action as distinct from the dialogue. When the writing of
> photoplays developed into a profession, the term "scenario" was
> adopted as the most fitting for the form in which plays are offered to
> film producers. It means an outline of the plot, situation by situation,
> arranged in scenes as the action changes its base of operations.[118]

Here we see that the film scenario writer was a considered a dramatist not only as a

logical consequence of conceiving of cinema as filmed drama, but also because

scenario writing for the screen was recognized to have directly derived from scenario

writing in the theater.

Later manuals do not draw such a tight connection between writing for the

stage and screen in terms of the scenario form. My suspicion is that this owes a mid-

decade shift away from the use of the term, "scenario," which resulted from changes

in production practices. Likely aware of the term's dramatic roots, many authors

maintained throughout the decade that the "scenario," properly so-called, was the part

of the script that set out the action in a scene-by-scene[119] kind of outline.[120] To the ire

of purists, however, the term was also commonly used to refer to the entire film script,

which was typically described as comprising a title page, a cast and set list, a short

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[116] Henry Albert Phillips, *The Photodrama* (Brooklyn, NY: The William G. Hewitt Press, 1914), 151.

[117] James Slevin, *On Picture-Play Writing: A Hand-Book of Workmanship* (Ceder Grove, NJ: Farmer Smith, 1912), 34.

[118] Leona Radnor, *The Photoplay Writer* (New York: Leona Radnor, 1913), 5.

[119] Note that a "scene" here is a shot. This is important in understanding the continuity between "scenario form" and "continuity form" as explained below. See John Emerson and Anita Loos, *How to Write Photoplays* (New York: The James A. McCann Company, 1920), 20.

[120] See, for early examples, McMackin; J. Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds, *Writing the Photoplay* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1913), 20; for mid-decade examples, see Eustace Hale Ball, *Photoplay Scenarios: How to Write and Sell Them* (New York: Hearst's International Library Co., Inc., 1915), 16-20; Philips, 43-44, 218-219; for examples from the end of the decade and the early 1920s, see J. Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds, *Writing the Photoplay, Revised Edition* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1919), 25-26; Howard T. Dimick, *Modern Photoplay Writing: Its Craftsmanship: A Manual Demonstrating the Structural and Dramatic Principles of the New Art as Practiced by the Modern Photoplaywright* (Franklin, OH: James Knapp Reeve, 1922), 263.

prose synopsis of the story, a scenario (as in the strict sense—a numbered, scene-by-scene description of the action including intertitles), and a scene-plot (a list of locations and the numbers of the scenes to be shot at each).[121] The purists preferred the term, "photoplay," to refer to the script as a whole, and this usage did, for the most part, take hold by the end of the decade. However, the mid-decade ambiguity in the use of the term, "scenario," is clearly suggested in a 1915 manual, which is unusually helpful in distinguishing between the scenario as script and scenario as scene outline: "The scenario manuscript should have four well-planned parts. These are the Synopsis; the Cast and Set List; the Working Scenario; the Director's Sheet [i.e. scene-plot]."[122]

However, Janet Staiger's research shows that by mid-decade, the scenario script had largely given way to a more detailed "continuity script" as a result of the emergence of the multiple-reel film and increasing pressure upon the manufacturers "to maintain continuity, verisimilitude, and narrative dominance and clarity…while keeping down costs and production time."[123] The continuity script was, in some ways, like the scenario script. Like the scenario script, it included a cast and set list, a scene-plot, and a short synopsis, and its centerpiece was a numbered, shot-by-shot outline—now called "the continuity"[124]—that described all relevant elements: camera distance, action, intertitles, edits, and so forth. In this sense, the continuity script evolved from the scenario script, and, in particular, the outline-like "continuity form" evolved out of the outline-like "scenario form."

Here we ought to pause long enough to register Steven Maras's denial there is an evolutionary link between the scenario script and the continuity script. Maras writes, "The ambiguity of the term scenario I want to suggest complicates [sic] an 'evolutionary' idea of its development directly into the 'continuity.'"[125] However, I think his concern is unfounded and mostly owes to the odd construal of the notion of "evolution" that is present throughout his book. First, the ambiguity of the term,

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[121] McMackin, 172-173; Phillips, 43-44, 218-219; Ball, 16-20; Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing*, 21; Dimick, 263. Also, it should be noted that the scene plot was a variable rather than essential feature.

[122] Ball, 17.

[123] Staiger, "Blueprints," 189.

[124] As Staiger puts it, "The fact that in later years these scripts became known as 'continuities' is traceable to the emphasis Hollywood filmmakers placed on the script's ability to prearrange the conventional cues to temporal and spatial relations." The term, "continuity," seems to have shifted from referring to the quality of spatio-temporal continuity to referring to the shot-by-shot outline that ensured that quality. In 1916, Epes Winthrop Sargent defines continuity as "the uninterrupted action of a story or the arrangement of a plot to avoid or explain interruptions of time or plot," but by 1919, Esenwein and Leeds use the term, "continuity," synonymously with scenario form or outline form that is meant to achieve spatio-temporal continuity. See Staiger, "Blueprints," 180; Epes Winthrop Sargent, *Technique of the Photoplay, 3rd Edition* (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company, 1916), 360; Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing Revised Ed.*, 19, 26.

[125] Maras, 91.

"scenario," was present before the advent of the continuity script, and it is not at all clear why this would preclude the scenario (in either sense of the term) from evolving into something else (or multiple things). Maras offers testimony from the 1920s and 1930s in support of his claim that the ambiguity of the term scenario presents problems for the view that the continuity script evolved out of the scenario script, but this conclusion does not follow from the evidence he presents.

As Esenwein and Leeds's 1913 volume indicates, "scenario" was already ambiguously used to refer both to the scenario-form outline portion of the script and the script itself in the early 1910s.[126] And the evidence clearly suggests that after the rise of the continuity script, the term "scenario" continued to be used as either a synonym for "continuity form" or for the script as a whole. If the term "scenario" is used ambiguously after the rise of the continuity script, it is so used in the same ambiguous way as it was beforehand (with one important exception, which I discuss below). This situation is rendered quite clear in Esenwein and Leeds's revised, 1919 volume—in which they use "scenario" and "continuity" interchangeably to refer to the outline form potion of the script: "Simply because the word 'scenario' has been so long used loosely as a name for the full written outline or story of the photoplay, it has come to mean the entire manuscript…[Yet] 'scenario' is the name now properly given to the continuity of scenes, or the 'continuity,' as many are calling it."[127]

To be sure, not everyone agreed with Esenwein and Leeds about the "proper" use of the term "scenario." And there was a confusing third sense in which it came to be occasionally used in the early 1920s. By then, amateurs were discouraged from submitting scripts in continuity form and encouraged to submit extended synopses instead. Because the term "scenario" continued to be used as shorthand for the manuscript in general, and the amateur manuscript came to consist mainly of a synopsis, "scenario" also came to refer to the "synopsis"—as indicated by Emerson and Loos's 1920 volume and Palmer's 1924 volume.[128]

Maras thinks this fact indicates that the scenario script does not evolve into the continuity script. He takes the fact that "scenario" later refers to the synopsis to "suggest that contrary to a linear hypothesis the scenario does not merely 'evolve' into the continuity script, or part of it, but informs the still-emerging notion of the

[126] Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing*, 29.
[127] Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing Revised Ed.*, 29.
[128] Emerson and Loos, 19; Frederick Palmer, *Authors Photoplay Manual* (Hollywood, CA: Palmer Institute of Authorship, 1924), 3. I elaborate upon this point shortly.

'treatment.'"[129] This strikes me as a bizarre claim. First, note that at the same time Maras wants to contest "a linear hypothesis," he posits one; obviously a "linear" relationship obtains if the continuity script "informs" the treatment. This odd worry about "linearity" is related to a strange understanding of evolution, which is indicated by Maras's first claim regarding the putative complication of "an 'evolutionary' idea of [the scenario's] development *directly* into the 'continuity.'"[130] "Directly" here is working to mean not only "directly," but also "singularly." And this, it seems to me, is Maras's concern with the evolutionary narrative. Maras thinks that acknowledging that the scenario script evolved into the continuity script precludes the possibility that the scenario script "informs" the treatment. But this is not how evolution works. I agree with Maras that "to read the scenario *solely* [my emphasis] in terms of the development of the blueprint [by which he means "continuity"] (and then beyond that in terms of the screenplay) would be an error."[131] However, Maras is wrong to think that an evolutionary narrative commits this error. On the contrary, it is perfectly possible to recognize that on the one hand, scenario form evolved into continuity form and the scenario script evolved into the continuity script, while acknowledging on the other hand that the synopsis portion of the scenario script evolved into the treatment. Simultaneously holding both propositions is no more problematic than maintaining that both gorillas and humans evolved from the Great Apes.

In any case, Maras's examples of ambiguous use of the term, "scenario," which supposedly "complicate" the picture can be explained by my account. The ambiguous use of the term is confusing, but the senses in which the term is used are consistent. Moreover, they support an evolutionary account, which holds the following mutually compatible claims: (1) Scenario form evolved into continuity form; in this sense of the term, "scenario" was replaced by "continuity" after a period during which the terms were used synonymously. (2) The scenario script evolved into the continuity script; in this sense of the term, "scenario" continued to occasionally be used to refer to the overall script (even if part of it was written in continuity form). (3) The extended synopsis of the scenario script came to be the centerpiece of the amateur script and eventually evolved into the treatment; in this sense of the term, "scenario" came to refer to the script as a whole because it already had so referred and the idea of the "complete" amateur script shifted.

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[129] Maras, 91.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

Returning to the general matter of the shift from the scenario to the continuity script, however, it was the case that the continuity portion of continuity script was more detailed than the scenario portion of the scenario script, and, in general, the continuity script was a much more technical document than the scenario script inasmuch as it also contained specific details about all aspects of the production from budget to costumes and props. Therefore, the writing of continuity scripts was limited to technicians employed by the manufacturers. As Staiger puts it, "a separate set of technical experts began rewriting all the stories. Although companies might hire famous writers to compose original screenplays ["photoplays" in the terminology of the period], their material was then turned over to these technicians who put it into continuity format."[132] So, too, it went with freelance submissions; any scenario the manufacturers accepted would be rewritten in continuity form.

This change in production practices offers a plausible explanation for both the shift away from the use of the term, "scenario," and from an emphasis on the theatrical origins of scenario form. Evidence indicates that for a brief period of time, "scenario" and "continuity" were used synonymously to refer to the shot-by-shot outline of action.[133] By the end of the decade, though, the manuals mostly referred to that shot-by-shot outline as the "continuity," and the term, "scenario," if it was used at all, was generally reserved to refer to the manuscript itself (or, for a reason I shall detail momentarily, the synopsis).[134] Therefore, it seems likely that the diminished use of "scenario" owed to the facts that scenario form had evolved into continuity form, and writing continuity was now seen as a part of the screenwriting process reserved for studio professionals.

For these reasons, most manuals of the late 1910s and early 1920s explicitly discourage amateurs from submitting "continuity"—that is, continuity form—to the manufacturers; if submitting continuity is ever permissible, it is only so for those who

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[132] Staiger, "Blueprints," 190.

[133] Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing Revised Ed.*, 25; Emerson and Loos, 19; Patterson, 97; Dimick, 263-264, 391;

[134] See Esenwein and Leeds, *Writing Revised Ed.*, 25-29; Patterson, 96-97; Emerson and Loos, 19; Palmer, *Authors*, 3. Dimick's 1922 commentary is particularly helpful in elucidating the ways in which the terminology had changed by the early 1920s: "The word scenario has a special meaning in the terminology of the stage dramatist. To him it means a plan of a play by scenes, the dramatic scene-sequence of the proposed story from which the dialogue is missing. In view of this usage, the word has a peculiar [in the sense of "particular"] resemblance to the cinematic term continuity; for a continuity is, after all, but a scene-development of the story, a SCENARIO in the technical sense...The word scenario is, however, commonly used to designate the complete manuscript of the photoplay." See Dimick, 263.

have mastered it.[135] Instead, the manuals begin to encourage amateurs to submit detailed synopses.[136] In his 1922 manual, Dimick explains:

> Thus, the present period might be called the era of the detailed synopsis, which has evolved out of the era of the scenario. It offers the author of ability the same opportunity to do effective dramatic composition as formerly was offered him, but now in a form unhampering to him who may be only indifferently effective in continuity. In other words, the author is permitted the freedom essential to convey his story in its entirety, leaving to another of the brotherhood, the continuity writer, its translation into scenario form…
>
> In the modern photoplay word, then, playwriting may be divided into two branches or variations, synopses and continuities. To those best fitted to originate and develop plots and details, the synopsis is the suited branch; to those who may evince a talent for that technical and dramaturgical structure, the scenario, continuity is best adapted. It cannot be too strongly asserted, however, that the author of the plot is a playwright in the true sense.[137]

This division of photoplaywriting into synopsis writing and continuity writing had two consequences worth noting here. First, as mentioned above, it created yet another sense of the term, "scenario," according to which the term referred to an extended synopsis. This was because the term had continued to be used to refer to the script, in general, which was now, for amateurs at least, constituted by the detailed synopsis.[138] Nevertheless, references to scenario writing are generally superseded by references to photoplaywriting by this point. Second, and more importantly, the manuals from the mid-1910s onwards tended to stress the photoplay's connection to the theatrical drama more in terms of narrative principles than written form. Playwriting for the cinema became more a matter of constructing a dramatic narrative according to the principals of the legitimate theater than using than writing in the form used in the legitimate theater. Thus, both the practices that comprised photoplaywriting—synopsis writing and continuity writing—maintained strong links to theatrical playwriting.

Starting around the middle of the decade, the manuals encouraged aspiring photoplaywrights to master the techniques of classical dramatic construction. For example, in his 1915 manual, Eustace Hale Ball writes:

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[135] Patterson, 126-127; Emerson and Loos, 32; Frederick Palmer, *Palmer Plan Handbook: Photoplay Writing: Simplified and Explained* (Los Angeles, CA: Palmer Photoplay Corporation, 1920), 98; Herbert Hartwell van Loan, *How I Did It* (Los Angeles, CA: The Whittingham Press, 1922), 114.

[136] Patterson, 136; Emerson and Loos, 30; van Loan, 114; Palmer, *Palmer Plan*, 81.

[137] Dimick, 14-15.

[138] Emerson and Loos, 19; Palmer, *Authors*, 3.

Dramatic principle is that apparently mysterious quality of a play, *whether for the stage or the screen*, which vitalizes it with an interest for the spectator or auditor holding him enthralled, uncertain of the results, sympathizing with the emotions and efforts of the characters, hoping and mentally fighting with them for the successful dénouement, and ultimately satisfied with, or reconciled because of, certain natural laws of justice, to the completion of the action of the play. The life-germ of dramatic principle is STRUGGLE.[139]

Similarly, in *Cinema Craftsmanship: A Book for Photoplaywrights*, Frances Taylor Patterson suggests:

[T]here can be no greater aid to the student of the new photodramatic art than the vast mass of critical material upon the practice and theory of theatre. The student of plot analysis should submerge himself in dramatic literature from Sophocles and Euripides to Granville Barker and Eugene O'Neil. He should analyze and "blue-print" the best examples of dramaturgy until he is thoroughly conversant with the plot appeal of each. He should consort with the master minds of dramatic criticism. From The Stagirite to Sarcey, from Brunetière to Brander Matthews. Then having accumulated as much equipment possible upon the works of plot *he should carefully translate his findings from stage craft into screen craft*.[140]

In short, we see here that the conception of the photoplay as a kind of dramatic writing during this period is not mere rhetoric. On the contrary, it is bound up with the idea that the photoplay is obliged, by its nature, to obey the same dramatic principles as the theatrical script.

What were those dramatic principles that aspiring photoplay writers were encouraged to master? As Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger exhaustively demonstrate in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, they were largely the principles of the well-made play as conceived by Sardou and Scribe, theorized by Brunetière and Freytag, and propounded by American critics like Brander Matthews, Clayton Hamilton, and William Archer.[141] As mentioned earlier, critics like Rollins and McMackin had intimated as early as 1908-1909 that scenarios ought to be modeled on the narrative principles of the drama and the short story. However, by the middle of the decade, the notion that photoplays should adopt classical dramatic principles became widespread and normalized. Older critics like Brunetière and Freytag, as well as contemporary dramatic critics like Matthews, Hamilton, Archer, and W. T. Price we frequently mentioned, as were their theories.

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[139] Ball, 27.
[140] Patterson, 7 (my emphasis).
[141] See, especially, Thompson, "Classical Style," 161-173.

For example, the frequently espoused notion that a conflict or crisis is needed
to propel the narrative forward was clearly derived by the manual authors from
established dramatic theories. Moreover, the manual authors often justified their
claims by explicitly invoking those theories. Consider this excerpt from Frederick
Palmer's 1920 manual:

> Considering drama in the broad and abstract sense, it may be useful to
> quote Ferdinand Brunetière, who says in 'Etudes Critiques': 'The
> theatre in general is nothing but the place for the development of the
> human will, attacking the obstacles opposed to it by destiny, fortune, or
> circumstances… Drama is a representation of the will of man in
> conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and
> belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle
> against fatality, against social law, against one of his fellow mortals,
> against himself, if need be, against the ambition, the interest, the
> prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him.'
> Thus we return to the general definition that drama is Conflict,
> Struggle—for in this basic sense, *that which is true of the speaking
> stage is equally applicable to the screen.*[142]

Later, Palmer makes a similar point by appealing to a contemporary dramatic
authority—William Archer—and asserts once more that the principles promulgated
by dramatic critics have equal bearing upon the scenario:

> To again quote William Archer: 'Perhaps we shall scarcely come
> nearer to a helpful definition than if we say that the essence of drama is
> Crisis. A play is a more or less rapidly developing crisis in destiny or
> circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, clearly
> furthering the ultimate events.' A crisis is in effect a dramatic
> situation.[143]

As Palmer sees it, the theory is relevant because photoplay writing is a kind of
playwriting: "What William Archer says in his volume in play-making applies with
equal pertinence to the creation of a photoplay."[144]

Howard T. Dimick, in his 1922 manual, also invokes Archer to make the same
point regarding dramatic crisis. And like Palmer, Dimick asserts that dramatic theory
is applicable to the photoplay insofar as it is a kind of dramatic writing:

> In recent years, William Archer has almost bodily thrown overboard
> the doctrines of earlier writers and has attempted a newer formulation
> of the dramatic in terms of crisis. Says he, 'A play is a more or less
> rapidly-developing crisis in destiny or circumstances, and a dramatic
> scene (as contrasted with one which is undramatic) is a crisis within a

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[142] Palmer, *Palmer Plan*, 75 (my emphasis).
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 82.

crisis, clearly furthering the ultimate event.' As to the accuracy of this view when applied to dramatic FORM there can be no doubt... Since the photoplay is generally conceded to be a dramatic art, it is, therefore, distinguished or demarked by the essential characteristics of other forms of drama; and we shall consider the various definitions of the dramatic as they are applicable, or inapplicable, to the screen-drama.[145]

Once again, the photoplay, conceived as a type of playwriting, is understood as being bound to the same rules regarding conflict as the theatrical drama. As succinctly put in Eustace Hale Ball's manual:

Struggle is this foundation stone of drama. Some one or some several want something: they try to get it. Some others or something resists the efforts to obtain it. The continuation of those efforts, now succeeding temporarily, now failing, here changing in plan, there surprising the antagonist, is the action of the drama. It is simple, is it not? For that is all there is to drama, whether for the stage, or for the screen.[146]

In addition to conflict, the manuals authors also borrowed notions about characterization from dramatic theory. Again and again, they emphasized the idea that the photoplaywright needed to create characters that revealed themselves through action. Dimick, for example, describes characterization as "the art of externalizing character by events in which a person of the story shows what he IS by what he DOES and the manner in which it is DONE."[147] Palmer expresses the same opinion, writing, "At all times you must keep before you the realization that your characters must express themselves in *action*."[148] The dramatic roots of this dictum were not always stated explicitly, but some manuals did acknowledge them. Frances Taylor Patterson informs aspiring writers, "from the drama, [the photoplay] borrows the element of plot and the revelation of character through action."[149] As with conflict, the version of this particular dramatic theory that was in currency at the time was formulated by William Archer. In his 1912 book, *Play-making*, Archer avers:

The interest of the highest order of drama should consist in the reaction of character to a series of crucial experiences. We should, at the end of the play, know more of the protagonist's character than he himself, or his most intimate friend, could know at the beginning; for the action should have been such as to put it to some novel and searching test.[150]

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[145] Dimick, 94.
[146] Ball, 32-33.
[147] Dimick, 155.
[148] Palmer, *Palmer Plan*, 28.
[149] Patterson, 5.
[150] William Archer, *Play-Making* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Company, 1912), 373.

But one would not have necessarily had to have read Archer to be familiar with this theory of characterization—both because it was very old and because it was dispersed and popularized in playwriting manuals as well as photoplay writing manuals. As Charlton Andrews puts it in his 1915 book, *The Technique of Playwriting*:

> It is obvious that in the consideration of human nature, upon the stage and elsewhere, the vital thing is what the people *are*; and this we can satisfactorily learn only through what they *do*. Strictly speaking, character is the fundamental in drama; but, since character reveals itself so exclusively through conduct, the action has come to stand first, in all discussions from Aristotle on… The plot of a drama, then, is the indispensable story formed of interwoven strands of action, wherein the characters unconsciously reveal themselves.[151]

Characterization, then, was another element of photoplay writing that directly imported its norms from the legitimate theater.

Of course, the manual writers borrowed from dramatic theory much more than ideas about conflict and characterization. They looked to the drama at nearly every turn, beginning with the most fundamental narrative principles. Many more examples could be given to expand upon this general picture, but *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* has already so thoroughly covered film's adoption of classical narrative principles from the theater and the other arts that it seems unnecessary. Suffice it to say that for further details, readers may turn to the work of Kristin Thompson, in particular, who writes: "In sum, models for structuring a film came, not from drama and fiction in general, but specifically from late nineteenth-century norms of those forms – norms which lingered on in popular stories, plays, and novels of [the twentieth] century."[152]

However, even as the manuals were emphasizing that photoplay writing was a form of playwriting, many were also championing it as a new literary art practice in its own right. Palmer—despite his penchant for citing dramatic theorists from Brunetière to Archer—writes,

> the art of photoplay writing is just twenty-two years old—twenty-five hundred years younger than the stage play…We become aware then that in the short space of twenty-two years, we have come face to face with an entirely new art, to which the rules of creating novels, short stories or plays for the speaking stage are not applicable.[153]

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[151] Andrews, 38; 45.
[152] Thompson, "The Classical Style," 172.
[153] Palmer, *Palmer Plan*,14.

Clearly there is a tension here: Palmer simultaneously claims that the rules of the other art forms do not apply to the photoplay, while explicitly recommending that photoplaywrights adhere to the rules expounded by major theorists of the drama. This apparent paradox owes, I think, to Palmer's conception of photoplay writing as a new *kind* of playwriting—a form that has its roots in playwriting, but that is a distinct literary practice unto itself.[154]

A similar tension is present in the commentary of Epes Winthrop Sargent. Writing in the 1913 edition of *Technique of the Photoplay*, he asserts:

> Photoplay, in a word, is not an adaptation of another branch of literary work, but is possessed of a technique all its own. There are, of course, broad basic rules of literary construction and dramatic development, applicable to all forms of literature, whether written or verbally expressed, but in the past few years the art of writing photoplays has become possessed of a technique that is applicable only to the writing of picture plays and to no other form…The photoplay…is the newest of the literary arts. [155]

Nevertheless, in the revised, 1916 edition of his manual, Sargent indicates that he conceives of the photoplay as a kind of play that, like any other play, ought to adhere to classical dramatic principles:

> A plot should consist of struggle, suspense, and climax; the centuries-old definition of Aristotle declares that a play must have a beginning, a middle and an end… Clearly the play must be brought to a definite and conclusive end. The proposition proves itself. The play must have a beginning, which is the statement of the object of the play and the obstacle to be encountered; a middle, or struggle against this object made interesting through suspense; and an end or termination of the struggle, wherein either victory is gained or defeat sustained.[156]

Sargent, like Palmer, wants to claim photoplay writing as a new art, yet recognizes its roots in playwriting.

Other manual authors expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that although the photoplay was only just beginning to be recognized as new dramatic form, it would soon take its place amongst the other literary arts. Writing in 1914, Henry Albert Phillips takes a similar stance as Palmer and Sargent while still explicitly

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[154] One might want attribute the apparent paradox here to a rather cynical marketing ploy on the part of Palmer, who also founded and ran a correspondence school for aspiring photoplaywrights—the Palmer Photoplay Corporation. But such an explanation seems too easy to me because the tension between describing photoplay writing as kind of playwriting and as new literary art is present in other commentary of the period. For a discussion of the Palmer Photoplay Corporation, see Anne Morey, "'Have You the Power?' The Palmer Photoplay Corporation and the Film Viewer/Author in the 1920s," *Film History* 9, no. 3 (1997): 300-319.
[155] Epes Winthrop Sargent, *Technique of the Photoplay*, *2nd Edition* (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company, 1913), 7-8.
[156] Sargent, *Technique, 3rd Edition*, 26-27.

maintaining, as noted above, that the photoplay writer is, "before all things… a playwright"[157]:

> Writers of fiction and dramatic literature have been less apt to respond to the call of a new literary vocation, than a world-wide public has been ready to flock to the appeal of a new dramatic art. A wonderful event has come to pass in the annals of dramatic literature thru the development of cinematography. So wonderful indeed was this new addition to the art of effective dramatic expression, that even after a decade of existence, scarcely a dozen successful writers had realized its potentiality and had allied themselves with the new drama.[158]

Again, we see that photoplay writing is conceived as a new art—not one that has appeared *ex nihilo*, but rather one that has grown out of playwriting.

Indeed, much of the commentary in the writing manuals expressed a remarkable and, likely self-interested, optimism about the future for "the art of photoplay writing." In 1912, Bannister Merwin claims, "The real future of the business absolutely depends upon the development of the art of writing photoplays."[159] Five years later, in 1917, Eustace Hale Ball offers the same opinion: "The greatest future in this industry is for the film playwright without whom nothing else matters."[160] According to the manual authors, the increasing importance and status of the photoplay script was sure to pay dividends to aspiring writers who got in the game early. In 1914, William Lord Wright writes, "A new and ever-enlarging field has…opened for the dramatist…and all others eager for a literary career."[161] Two years later, Carl Charlton concurs, "With the advent of the moving pictures a new field in play-writing was opened up—and one in which there is an ever increasing demand."[162]

Lest one suspect that the manuals' promulgation of an understanding of photoplay writing as a new kind of dramatic literary art was nothing more than a ploy to sell more manuals, it should be noted that the ideas they expressed were echoed in the legitimate theatrical press. For example, the prominent theater critic, Clayton Hamilton, drew similar comparisons between writing for the stage and for the movies. In 1911, he suggests that the particular qualities of the film medium "offer…the artist who devises a scenario for the kinematograph many possibilities of narrative which

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[157] Philips, 151.
[158] Phillips, xv.
[159] Quoted in Maras, 136.
[160] Ibid, 137.
[161] Ibid, 133.
[162] Carl Charlton, *How to Write Photoplays* (Philadelphia, PA: Royal Publishing Company, 1916), 13.

lie far beyond the range of the writer for the restricted stage of the ordinary drama."[163]

Furthermore, situating the writing of photoplays in the dramatic tradition, he avers:

> The art of the moving-picture play is not an art to be despised or
> ignored by serious criticism. It represents, in fact -- to look upon it
> from the historical point of view -- a reversion to an earlier and more
> perennially refreshing mood of narrative than that which latterly has
> assumed dominion over the novel and the drama. The moving-picture
> play carries us back to the boyish age of the great art of telling tales,
> when stories were narrated nakedly as stories instead of being sicklied
> o'er with the pale cast of thought. One can hardly imagine Mr. Henry
> James devising a successful scenario for the kinematograph; but the
> Shakespeare who wrote Richard III and the Homer who wrote the
> Odyssey would experience no difficulty in fulfilling the
> requirements.[164]

Similarly, in 1918, *The Drama* published Richard Silvester's article, "The New Art of the Photoplay-Dramatist," in which he claims,

> The time is not far distant when the photo-dramatist will be the
> important individual in the studio. The director, the scenic artist, the
> actors, as well as the joiner [editor], will then do *his* bidding. They will
> do all in their power to produce the playwright's play in the manner in
> which he intended it to be presented, just as is now done on the
> legitimate stage with a play by, let us say, Augustus Thomas.[165]

Thus, the film industry and its trade press were not alone in proclaiming the advent of a new type of dramatic art and, with it, a new type of dramatic literature. On the contrary, they found support from reputable dramatic critics like Hamilton and Silvester.

However, by the early twenties, the photoplaywright's supposedly inevitable heyday had not yet come to pass; on the contrary, the status of the writer and the photoplay script were already on the wane. According to historian Richard Koszarski, the "immediate post-war era" saw "the virtual elimination of the free-lance market" for scenarios, and, as a result, the market for manuals dried up as well.[166] In the manuals that were published, as well as in other literature, one recurring theme was that photoplaywrights had yet to realize the grand ambitions that had been envisioned for their profession years earlier. In his 1922 hybrid memoir/ advice manual, *How I Did It*, the professional writer Herbert van Loan still expresses optimism about the

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[163] Hamilton, "The Art of the Moving Picture Play," 231-232.
[164] Ibid, 237.
[165] Richard Silvester, "The New Art of the Photoplay-Dramatist," *The Drama* Vol. 8, no. 29 (February 1918): 101.
[166] Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 108.

imminent arrival of "the era of the screen author," but laments the fact that, in years past, "the screen writer was poorly equipped and poorly paid. He received no recognition from either the producer or public...[T]he producer did a lot of experimenting before he was willing to admit that screen writing was an art in itself."[167] In the musings of van Loan and others, there was a sense that the moment at which photoplay writing would be universally recognized as an important art remained on the horizon.

At the same time, however, the feeling that such a moment was inevitable was still voiced—often due to the underlying assumption that photoplay scripts, properly regarded, were, in fact, works of dramatic literature. In 1921, for example, William C. De Mille declares, "I have come to the conclusion that the screen must create its own literature...We will see playwrights turning out a number of original screen and stage plays each year..."[168] Coming to Hollywood from the theater, where he had first written scenarios, the notion that writing for the screen was a kind of dramatic writing must have seemed patently obvious to De Mille, for he himself had transferred his scenario writing experience in the theater to scenario writing for films. Moreover, he had helped institute narrative norms for film writing that were based on principles of dramatic construction he had learned in the theater and from his study under Brander Matthews at Columbia University. As De Mille put it in a 1935 lecture entitled "Twenty Years in Hollywood":

> That first year...the scenario department [at the Jesse Lasky Feature Play Company] as such had not been born. In fact my job was to organize one and try to get some order into the reading of material, its selection, and to develop some new form of screen-drama, which would follow the dramatic principles of the theater as to telling a drama in action, but would adapt itself to the new medium, with its quick change of scene and its extremely limited use of words.[169]

In fact, by 1917, every member of the scenario department in the new Famous Players-Lasky Corporation—including De Mille himself, Margaret Turnbull, Hector Turnbull, Marion Fairfax, and Beulah Marie Dix—had been a Broadway-produced playwright.[170] De Mille's unwavering belief that writing for the screen was—like writing for the stage—a type of playwriting is, therefore, unsurprising.

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[167] van Loan, 7-9.
[168] Quoted in Maras, 82.
[169] William C. De Mille, "Twenty Years in Hollywood" (unpublished notes dated September 1935), held in the William C. De Mille Papers, New York Public Library, 25.
[170] Azlant, "Screenwriting," 183-187.

Yet De Mille was not the only one who still understood writing for the screen as a kind of playwriting in the 1920s. For example, Howard Dimick, in a 1922 book he described as "a manual presenting the essentials of playwriting for the screen," predicted, "The era of the screen author, whose profession is the creation of stories in dramatic form for the camera, is beginning; and the author's remuneration is coming to rank with that of the other important arts."[171] According to Dimick, "The modern photoplay author is still a playwright, using a playwright's methods and indebted to a playwright's technique for success."[172] Given this view, it is perhaps unsurprising that Dimick admits he has "often wondered why no chairs of photoplay writing have been permanently established in the dramatic departments of our leading universities."[173]

By this point, however, one encountered the view held by De Mille and Dimick with diminishing frequency. Discerning the reasons for this shift in attitude would be another project, but it is at least worth mentioning that the first work of film theory, Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, had been published in 1916 and established a tradition of arguing for film's art status by either disparaging or denying its ties to the theater. For example, Münsterberg asserted, "the stage and the screen are as fundamentally different as sculpture and painting," although he admitted, "we remember that the whole moving picture play arose from the slavish imitation of the drama and began only slowly to find its own artistic methods."[174] One implication of Münsterberg's argument was that the photoplay script was not, in fact, the equivalent of the theatrical script. On the contrary, Münsterberg suggested, while "a drama is complete as a work of literature even if it never reaches the stage…the work which the scenario writer creates is in itself still entirely imperfect and becomes a complete work of art only through the action of the producer."[175]

In any case, my objective in referencing De Mille and Dimick is not to argue that their understanding of photoplay writing—or "screen writing" as more and more people were now calling it—as a kind of playwriting was still dominant in the 1920s.[176] But I want to suggest that the fact that they were able to hold this view

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[171] Dimick, 7; 12.
[172] Dimick, 25.
[173] Dimick, 8. The closest thing approaching Dimick's suggestion here was probably Columbia University's establishment of a Photoplay Composition extension course in 1915. See Peter Decherney, "Inventing Film Study and its Object at Columbia University, 1915-1938," *Film History* 12 (2000): 443-460; and Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 33-89.
[174] Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916); 141; 130.
[175] Ibid, 193.
[176] As we saw, van Loan uses the term, "screen writer," in 1922, and Patterson uses the term in her 1921 manual.

depended on two things: First, photoplay writing's evolution out of scenario writing, and in turn, playwriting, was fresh in their minds. Indeed, De Mille's own efforts "to develop some new form of screen-drama, which would follow the dramatic <u>principles</u> of the theater," had been part of that evolution.[177] Second, despite the fact that script writing practices and the film script themselves had changed in important ways during the previous decade or so, the standards that were firmly in place by the 1920s had clearly evolved; they had not appeared spontaneously. In other words, it was not as if writing for the screen had initially evolved out of playwriting before going through some radical reinvention by which its ties to playwriting were severed. On the contrary, although the *conception* of writing for the screen as a kind of playwriting was being rethought in the 1920s, *the practice* of writing for the screen could nevertheless still clearly be traced back to playwriting—despite the changes it had undergone.

This is a crucial point: Although there was, by the 1920s, less talk in the industry and press about screen writing as a kind of playwriting and the screen writer as a kind of playwright or author, the actual practice of screen writing had already been normalized around the classical narrative principles of the legitimate theater. As Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson have shown, the classical Hollywood system was "complete in its basic narrative and stylistic premises" by 1917.[178] Moreover, Staiger's research indicates that use of the detailed continuity script, which was the norm in studio production throughout the 1930s and 1940s, "was standard practice by 1914."[179] Yet, as we have seen, the evidence in the press and the manuals strongly suggests that the three-part set of conceptions—writing for the screen as a kind of playwriting, photoplaywright as kind of playwright, photoplay script as kind of dramatic script—was still widespread, if not at its height, around 1914-1917. So while those conceptions were no longer explicitly stated (at least very frequently) in the 1920s, the actual practice of writing for the screen remained fundamentally unchanged from the time that those conceptions were popular and their validity was taken for granted.

And, of course, while there have since been important changes in Hollywood screenwriting practice since the 1920s, our contemporary practice's roots in the

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[177] De Mille, "Twenty Years," 25.
[178] Thompson, "Classical Style,"157.
[179] Staiger, "Blueprints," 189.

origins of the classical Hollywood system are generally acknowledged.[180] That is, contemporary Hollywood screenwriting practice largely adheres to the fundamental narrative principles regarding causality, clarity, coherence and unity, as well as more specific standards with respect to plot structure, conflict, and character development. To put it somewhat simplistically—yet accurately—contemporary Hollywood screenwriting practice has its roots in classical Hollywood screenwriting practice, and classical Hollywood screenwriting practice has its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century playwriting practice. This is not to say that Hollywood screenwriting practice has not changed since its beginnings. It is to say that it has evolved, and we can trace its evolution all the way back to playwriting.

Thus, we have a historical narrative that should give us good reason to think that screenwriting—having evolved out of the recognized art practice of playwriting—is, in fact, an art practice. To summarize, the story goes like this: As early film manufacturers begin producing short narrative fictions, they realized that they could save time and money by using written production plans. In part because early story films were conceived as filmed theater, in part because cinema had already borrowed the theatrical forms of the skit and the playlet, and in part because theater professionals were already working in the film industry, cinema's early script writing practice took theatrical playwriting—specifically scenario writing—as its model. Moreover, evidence suggests that by 1904-1905, the manufacturers and writers consciously and explicitly conceived of scenario writing as a kind of playwriting.

Because this conception was still in currency by 1907-1909, when the manufacturers struggled to keep pace with demand and meet higher standards of quality (especially with regards to narrative clarity and coherence), writing for the screen continued in the form of scenario writing, but turned to playwriting for the legitimate theater as its model. This emphasis on the narrative principles increased along with the increasing length of films and demand for quality product as the decade progressed. From playwriting for the legitimate theater, photoplay writing appropriated most of the fundamental narrative principles that came to define the classical Hollywood system: causality, clarity, coherence, unity, and so on. The manufacturers, the trade press, and the photoplay writing manuals all explicitly emphasized that photoplay writing was a kind of playwriting and that, therefore, the

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[180] See, for example, Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*.

photoplaywright was obliged to master and repeat the classical narrative strategies propounded by dramatic critics from Brunetière to Matthews to Archer. In short, Hollywood photoplay writing, conceiving itself as a kind of dramatic writing, crystallized around the intentional repetition of the established practices and strategies of playwriting for the legitimate theater. And, as we know, after those writing practices and the narrative principles that underpinned them stabilized around 1917 or so, they continued to be repeated and amplified as the classical Hollywood system emerged and flourished. Furthermore, we know that since the end of the Studio Era and the beginning of the so-called New Hollywood, writers have continued to repeat, amplify, and also repudiate those same practices. Contemporary Hollywood screenwriting practice therefore ultimately has its roots in, evolved out of, and has much in common with late nineteenth and early twentieth century playwriting practice. Like its ancestor, contemporary Hollywood screenwriting practice is an art practice.

Chapter 5: Screenplays as Artworks: A Case Study of Ernest Lehman

The previous chapter concluded that Hollywood screenwriting is an art practice because it evolved out of late nineteenth and early twentieth century playwriting practices—which are acknowledged art practices—as a result of scenario writers and photoplaywrights intentionally repeating, amplifying, and (in some cases) repudiating the central narrative and stylistic strategies of those playwriting practices.

Here is one immediate concern that this conclusion might generate: If Hollywood screenwriting is an art practice (and has been since at least the mid-1910s), then it might appear that, as a result, all Hollywood screenplays are necessarily artworks. I suspect this will strike some readers as a counterintuitive proposition. Perhaps one might doubt that all Hollywood *movies* are artworks, let alone their screenplays; surely, one might think, neither *Snakes on a Plane* (2006), nor its screenplay is a work of art.[1] I think this kind of response is rooted in a sort of folk aesthetic theory of art, whereby arthood is a matter of possessing a certain amount of aesthetic value—or, perhaps, some other sort of value. In other words, my conjecture is that initial resistance to the idea that all Hollywood screenplays (or films) are artworks probably stems from an intuition that "art" is an essentially evaluative concept, and not all of these objects possess sufficient value—presumably aesthetic value—to count as art, properly so-called. Recall, however, that I am using the term, "art," in a classificatory rather than evaluative sense. Moreover, numerous philosophers of art have argued that aesthetic definitions of art face insurmountable problems.[2] I do not wish to enter that debate here, but it is important to realize that if the proposition, "all Hollywood screenplays are artworks," does in fact follow from my conclusion that Hollywood screenwriting is an art practice, then this proposition is merely classificatory rather than evaluative in nature. On my view, nothing can fail to be an artwork in virtue of it lacking aesthetic value—including Hollywood

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[1] I am aware that one also might be skeptical that we can, in fact, pin down "the" screenplay of *Snakes on a Plane* or any film. See, for example, Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009), 11-15. I address this concern in Chapter 8.

[2] For discussions and critiques of the idea that art is an essentially evaluative concept, see George Dickie, *Art and Value* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2001), 92-108; and Stephen Davies, "Essential Distinctions for Art Theorists," reprinted in his *Philosophical Perspectives on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-38. For discussions and critiques of aesthetic definitions of art, see Noël Carroll, "Art and Interaction," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5-20; Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 50-78; Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2005), 90-92. Also, for an illuminating general discussion of "mass art," see Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

screenplays like that of *Snakes on a Plane*. Therefore, the proposition, "all Hollywood screenplays are artworks," does not strike me as immediately implausible.

I think more pressing concerns about the proposition would have to do with whether all Hollywood screenplays are created with the right sorts of intentions for them to be art—especially since my approach to identifying art makes such intentions central to art's creation. For example, I anticipate that one immediate objection might be that it is patently clear that not all Hollywood screenwriters intend to create "art" or think of themselves as creating art. Here I ask the skeptic to recall the discussion in Chapter 2, in which I argued that an art making intention need not take the form of a conscious and explicit—or, to borrow a term from Jerrold Levinson, "opaque"— intention to create "art" or even a work "like *that* artwork." On the contrary, an art making intention may be "transparent"; it may obtain simply in virtue of someone intending to create "one of those things," where "one of those things" happens to be an artwork.[3] Or, one might have an art making intention in virtue of intending not to create "one of those things" that happens to be an artwork, but merely to repeat, modify, or repudiate some central element—whether it is form, style, or so forth—of "one of those things" that happens to be an artwork. So, the fact that many Hollywood screenwriters do not intend to create "art" does not necessarily pose a problem for the view that all Hollywood screenplays are, in fact, artworks.

Another, related objection might be that a Hollywood screenplay (or, for that matter, a film), which is put together piecemeal by a group of people not working together in a coordinated manner, has not been created with the sorts of intentions necessary for something to be art. That is, one might argue that some Hollywood screenplays are not created with any coordinated or coherent intentions regarding the work as a whole and, therefore, are not artworks. However, it seems clear that artworks are, in fact, sometimes created through the conjoining of specific, *localized* intentions of various agents. Consider, for example, the Surrealists' "exquisite corpse" exercise, in which various people contribute a single portion of a verbal or visual work without being able to see the parts that have already been completed. In a case like this, the agents cannot have coordinated intentions with regard to the overall piece. Nevertheless, we recognize that the localized intentions of each agent are properly understood as art making intentions—of at least a transparent, if not opaque

[3] Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 39-40.

sort—and that what the agents collectively create is an artwork.[4] Therefore, it is not clear that the sometimes uncoordinated, piecemeal creation of Hollywood screenplays precludes them from being artworks.

I offer these responses to what I imagine would be the most immediate objections to the idea that all Hollywood screenplays are artworks because I do think that *most* Hollywood screenplays are artworks. However, I do not think that my claim that Hollywood screenwriting is an art practice actually commits me to the view that Hollywood screenplays are necessarily artworks even though I have offered a brief defense of that view. For we can imagine a situation in which someone who is engaged in an indisputable art practice does not create an artwork. It is unlikely, for example, that a violinist who merely practices her part for an upcoming performance of Brahms's *Symphony No. 1* creates an artwork. Consider, too, the fact that someone who writes only a portion of a poem or novel has been engaged in an art practice, but has not (typically) thereby created a complete work of art.

In any case, the proposition that all Hollywood screenplays are artworks is not one for which I want to argue. My goal is much more modest. All I want to demonstrate here is that some Hollywood screenplays are artworks. For although I take this to be a relatively modest aim, the notion that screenplays can be artworks has been met with a good deal of skepticism lately, which nobody—to my knowledge— has attempted to allay.[5] Moreover, if I can show that some rather run-of-the-mill screenplays produced within a Hollywood studio are artworks, I will have offered good reasons to think that, in fact, quite a lot of Hollywood screenplays are artworks. At the same time, however, I need to make a persuasive case. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my approach to identifying instances of screenplays that are artworks will center on offering evidence to show that they were created with intentions that link them to undisputed works of art. Largely as a result of my desire to "split the difference," as it were, between wanting to pick rather "typical" Hollywood screenplays and wanting to convincingly show their clear connections to acknowledged art—as well as with

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[4] See Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39-40.
[5] For the skeptical position, see Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 68-69; Maras, 44-62. I address this skepticism directly in the next section. There are contemporary critics who have suggested that screenwriting might be an art practice and that the screenplay might be a kind of literary work, but most of these critics neither explicitly argue for such claims nor do they mount counterarguments against skeptics. For examples, see Claudia Sternberg, *Written for the Screen: The American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 1997); Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider, "The Published Screenplay—A New Literary Genre?," *AAA—Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 25, no. 1 (2000); Kevin Alexander Boon, *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008). A very recent notable exception is Marja-Ritta Koivumäki, who addresses the issues more directly in "The Aesthetic Independence of the Screenplay," *Journal of Screenwriting* 2, no. 1 (January 2011): 25-40.

consideration for the availability of evidence—I take Ernest Lehman as a case study here.

Before Lehman arrived in Hollywood in 1952, the full extent of his involvement in the film industry consisted of a sale of a single original story, which Republic Pictures used to make *The Inside Story* (1948). He went to Hollywood despite the fact that he had no prior screenwriting experience because he had enjoyed some success as a freelance writer of short fiction, and on this basis alone, "felt" that he "would be good at it."[6] Yet over the following twenty years, Lehman became one of the most critically and commercially successful screenwriters of all time—best known for his original screenplay for *North by Northwest* (1959) and his many successful adaptations such as *West Side Story* (1961), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966).

In this chapter, I draw upon primary source evidence including notes, treatments, and drafts from the Ernest Lehman Collection in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin to analyze Lehman's early screenwriting practice and argue that there are essential commonalities between it and his prose fiction writing practice.[7] In the first section, I highlight the similarities between Lehman's 1946 working notes for his abandoned novel, *You Scratch My Back…*, and his 1955 notes for the unfinished MGM project, *Labor Story*. Based on an analysis of these documents, I argue that in both his prose fiction writing and his screenwriting, Lehman approaches the planning of his stories—or what I will call macro level narrative issues, including plot structure and character development—in a similar fashion and with the same commitment to classical narrative conventions.

In the second section, I look at the ways in which Lehman's prose fiction writing practice influences the composition of his first screenplay, for *Executive Suite* (1954), as well as the composition of his screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957)[8], and argue that in his prose fiction writing and screenwriting, Lehman uses

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[6] Quoted in John Brady, *The Craft of the Screenwriter* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1982), 192.

[7] I focus on his "early" screenwriting practice in order to limit my scope, and consider that "early" period to be from 1952-1957.

[8] It should be noted here that Lehman's final screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success* was heavily rewritten by Clifford Odets after Lehman was ordered by his doctor to stop working for health reasons. The "final" screenplay—and the one that has been published—is credited to both Odets and Lehman. Because I am focused on Lehman's screenwriting practice in this chapter, I will only be discussing his work on the project and where I refer to a 'final' draft or 'final' screenplay I mean the final version that Lehman wrote for Hecht-Hill-Lancaster before leaving the project. I am less concerned with how the shooting script looks and who contributed which parts than the process by which Lehman wrote his version(s) before Odets took over. In addition, it should be noted that evidence indicates that Alexander Mackendrick (the director) and Burt Lancaster both had considerable creative input in story meetings even before Lehman left and Odets was hired. However, this does not directly affect the points about Lehman's writing practice that I make in this chapter, so I do not deal their creative contributions at length. For Mackendrick's account of the pre-production and production of the film, see Alexander Mackendrick, *On Film-making: An*

language in the same aesthetically relevant ways—to create imagery, rhythm and metaphor, to name a few examples. In short, I wish to show that, for Lehman, the practice of prose fiction writing and the practice of screenwriting are essentially similar. Because creating a screenplay is, for him, fundamentally like creating a work of prose fiction—essentially a matter of handling macro-level narrative issues in accordance with classical narrative principles and using language in aesthetically relevant ways—Lehman's screenplays are, I submit, artworks on the same order as his works of prose fiction. To phrase my argument in terms of a Carroll-esque identifying narrative: Lehman's screenplays can be identified as artworks in virtue of his intention that they repeat and amplify central narrative principles and stylistic elements of his prose fiction.

You Scratch My Back…, *Labor Story*, and Classical Narrative Principles

Between 1944 and 1952, Lehman honed his writing skills contributing freelance fiction to magazines like *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Esquire*. Of this early short fiction, his most notable pieces are the novelettes, "Tell Me About It Tomorrow" and "The Comedian", published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1950 and 1952, respectively. Famously, the title, "Tell Me About It Tomorrow", was supplied by the publisher, who rejected Lehman's original title, "Sweet Smell of Success", because he "did not want to use the word 'smell' in the magazine."[9] A lesser-known fact is that the origins of *Sweet Smell of Success* predate Lehman's writing of the novelette. The novelette was just one of three pieces of fiction—the other two are "Hunsecker Fights the World" and "The Nicest Thing to Do", published in 1948 and 1949—that Lehman developed out of the remains of a novel, tentatively titled *You Scratch My Back…*, which he began and quickly abandoned in 1946. Despite the fact that Lehman never completed the novel, he made extensive notes for it, which reveal a good deal about his working methods as a writer of prose fiction.

The value of Lehman's *You Scratch My Back…* notes in the present context is that their striking similarity, in both form and content, to notes he made while working on a screenplay for MGM's *Labor Story* in 1955 indicates an important continuity in his transition from prose fiction writing to screenwriting. I want to

suggest that the similarities in Lehman's approach to planning and developing the stories for these projects owe to a belief in a kind of fluidity across different types of narrative fiction. In fact, there is some evidence to indicate that this is a view that Lehman derived from Theodore Goodman, his writing teacher at City College of New York, whose own work focused on the neo-classical principles common to different forms of narrative fiction.[10] Regardless of Lehman's philosophy of narrative, however, his notes show that his approach to writing narrative is the same whether working on a screenplay or prose fiction.

More specifically, the two sets of notes Lehman composed reveal important parallels between his methods of working on plot structure and character development in his prose fiction writing and his screenwriting. His notes show that, on both projects, his primary concerns are to develop characters who have clearly motivated and strong wants, to establish oppositional characters or forces so as to create conflict, to drive the protagonist to action and shift the conflict from internal to external, and to ensure that all the characters' actions are clearly motivated so as to unify the narrative. In short, the parallels in Lehman's processes for writing prose fiction and screenplays suggest that he views the two as essentially the same in narrative terms. Moreover, Lehman's notes indicate that this conception of narrative as fluid across various forms is related to his commitment to a particular sort of storytelling—namely, storytelling according to classical principles. That is, for Lehman, the medium through which a story is told changes nothing in his fundamental approach since, for him, those classical principles apply to all narrative forms.

Lehman's notes for *You Scratch My Back…* and *Labor Story* are both comprised of character profiles, hypothetical questions and answers, and "thinking-out loud" musings—all of which are written with an eye towards characterization and plot development in accordance with the norms of classical narrative. In this work on both characterization and plot development, creating conflict is one of Lehman's principal objectives—both in these notes and in general. As he explains in another context,

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[10] For example, Goodman claims, "In all *stories*, short or long, is the element of conflict inherent and profound." Furthermore, he writes, "there is no *fiction* without conflict, for then there is no plot" because it is conflict that "generates the power of climax, suspense, and action." (My emphasis.) I will detail the ways in which Lehman's work makes good on this theory shortly. There are also a variety of quotations from Lehman that seem to echo Goodman's own ideas about writing, but which I do not have space to discuss. In addition, Lehman is not on the record discussing his relationship with Goodman at great length, and I am wary of introducing too much circumstantial evidence. Nevertheless, it strikes one as more than a coincidence that Goodman also taught such writers as Bernard Malamud, Paddy Chayefsky, Abraham Polonsky, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Henry Roth, William Gibson, and Daniel Fuchs. See Theodore Goodman, *Narrative Structure and Style* (New York: D. Appelton and Co., 1926), 50, 55-56.

> A scene, to me, has to have some element of conflict in it or some
> cross-purpose. It doesn't have to be a quarrel, but there should be some
> kind of tension. The most obvious are scenes involving opposing
> viewpoints. If it's a two-character scene and both characters have the
> same goal, usually to make a scene work the goal of one has to be
> either slightly different or more powerful than the goal of the other.[11]

Moreover, Lehman subscribes to a classical conception of narrative by which conflict
structures not only individual scenes, but also the entire plot:

> In the first act, who are the people, what is the situation of the whole
> story? Second act is the progression of that situation to a point of high
> conflict and great problems. And the third act is how the conflicts and
> problems are resolved. That's putting it a little patly, but that's the way
> it ought to be.[12]

In line with this focus on conflict, Lehman begins his notes for the novel and the
screenplay by first establishing his characters' clearly defined, strong, and conflicting
wants.

In the character profiles for *You Scratch My Back…* and *Labor Story*, Lehman
pits a successful but corrupt man, driven by an insatiable lust for power, against one
of his underlings who has been blinded by ambitions of similar success but is
beginning to recognize his mentor's moral dubiousness. In the case of *You Scratch My
Back…* , the antagonist is Ferdinand Saxon, whom Lehman describes as follows:

> Famed Broadway columnist…Saxon is a man of great power, utter
> ruthlessness and staggering ego… He is a man of many acquaintances,
> but no friends—only stooges, sycophants and parasites… There is only
> one who really loves Ferdinand Saxon, and that is Ferdinand Saxon…
> So great is Saxon's opinion of himself that it cannot tolerate the small
> disillusionments about self which ordinary mortals have.[13]

Compare the way in which Lehman draws Saxon as predisposed towards conflict with
his depiction of *Labor Story*'s antagonist, Bannon, as personifying conflict:

> Bannon literally radiates forces of conflict. His wants are several,
> though inter-related, and all powerful. Everything he does stems from
> his need for power, dominance, control, possession…[14]

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[11] Quoted in Brady, 183.
[12] Quoted in Brady, 203-204.
[13] Ernest Lehman, "*You Scratch My Back…:* 'synopsis of a novel'" (1946), in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF197.003).
[14] Ernest Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment'" (1955), in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF164.004).

Lehman ensures that the strength of the antagonists' wills—their appetite for power (albeit of two different sorts)—will naturally incline them to come into conflict with anyone who appears to be in their way.

In the notes for both his novel and screenplay, Lehman guarantees that his antagonists will encounter conflict by developing protagonists whose own wants are strong enough to motivate them to take action in opposition to their mentors. In his character profile for Allan Lasker, of *You Scratch My Back...*, Lehman writes:

> Broadway's most powerful press agent...known to insiders as "the man behind Saxon." ... He is, beneath it all, a sensitive man who has "sold out" his sense of ethics and decency in return for the kind of wealth and power which he most probably would never have acquired any other way. And as you, the reader, come into his life, he has reached almost the peak of self-disgust and inner rebellion.[15]

Lehman describes the protagonist of *Labor Story*, Christopher[16], as similarly burdened with an internal conflict that will eventually drive him to oppose his mentor:

> He is fighting nagging doubts about Bannon... When [he] finally has to face the truth – that Bannon is selling out the union for a deal with the politico-industrial forces, he knows he should give up... But he doesn't give up. He decides to defy Bannon and carry the strike to its conclusion.[17]

In these profiles, then, Lehman establishes that, facing ethical dilemmas, both protagonists come to a realization that requires them to take action that will draw them into a fight with the antagonists.

It is important to note the parallel between the character arcs Lehman devises for Christopher and Lasker, as well as the way in which the writer intertwines character arc with plot structure.[18] In his notes for both novel and screenplay, Lehman relies on a classical model in which a moment of realization or recognition spurs the protagonist to take definitive action to resolve the external conflict. In the *Labor Story* notes, Lehman writes that Christopher must "grow, changed from blind belief...to complete disillusionment...and [will have]...an awakening and final realization" that drives him to oppose Bannon.[19] Likewise, Lasker "knows that he is approaching the

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[15] Lehman, "*You Scratch My Back...*: 'synopsis of a novel.'"

[16] Over the course of the project, Lehman melds the characters of Harry Christopher and Chris Christopher, so I refer to the protagonist of *Labor Story* simply as Christopher.

[17] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"

[18] An interesting note about Lehman's *Labor Story* notes that I cannot elaborate upon here is that he seems to have read and been influenced by Lajos Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946). He borrows Egri's premise for *Macbeth*—"Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction"—and applies it to his own character, Bannon.

[19] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"

crossroads of his life" and must make a decision.[20] What is crucial to see here is that the medium for which Lehman is writing in no way changes his approach to character arc or dramatic structure. In both cases, Lehman's commitment to classical narrative norms demands that he develop character and plot according to this "rising conflict/moment of realization/taking of action to resolve conflict" formula, despite the fact that he intends to write one story as a novel and the other as a screenplay.

One important consequence of Lehman's reliance upon the classical model of character arc and plot structure described above is that, for both novel and screenplay, he is forced to first develop the conflict internally and then draw it out externally after the protagonist comes to the moment of realization. Lehman's notes show him grappling with this dilemma and working to dramatize the inner turmoil of Christopher and Lasker until the protagonists are finally driven to take action. In his *Labor Story* notes, Lehman suggests, "It is possible that in the beginning, until Chris decides to fight Bannon openly, the conflict in Chris will be an inner one. He will be fighting to believe in Bannon, and fighting against those who are trying to make him disbelieve. An inner struggle."[21] Likewise, Lehman writes in the *You Scratch My Back...* notes, "At first the conflict was an inner one: whether to run away from love and everything good that was still left in you...or risk antagonizing Ferdinand Saxon, thus endangering your career, the girl's career, the very structure of your life. Lasker has made his decision...Henceforth, the conflict moves outward."[22] Again, it is apparent that the form in which these stories will be written has little bearing on Lehman's approach. While we might intuitively think that internal conflict is more easily handled in prose fiction and that screenplays better accommodate external conflict, Lehman makes no effort to tailor his story material for a particular form of writing.

The requirements of classical narrative also demand that the shift from internal to external conflict is sufficiently motivated by character psychology. Therefore, Lehman spends a good deal of time working out psychological motivations for the characters' present situations, their wants and attitudes, and their actions. In both sets of notes, he does this primarily by posing and answering hypothetical questions. But the point of this exercise is not, as it might superficially appear, just for Lehman to "get to know" a character. Rather, he is working out the psychological motivations

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[20] Lehman, "*You Scratch My Back...*: 'synopsis of a novel.'"
[21] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"
[22] Lehman, "*You Scratch My Back...*: 'synopsis of a novel.'"

underlying fundamental dramatic elements like wants and actions because it is essential for him to understand and establish such motivations regardless of the medium in which he works. Here is how Lehman motivates Lasker's present situation, his desires, and his eventual action in the notes for *You Scratch My Back...*:

> Question: Why did Allan Lasker carve out this particular career for himself?
>
> Answer: He started off by taking the easiest course. Then, when it worked, and he started to earn big money, he saw himself becoming a man of power and influence... Power breeds the lust for more power, and since Ferdinand Saxon was Allan Lasker's means of success, Lasker found himself a slave to the man...
>
> Question: What kind of a guy is this Lasker that he is content to base his whole life on the goodwill of another? And doesn't he have any self-respect? Doesn't it vex him to know that he has been playing pimp, stooge and ghost-writer to Ferdinand Saxon?
>
> Answer: Very good questions. Just the questions that Allan Lasker has been asking himself for the last few years. He is, beneath it all, a sensitive man who has "sold out" his sense of ethics and decency in return for the kind of wealth and power which he most probably would never have acquired any other way. And as you, the reader, come into his life, he has reached almost the peak of self-disgust and inner rebellion. He is, to coin a phrase, becoming fed up. Fed up with Ferdinand Saxon, fed up with Allan Lasker, fed up with the utter emptiness of his life.[23]

The last paragraph of this passage is crucial because it not only motivates Lasker's opposition to the man who has brought him all of his success, but also because it explains why Lasker is primed to take action at this particular moment in his life.

Similarly, in the case of *Labor Story*, Lehman explicitly recognizes the need to psychologically motivate Bannon's lust for power, writing: "We must see [power] operating in his whole life. It is the motivating force of his entire career. And what makes him a person who needs this power is another question, which eventually must be answered on psychological, as well as biographical terms."[24] Aware of the importance of establishing the psychological terms of Bannon's power-drive, Lehman suggests, "[I]t is quite possible that this need [for power] stems from deep fears...of being helpless, defenseless, inadequate, insecure, 'powerless.'"[25] Moreover, Lehman

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[23] Lehman, "*You Scratch My Back...*: 'synopsis of a novel.'"
[24] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"
[25] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"

recognizes that he also needs to relate the motivation for Bannon's hunger for power to the specific context of the story, which centers on a labor movement:

<u>Why</u> is Bannon a man dedicated to the cause of labor?

Worked in the mines himself, experienced the intolerable conditions… Saw his father killed in a preventable mine disaster… Resolved that he would someday have enough power to crush the Winchesters of the industry, the men who he regarded as The Enemy… He strove for the cause of labor not because of his love for the workers, but rather because of his hatred of management… His was a fanatical zeal…[26]

The larger point here is that Lehman needs to engage in the same process of working out psychological motivations for characters' actions in his screenwriting and prose fiction writing because he is committed to an understanding of both as operating in line with classical narrative principles.

In sum, Lehman's notes for *You Scratch My Back…* and *Labor Story* are linked by a common approach to handling macro level narrative issues. By this, I mean that in his notes for the novel and his notes for the screenplay, the way Lehman conceives, outlines, and develops ideas about character psychology, wants, conflict, and dramatic structure is the same. That is, in both sets of notes, Lehman employs the same strategies of writing out character profiles, hypothetical questions and answers, and "thinking-out-loud" meditations in an effort to ensure that he develops character and plot in accordance with classical narrative principles. Moreover, these similarities can be understood by recognizing that a strict adherence to classical narrative norms largely requires character and plot to be developed in the same fundamental ways regardless of the form in which the narrative is written.

Particular to Lehman's case, however, is the striking fact that his notes indicate that he develops the narrative elements of his 1955 *Labor Story* screenplay by going through nearly the exact same creative process he went through nine years earlier while working on *You Scratch My Back…* Significantly, the close analysis of the two sets of notes reveals that, in terms of crafting the major narrative elements of his stories, Lehman's screenwriting practice is roughly the same as his prose fiction writing practice. It is because of this striking similarity that I have focused on one of Lehman's unfinished screenwriting projects. Because the screenplay for *Labor Story* was never written, it can hardly be regarded as an artwork. Yet, as an examination of

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[26] Lehman, "*Labor Story*: 'notes for a treatment.'"

Lehman's notes and drafts for other screenplays indicates, his screenwriting practice varies little from project to project.[27] For every screenplay he writes, the intentions and strategies with which he attends to macro-level narrative issues are largely the same. And if Lehman's intentions and strategies in the writing of other screenplays are largely the same as they are in the writing of *Labor Story*, then we have good reason to think that those other screenplays are works of art—created with the same intentions and strategies with regard to the construction of narrative as in Lehman's prose fiction.

However, there is clearly more to both screenwriting and prose writing practices than the construction of narrative. Although in Lehman's case, these two writing practices may initially resemble one another in terms of his intentions and strategies with regard to macro level narrative issues, we have yet to see that they are at all alike in a much more fundamental way—the use of language. It is to a comparison of Lehman's use of language in his screenwriting and prose fiction writing that I now turn.

Executive Suite, Sweet Smell of Success, and the use of language

According to Lehman, when Paramount first offered him a contract in 1952, the studio did not want him for anything specific; rather, he was "tapped" for the job "as a result of [his] novelettes ["Tell Me About It Tomorrow" and "The Comedian"] appearing in *Cosmopolitan*."[28] For his first project in Hollywood, he was loaned out to MGM to work on adapting Cameron Hawley's novel, *Executive Suite*, into a screenplay. Lehman began his work by writing a fifty-five-page outline for a treatment, followed by the treatment itself, which consists of one hundred and twenty-nine pages of prose.[29] Three things distinguish Lehman's *Executive Suite* treatment from the sort of prose one finds in short stories, novelettes, and novels: First, he uses scene headings (e.g. EXT. THE STREET); second, he sometimes specifies camera directions (e.g. THE STREET (POINT OF VIEW SHOT)); third, rather than embedding dialogue in prose, he often writes it out as it would appear in a theatrical

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[27] This is particularly apparent in the documents related to *Executive Suite* and *Sweet Smell of Success*, which I discuss in detail in the next section, as well as those related to *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956).

[28] Lehman, quoted in Brady, 192.

[29] Ernest Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'original treatment'" (1953) in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF191.011).

script (e.g. <u>Smith</u>: Like so). With these minor exceptions, however, Lehman's treatment looks quite like any other work of prose fiction.

One important consequence of Lehman's approaching the writing of *Executive Suite* by first writing a sort of hybrid novelette/treatment is that many passages of both the treatment and the screenplay are marked by literary devices like metaphor, as well as other aesthetically interesting usages of language such as the construction of imagery and rhythm. Consider the following passage from the treatment:

> He is on the sidewalk now—Broad Street—the heart of New York's financial district. He wants a cab. Here's one right in front of the building. But no—it is pulling away with a passenger as he moves toward it. Ah—there—across the street. A cab becoming vacant! ... He moves with a sharp burst of speed down off the curb into the street... A step... Another... And then suddenly, without warning, it happens. A tiny artery deep within the brain gives way to the pounding of a hard-driving bloodstream... The streets reel, the world fades... And Death, a hard, black roadbed, is rising swiftly to meet his falling body as he crashes into the silent darkness...[30]

This passage could easily be mistaken as an excerpt from a short story or a novel—and not because Lehman has simply lifted Hawley's prose. Notice how different the scene is in Hawley's novel:

> Hurriedly, Avery Bullard took out his wallet, made change and, as the woman stepped out, he pushed past her, leaning forward, reaching out with his right hand—
> Then it happened. A whiplash of pain exploded behind his eyes. Instantly, a giant force was twisting his head to the right until it seemed that the cords of his neck were being torn from his shoulders, disembodying his brain, washing it through the whirlpool of a crimson flood and then on into the engulfing blackness of a silent cave.[31]

Moreover, it is important to note that the above passage from Lehman's treatment does not significantly differ from what appears in his final draft screenplay, which looks like this:

> He is on the sidewalk now, in the heart of New York's financial district, bright in the dazzling June sunshine. He goes towards a cab at the curb. But it pulls away with a passenger. HE sees another across the street, moves towards it with a sharp burst of speed. A step. Another. And then suddenly, HE staggers. The streets reel, the world begins to fade. And Death, a hard, black roadbed, rises swiftly to meet his falling body as HE topples into the silent darkness that fills the

[30] Ibid.
[31] Cameron Hawley, *Executive Suite* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 8. Lehman does borrow the "pounding" of a "hard-driven bloodstream" from the first page of the novel: "After fifty-six years, somewhere deep within the convoluted recesses of his brain, a tiny artery finally yielded to the insistent pounding of his hard-driven bloodstream..." Ibid, 3.

screen. CAMERA holds on that black void for a moment – <u>as the last title ends.</u>[32]

In both the treatment and the final draft screenplay for *Executive Suite*, Lehman uses language as he might if he were writing prose fiction. For example, in Lehman's use of the metaphor that treats Death as "a hard, black roadbed," he seems decidedly unconcerned with the relationship between his language and the actual shooting of the film. Rather, he is using words to create images and metaphors for their own sake. Notice as well the way which language is use for rhythmic effect in this passage: "A step. Another. And then suddenly, he staggers." Writing this scene in fragments rather than complete sentences creates a staccato rhythm, which is underscored by the use of alliteration. In short, the imagery, metaphor, and rhythm in these passages engender for readers an imaginative experience that is inextricably linked with the language used. Finally, it is important to observe that Lehman does not just write out a novelette-styled treatment as an intermediary step to be forgotten once work on the screenplay begins in earnest. Rather, his prose writing practice is a constitutive component of his screenwriting.

Indeed, what is particularly interesting about Lehman's work on *Executive Suite* is the extent to which he writes the screenplay by reformatting the prose of the treatment in the manner just described. After Lehman puts the treatment through a few more drafts, he begins to prepare the first draft of the screenplay by editing the work he has already completed. In a revised draft of the treatment, Lehman handwrites formatting amendments such that the treatment is transformed into a screenplay. The following example is indicative of his process. Here is the passage as it is typed in Lehman's original treatment:

> Bruce Pilcher stiffens. "Julius! Quick!"
> Steigel comes puffing to his side, bends over the sill, looks down. His hand clutches Pilcher in horror. "No…it isn't…it just looks like…"
> "It's Avery Bullard," Pilcher says.
> A low moan escapes from Steigel's lips.[33]

Here is the passage with Lehman's handwritten amendments indicated as closely as possible with strike-throughs as he used them and his additions in brackets:

> ~~Bruce~~ [^ At the window,] Pilcher stiffens. [^ Pilcher:] "Julius! Quick!"

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[32] Ernest Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'final script'" (1953), in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF191.012).
[33] Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'original treatment.'"

Steigel comes puffing to his side, bends over the sill, looks down. His hand clutches Pilcher in horror. [^ Steigel:] "No…it isn't…it just looks like…"
[^ Pilcher:]"It's Avery Bullard[.]" ~~Pilcher says.~~
~~A low moan escapes from~~ Steigel's lips. [moans.][34]

In this fashion, Lehman completes the first draft of the screenplay. Scene by scene, he edits the treatment down until only character names, dialogue, and scene action are left on the page, waiting to be properly formatted into standard screenplay form.[35]

In a fascinating note on the cover of this hybrid document, Lehman writes, "On May 11, 1953, I gave these pages to my secretary, Virginia Coleman, and told her to type them in the manner of a screenplay."[36] Of particular interest here is that the peculiar format of the screenplay, which we might intuitively regard as one of its defining features, seems to be an afterthought for Lehman. For him, screenplay format apparently requires no special consideration during the writing process until a late stage at which much of the creative work is finished. Lehman does some formatting himself via his handwritten amendments, but it is evident that he regards most of the business of screenplay formatting as secretarial work rather than an essential part of the work of the screenwriter. Yet if formatting is not an essential part of Lehman's screenwriting practice as he himself conceives it, then that practice and his prose fiction writing practice are even more similar than they might first appear.

It is in part because Lehman writes much of the screenplay by editing and reformatting the treatment that the previously mentioned literary devices and aesthetically relevant uses of language commonly found in prose fiction writing make their way into the screenplay itself. As a consequence, many scenes offer reading experiences that are worthwhile for their own sake and cannot be transposed visually because their meaning depends on how language is used. Here is another passage from Lehman's treatment that does not appear in the novel:

In that instant before life will be forever changed, as she sits there unprepared for disaster, phone held gracefully to her ear, face still wearing the dream-like beauty that was hers as she sat at Bullard's desk, the voice in her ear is conveying the awful news now.
And then, a very strange thing happens—nothing.
No cry from her lips, no convulsive movement of the body. No change of expression. Just nothing.[37]

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[34] Ernest Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'first draft of the screenplay ready to be typed, written in narrative form w/revisions'" (1953) in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF226.002).
[35] See, for example of standard screenplay form, Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'final script.'"
[36] Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'first draft of the screenplay ready to be typed, written in narrative form w/revisions.'"
[37] Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'original treatment.'"

And here is the revised version of the passage from Lehman's final draft screenplay:

> In that instant before life will be forever changed, she sits there unprepared for disaster, phone held gracefully to her ear, face still wearing the dream-like beauty that was hers as she sat at Bullard's desk.
>
> The voice in her ear is conveying the awful news now. And then a very strange thing happens—<u>nothing.</u> No cry from her lips, no convulsive movement of the body. No change of expression. Just nothing.[38]

Of particular interest in both versions of this passage is the effort to which Lehman goes to dramatize the scene by describing what *does not* occur. He could instruct the actress to remain motionless by simply saying as much. Instead, Lehman tells us three specific ways in which she does not move, using the rhetorical device of anaphora— the repetition of words at the beginning of successive clauses—to emphasize the character's lack of reaction. Needless to say, the effect achieved here with language cannot be transposed to the screen; the film image—the record of a pro-filmic reality—necessarily cannot show us all of the things that did not happen before the camera, but only the things that did.[39] Moreover, whereas Lehman can use prose to suggest how the character might have reacted—and, indeed, underscore these possibilities with a rhetorical device like anaphora—a film camera cannot hint at alternative pro-filmic realities it might have recorded in other possible worlds. Lehman's reliance upon his prose writing results in passages like this one from his *Executive Suite* screenplay that not only has aesthetic relevance in its own right, but in fact can only be appreciated by reading it and attending to its particular uses of language.

Lehman's unique application of his prose writing style, which includes the use of such familiar literary and rhetorical devices as metaphor and anaphora, to his screenwriting is not a one-off strategy he abandons after finishing *Executive Suite* and gaining more screenwriting experience. On the contrary, he takes a similar approach to writing his screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success*—not only when he first dabbles at it at MGM in 1953, but also when he begins work on it in earnest for Hecht-Hill-Lancaster in 1956 following his work on *Sabrina* (1954), *The King and I* (1956), and

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[38] Lehman, "*Executive Suite*: 'final script.'"

[39] Or, to put it more precisely, a film or photograph cannot express a negative or counterfactual proposition. For discussions, see Sol Worth, "Pictures Can't Say 'Ain't,'" in *Film/Culture: Explorations of Cinema in its Social Context*, ed. Sari Thomas (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 97-109; Edward Branigan, "Here Is a Picture of No Revolver," *Wide Angle* 8, no. 34 (1986): 8-17.

Somebody Up There Likes Me. As mentioned earlier, Lehman's "Tell Me About It Tomorrow" becomes a blueprint for the storyline of his *Sweet Smell of Success* screenplay. But he does not only use the novelette as a basis for the screenplay's plot structure. He also writes large segments of the screenplay by reformatting passages of prose from the novelette.

Comparing a single scene as written in the novelette, a treatment, and the first draft of the *Sweet Smell of Success* screenplay elucidates this process by which Lehman transforms pages of his novelette into pages of his screenplay. Here is the scene from the novelette:

> Herbie Temple was sitting at the mirror when I walked into the dressing room, covering the scars of too many years of obscurity with a thick layer of pancake. Al Evans was pacing back and forth behind him, straining his worried voice through an unlighted cigar.
> I pointed a finger at Evans. "Hiya, tootsie."
> He looked up with a grunt of displeasure. "I didn't know you and Herbie know each other," he muttered.
> "We don't," I grinned. "How do you do Mr. Temple?"
> The comedian got to his feet quickly and, because there was no telling who I was, he hung a smile on his lean, aging face.
> "My name is Sidney Wallace."
> "Delighted."
> Evans looked at the tip of his cigar. "Mr. Wallace is a *press* agent." The smile was still there, but it had suddenly congealed.[40]

Notice some of the issues and challenges this passage presents for someone who might adapt it into a screenplay: The passage uses the past tense (whereas screenplays normally use the present); the story is narrated in first person by a character in the scene; the narrator's perspective on the other characters in the scene leads him to describe them using imagery that suggests his attitude towards them. The issue of tense is, perhaps, minor, but the images and, ultimately, the tone constructed by the first person narration determine the passage's meaning. That is to say, the observations that Temple covers "the scars of too many years of obscurity" and that Evans gives a "grunt" are made by Sidney, who is clearly a strongly opinionated and, perhaps, unreliable narrator. Adapting the passage into a screenplay requires one to decide whether to transpose this interesting narrative perspective and how do it since, presumably, the language used to create the perspective in a literary context cannot be used to re-create it in a filmic context unless voice-over narration is used.

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[40] Ernest Lehman, "Tell Me About It Tomorrow," *Cosmopolitan* 128 (1950): 175.

Interestingly, Lehman attempts to have it both ways. In writing the treatment, his obvious first steps are to add a scene heading and change the tense from past to present in order to meet standard screenplay protocol. He then changes the first person narration to third person narration. But he chooses not to excise the uses of imagery and figurative language that colored the first person narration. Instead, Sidney's attitudes toward the characters in the scene in the novelette become the third-person narrator's attitudes in the treatment. Thus, the following passage from the treatment shows that Lehman "solves" the problem of how to transpose unreliable first-person narration to the screenplay by simply abandoning it, but he is content to leave alone the interesting uses of language that marked that narration in the first place. Here is the passage from the treatment:

> INT. DRESSING ROOM
>   HERBIE TEMPLE, an aging comedian, is seated before his dressing-table mirror, covering the scars of too many years of obscurity with a thick layer of pancake. AL EVANS, his agent, is pacing back and forth behind him, straining his worried voice through an unlighted cigar.
>   Stanley comes breezing in, points a finger at Evens. "Hiya, tootsie."
>   Evans looks up with a grunt of displeasure. "I didn't know you and Herbie knew each other," he mutters.
>   "We don't," Stanley grins. "How do you do, Mr. Temple?" The comedian gets to his feet quickly and hangs a smile on his face. "My name is Stanley Wallace."
>   "Delighted."
>   Evans examines the tip of his cigar. "Mr. Wallace is a press agent."
>   The comedian's smile is still there, but it has suddenly congealed.[41]

Most of the remaining work, then, simply involves reformatting the passage into standard screenplay form. In the passage below, excerpted from Lehman's final draft screenplay, few substantive changes are made. Significantly, the uses of figurative language and imagery that first appeared in the novelette remain in the final draft of the screenplay.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

HERBIE TEMPLE, an aging comedian, is seated before his dressing table mirror, covering the scars of too many years of obscurity with a thick layer of pancake. Behind him, small, bespectacled AL EVANS,

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[41] Ernest Lehman, "*Sweet Smell of Success*: 'outline of proposed treatment'" (1954), in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF120.008).

his agent, is pacing back and forth straining his worried voice through an unlighted cigar.

EVANS: … I said to him! "Look Figo, I'm not selling you a dozen eggs, I'm selling you Herbie Temple, so don't give me—"

He stops, turns, as Sidney comes breezing in.

SIDNEY (to Evans): Hiya, tootsie.

EVANS (displeased): I didn't know you and Herbie knew each other.

SIDNEY (grins): We don't. (to Temple) How do you do, Mr. Temple?

The comedian gets to his feet, an uncertain smile on his face.

SIDNEY: I'm Sidney Wallace.

TEMPLE (shaking his hand): Delighted.

EVANS (examining the tip of his cigar): Mr. <u>Wallace</u> is a <u>press</u> agent.

The smile on Temple's face congeals.[42]

Notice again that insofar Lehman's writing of this scene in the screenplay largely involves reformatting the scene from the treatment (and, in turn, the novelette), his prose writing practice is a constitutive element of his screenwriting practice. Furthermore, it is hard to see what truly substantive differences exist between the scene from the screenplay and the scene in the novelette. The most important change is the shift from first person to third person narration, which alters the meaning of the passage because it dispenses with Sidney's interesting and complex narration of events. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that the novelette easily *could* have been written in third person. The point I wish to raise here is that if this shift in narration is the most drastic change from novelette to screenplay—since all of the other elements of the passage from the novelette, including the figurative uses of language and imagery, remain as originally written—then Lehman's screenplays and his literary works are really quite closely connected.

Finally, one should not get the incorrect impression that Lehman only uses the process I have described when he adapts literary works. The influence of his prose writing experience is also apparent in his original screenplay pages as well. Here too,

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[42] Ernest Lehman, "*Sweet Smell of Success*: 'first draft screenplay'" (1956), in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF119.001).

Lehman consistently deploys common literary devices such as metaphor, which he intends the reader to attend to and appreciate for their own sake. Consider, for example, the following passage. Although it is from Lehman's final version of his screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success*, it is one of several parts of the screenplay that do not have a prior source in his prose fiction:

> It is 2:30 A.M. and the Broadway district is deserted. The spectacular signs are no longer shining. The sidewalks are littered with refuse. It is the hour when bright dreams have turned to ashes. Sidney is walking slowly toward his apartment. There is no purpose in his stride. He is not going anywhere – not ever again – and he knows it.[43]

Again we see Lehman drawing upon his prose writing style to achieve what we might broadly call aesthetic effects, resulting in another scene marked by rich, rewarding uses of language. The metaphor that likens unfulfilled dreams to ashes is yet another instance in which Lehman creates images and aesthetic effects that are entirely dependent on how he uses language, and, thus, can only be properly regarded and appreciated by reading what he has written. Of course, the metaphor may be helpful insofar as it might serve to suggest the tone of the scene to the cast and crew, and that tone may be adequately represented by what is ultimately shot; however, the aesthetically interesting use of language through which that tone was first expressed is necessarily absent from the filmed scene, for it can only be accessed by reading the screenplay. And what is particularly interesting in this case is that the metaphor is not borrowed from a short story or novel, but is written solely for a screenplay.

Conclusion

The analysis I have offered supports the broader claim that Lehman's early screenwriting practice turns on his conception of a particular fluidity between various forms of narrative fiction writing; for him, screenwriting and prose fiction writing are essentially alike. Further, my analysis shows that Lehman approaches macro level narrative issues in screenwriting and prose fiction with the same intentions and handles them with the same strategies. In addition, Lehman's use of language in his screenwriting and prose fiction writing involves the mobilization of the same stylistic techniques to achieve the same, broadly aesthetic, purposes. At both of these levels,

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[43] Ernest Lehman, "*Sweet Smell of Success*: 'final version of the Lehman script'" (1956) in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF120.006).

the evidence suggests not only that Lehman's early screenwriting practice depends on the knowledge, strategies, and techniques he developed as a writer of prose fiction, but also that the creation of these early screenplays essentially involves his intentions to repeat and amplify those prose writing techniques and strategies. In short, it appears that whether writing a screenplay or prose fiction, Lehman engages in a similar creative process with roughly the same intentions for the work.

By saying that Lehman's creative process is similar in his early prose fiction as it is for his early screenwriting, I do not mean to imply that he wrote in a vacuum. Obviously, he worked under the constraints of magazine editors in New York as well as studio executives and producers in Hollywood. However, it would be a mistake to over-emphasize industrial considerations in this particular case, in which the textual evidence clearly indicates that—whether it was alone in his New York apartment or immediately following a story conference with Hecht, Hill, and Lancaster—Lehman ultimately sat down and wrote his prose fiction and screenplays with the same intentions, using the same strategies, methods, and techniques.

Furthermore, Lehman's own reflection on the writing process supports this conclusion. Consider this provocative anecdote:

> I used to play a little trick on interviewers. I would say: There was this writer and he read a novel which he thought lent itself very well to the medium and he decided to take an option on it and went to a producer and the producer was enthusiastic, too. And they got a director who was interested. So the writer took a ream of paper and a typewriter and locked himself in his study for three or four months and wrote a first draft—and the producer and director were *very* enthusiastic. Anyway, to make a long story short, the script was produced and, oh, they got this star and they got that star, and it was a smash hit. Then I'd say to the interviewer: What am I talking about now? Am I talking about a *movie*? Or am I talking about *Teahouse of the August Moon* on the *stage*? Or am I talking about Goodrich and Hackett's stage adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank*? Or am I talking about the musical play that was done, based on the novel, *7 ½ Cents* and called *Pajama Game*? I had made the interviewer think I was talking about the movie. See, I was trying to show him there really is not all that much difference between writing a movie and writing a play because in both cases you wind up with a dramatic manuscript which is then produced—the difference being that in the movies it is photographed and edited and scored. But the *writing* process is very much the same.[44]

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[44] Lehman, quoted in Brady, 189-190.

Hearing this story, Lehman's interviewer protests that the industrial contexts of theater and film are not the same—that the playwright's work is not susceptible to the endless revision suffered by the screenwriter. Lehman calmly acknowledges this and replies, "That's true…But I was just trying to convince this journalist that there isn't that much difference in the *creative process* of writing the two forms of drama, except that one of them is to be put on the screen."[45] Here I believe Lehman may just as easily have been speaking of the similarities in his creative process for writing prose fiction and screenplays.

Lehman's quote makes roughly the same point I have tried to argue here, but with regard to the relationship between screenwriting and prose fiction writing. We have established that in two fundamental parts of any narrative fiction writing process—the development and coordination of macro level narrative elements and the use of language—Lehman's screenwriting practice and prose writing practice are not appreciably different. But if Lehman intends his screenplays to repeat and amplify the fundamental narrative principles and stylistic elements of his prose fiction, and, to achieve his purposes, he uses the same strategies and techniques he uses in his prose writing practice, then, I submit, we have good reason to think that his screenplays are works of art on the order of his works of prose fiction.

But furthermore, if Lehman uses language in the same, broadly aesthetically relevant ways in his screenplays as he does in his prose fiction—for the purposes of constructing an engaging narrative, creating metaphors, constructing striking imagery, and so forth, which, in sum, are intended to make the texts worthwhile reading without regard for any further, instrumental purpose—is something not lost if we do not regard his screenplays, too, not only as artworks, but, specifically, as literary works?[46] For if we regard Lehman's screenplays merely as "blueprints" for the production of films—or, even if we regard his screenplays as artworks in a broad sense but do not engage with them, more narrowly, as works of literature—then we overlook the fact that Lehman has intentionally employed the same strategies as in the writing of his prose fiction in order to create screenplays that have the same kinds of

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[45] Ibid, 190.

[46] I do not mean to offer a definitive explanation of what makes Lehman's prose fiction "literature," let alone to propose a definition of literature here. On the contrary, this is merely a rough and ready, hopefully uncontroversial, characterization of how I think we might identify literary works. In this characterization, I follow Robert Howell in thinking of literature "as, roughly, that body of works, essentially and significantly involving the use of words, that are, or that are put forward to be, objects with aesthetically relevant features. Those are features whose reception, through reading, hearing, or speaking, is worthwhile for its own sake." See Robert Howell, "Ontology and the Nature of the Literary Work," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 67.

aesthetic qualities and afford the same sorts of aesthetic engagement as his literary works.[47]

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[47] In other words, even if my above characterization of literature is met with skepticism, or is shown to be wrong, Lehman's screenplays can still be shown to be works of literature through either the theory of artifact change offered in Chapter 2 or the identifying narrative approach offered in Chapter 3.

Chapter 6: Objections and Ontology I: Is the Screenplay an Autonomous Work?

The opera demands the poet and the composer; and yet the text of the opera is a work of literature *independent and complete in itself*, and the music of the opera has its own life…[M]usic is a perfect work of art even before it is sung or played on an instrument, just as a drama is complete as a work of literature even if it never reaches the stage... [In the photoplay]…the work which the scenario writer creates is itself still *entirely imperfect* and becomes a complete work of art only through the action of the producer.[1]

     -Hugo Münsterberg

As I suggested in Chapter 4, there is a long history of conceiving of the screenplay as a kind of artwork.[2] There is also, however, a well-known history of argumentation to the contrary.[3] I do not intend to detail either of these histories here; suffice it to say that this has been ably done elsewhere.[4] My focus in the next three chapters will be limited to the central, contemporary objections to the previous chapter's argument that at least some screenplays (Hollywood screenplays, no less) are works of art. More specifically, I am interested in those objections that meet me on my own terms, as it were. By this I mean to exclude that cluster of objections which is underpinned by an assumption that arthood is matter of possessing some sufficient amount of aesthetic value, which screenplays do not have.[5] As I argued earlier, this kind of objection cannot get off the ground because it depends on a controversial aesthetic definition of art that has been thoroughly critiqued elsewhere. And in any case, I suspect that one encounters these sorts of objections less and less frequently—at least in sophisticated forms.

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[1] Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916), 192-193 (my italics).
[2] See, for a recent example, Kevin Alexander Boon, *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008). Also, note Nathanial Kohn's amusingly bombastic assertion, "By plaintively saying one thing—'The writer in movies is not king. He's some peasant in a field,' to quote *Frasier* executive producer David Lee (Fretts, 1995, p.27)—and blithely continuing to work in the usual ways (a tacit acceptance of the futile and arcane nature of resistance in the postmodern landscape) and by then occupying an anonymous postmodern becoming space between and beyond man and machine, Hollywood screenwriters are unknowingly making a newly engaging literary thing, something epistemologically diverse, unanchored, free flowing, floating, and authorless, exemplifying the Foucauldian conclusion 'that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of [the author-function] are far from immutable' (Foucault, 1984, p. 290), and evidencing the promise of his imaginary culture," in "The Screenplay as Postmodern Literary Exemplar: Authorial Distraction, Disappearance, Dissolution," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 4 (December 2000): 503.
[3] The epigraph offers an early example from Münsterberg. For a recent example, see Adrian Martin, "Making a Bad Script Worse: The Curse of the Scriptwriting Manual," *Australian Book Review* 209 (April 1999), accessed May 7, 2010, http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/April99/mar.html (site discontinued).
[4] For an overview, see Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009).
[5] See Martin, who holds a position along these lines, although his discussion focuses on the question of whether the screenplay can be a work of literature: "scripts rarely hold up as literary objects because they are mere skeletons without flesh, tales without poetry or metaphor, figures without life."

The kind of objection that interests me—and that is most prominent in contemporary critical commentary—is that which argues that screenplays cannot be works of art for ontological reasons. Roughly, the thought is that the very nature of the screenplay—the kind of thing it is—precludes it from being an artwork. And despite the fact that I will only address contemporary work in this vein, I begin the chapter with a quotation from Münsterberg because it strikes me that here, in arguably the first work of film theory, is a clear, concise, and measured statement that encapsulates the twin objections I face: (1) The screenplay cannot be a work of art because it is essentially not an autonomous ("independent" in Münsterberg's words) work; (2) The screenplay cannot be a work of art because it is essentially not a complete work.

I do not mean to imply that I judge the contemporary objections to be "hangovers" from Münsterberg's work or a general tradition of theorizing about film and the screenplay. On the contrary, if Münsterberg and the contemporary critics hold similar views, I think this owes to the fact that these ontological objections to the screenplay's art status hold some intuitive appeal. Indeed, an interesting feature of these objections is that they are made by scholars from very different theoretical traditions: The objection that screenplays are not autonomous works has been most forcefully made by Noël Carroll; the objection that screenplays are not complete works has been made by a number of critics influenced by post-structuralist literary theory. Despite the different theoretical underpinnings of each objection, then, both take the ontology of the screenplay to preclude it from being a work of art.

Therefore, I begin this chapter by offering some general remarks on the relationship between art status and ontology. In the remainder of the chapter, I reconstruct and critique Carroll's objection. It should be noted here that Carroll's remarks are rather brief, but because they represent the most lucid version of a claim made by several other recent theorists—that the screenplay is not an autonomous work—I deal with them at length.[6] Because I think this type of objection ultimately misses the mark due to a broader confusion of the relationships that obtain between work-determinative documents (scores, scripts, screenplays, architectural plans) and the works created from them, my most robust counterargument takes the form of an alternative sketch of these relationships and the ontology of the screenplay, which

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[6] For example, Maras writes, "The intermediality of the script complicates the extent to which the screenplay can be considered an autonomous form" (48). One reason for dealing with Carroll's remarks is that this and other claims Maras makes are vague.

comes in the following chapter. There, I conclude that screenplays are, in fact, the kinds of things that can be works of literature. Finally, this conclusion provides a segue into Chapter 8, which reconstructs and then rebuts the objection that screenplays are not the kinds of things that can be works of literature because they are essentially incomplete.

Art Status and Ontology

Figure 1: In Advance of the Broken Arm (1964)

Figure 2: An ordinary snow shovel

One of these snow shovels is a famous work of art by Marcel Duchamp (*Fig. 1*). The other is an ordinary snow shovel (*Fig. 2*). How do we explain the difference? Because there is nothing about the intrinsic properties of the snow shovels themselves that makes one, but not the other, an artwork, we can only account for the difference by explaining what Duchamp *did* to make one of them art.[7] The advent of ready-mades and conceptual art has forced us to acknowledge that just about any kind of object can be an artwork, and what is needed to distinguish art objects from ordinary objects is to track the intentions and actions directed at a given object. What it takes for something to be an artwork is a matter of the intentional activity by which an agent creates, uses, appropriates, or destroys a particular object. In short, art making is

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[7] See, especially, Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

an essentially intentional activity, and that intentional activity is primary in determining art status.[8]

Figure 3: Study for 'The Potato Eaters' (1855)

　　　　In contrast to the two snow shovels above, (*Fig. 3*) seems to very clearly be an artwork. In this case, the properties of the object are such that it is much easier for us to make inferences about what the artist, Vincent van Gogh, did to create it. That is, the object appears to be the successful result of intentional activity that we recognize as sufficient for art making. But now what if I tell you that the title of this work is *Study for 'The Potato Eaters'*, and van Gogh did not intend it to be 'the final' work, but an intermediary work whose sole purpose was to help him create the painting below, *The Potato Eaters*—whose exhibition at the Paris Salon of 1885 he imagined would establish his reputation?

Figure 4: The Potato Eaters (1855)

Does the intermediacy of *Study for 'The Potato Eaters'* entail that it is not an autonomous work of art after all? Given that the sketch is itself complete and shows signs of having been created with recognizable art making intentions, it seems to me

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[8] Recall here that the intentions to which I refer need be neither specific nor conscious. For a discussion of the former claim, see Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31-61. For a defense of the latter claim, see Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 3-25; Jerrold Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 411-423; and Noël Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," reprinted in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63-75.

that it would be very hard to argue that it is *not* an autonomous artwork. And this—rather than the bottom line regarding the sketch's art status—is the important point here: The burden of proof is upon the person who wants to *deny* that *Study for 'The Potato Eaters'* is an autonomous work of art, because the evidence (manifest in the sketch) of van Gogh's intentional activity vis-à-vis the creation of the sketch indicates, *prima facie*, that it is an artwork.

In other words, knowing that an object is the result of an agent's engagement in an art practice gives us good *prima facie* reasons to suppose that the object is an artwork. Now, this is not to say that the object necessarily is an artwork. As I suggested in the previous chapter, there may indeed be extenuating circumstances—ontological or otherwise—that militate against the object's being art. For example, under normal circumstances, we do not regard a fragment of a poem, abandoned by a frustrated poet, as a work of art. However, we make this judgment *after* having identified the object as the result of an agent's engagement in poetry writing; indeed, it is necessary that we adjudicate in this fashion because we cannot identify the object as a fragment until we identify what it is a fragment *of*. But *prima facie*, we regard such an object as an artwork and it is not until we are presented with sufficient evidence to the contrary that we revise our judgment.

These points must be kept in mind as we consider ontologically-based objections to the argument that (some) screenplays are works of art. Discussion of this topic often begins with the argument that the screenplay cannot be a work of art because of its ontological status.[9] But basing decisions about art status first and foremost upon claims about the ontology of an object gets the order of things backwards. We do not doubt, *prima facie*, that van Gogh's *Study for 'The Potato Eaters'* is an artwork because of its intermediate status and then have to make a case for why it is in fact an artwork. On the contrary, the properties of the work tell us something about the process by which van Gogh created it and because that process is recognizable to us as an artistic practice, we regard *Study for 'The Potato Eaters'*, *prima facie*, as an artwork. Similarly, the arguments I put forth in the previous two chapters offer good reasons to think that screenwriting is an art practice and, *prima facie*, some screenplays are works of art. Therefore, the burden of proof is on those who would deny the possibility of screenplays being artworks on ontological grounds

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[9] See, e.g., Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 68-69; and the overview in Maras, 44-62.

to make their case. Carroll needs to convincingly show that the ontology of the screenplay is substantively different from the ontology of the theatrical script—that, unlike theatrical scripts, screenplays are essentially constituent parts of other artworks, and this precludes them from being works of art in their own right. The post-structuralists need to convincingly show that screenplays are essentially incomplete in a way that other works that are open to revision, like theatrical scripts, are not. Neither objection, I will argue, surmounts these challenges.

Carroll's Objection

To be fair to Carroll, it is worth noting that his remarks on the screenplay have all appeared as peripheral comments in the context of broader discussions regarding the ontology of film. Nevertheless, he has maintained the same position in various publications over the last fifteen years, so I take it to be one to which he is committed. To reconstruct Carroll's argument, I draw upon material he originally presented in his 1998 monograph, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, and which he has recently updated in his 2006 essay, "Defining the Moving Image," and his 2008 volume, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*.[10]

Carroll begins by claiming that we do not, in our standard appreciative practices, treat screenplays the same way we treat theatrical scripts. According to Carroll, screenplays "are not read like plays and novels."[11] On the contrary, he claims, "The only people who read screenplays, apart from actors and directors, are people who are trying to learn how to write them or the people who teach people to write them or film scholars engaged in historical and/or critical research."[12] Furthermore, he reasons, "When scripts are published that is typically because the films in question are thought to be aesthetically important."[13] Notice here that Carroll does not advert to these suppositions regarding our appreciative practices in order to argue that screenplays are not artworks. That is, he is not making the argument—which one supposes is open to him—that screenplays are not artworks *because* we do not treat them as such. But he is suggesting that our appreciative practices indicate, prima

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[10] Noel Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Noël Carroll, "Defining the Moving Image," in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, eds. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 113-133; Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*.
[11] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Carroll, *Philosophy of Mass Art*, 214n50.

facie, that screenplays are *not* artworks on the order of theatrical scripts. Whether we should accept Carroll's account of our appreciative practices of screenplays is a question I shall address later on. For now, it is enough to note that on his view, we just do not read screenplays as we read theatrical scripts.

Carroll then segues from a description of our practices to an explanation of them by way of an example. According to him, "the voters at the Academy Awards do not read the scripts of nominees when they vote for the best screenplay; they watch the movie in which it is a contributing creative ingredient."[14] Here we see the beginning of the argument: the screenplay is a kind of contributing ingredient in a film. More specifically, screenplays are, in Carroll's words, "constituents," of films.[15] This relationship between the screenplay and the film is, on Carroll's view, markedly different from the relationship between the theatrical script and the theatrical performance.

Because Carroll draws a sharp contrast between the screenplay/film relationship and the theatrical script/theatrical performance relationship, we need to look at his philosophy of theater—most fully elaborated in his 2006 essay, "Philosophy and Drama"—quite closely.[16] On his view, the art of drama actually involves "two distinguishable art forms: the art of composing play texts (or, more broadly, performance plans) and the art of performing them."[17] Therefore, he writes, "Drama, in this respect, is a dual-tracked or two-tiered art form."[18] According to Carroll, drama as composition need not take the form of a script (or, as he often calls it, "play text"); it could be a performance plan that remains unwritten, in which case "the script, so to speak…may live in the memory of the performers."[19] The script or play text is, in fact, the form of drama as composition with which we are most familiar, yet, Carroll suggests, all performance plans can be evaluated in their own right regardless of the form they take. For example, "an untranscribed harvest ceremony also has a performance plan, albeit unwritten, that can be analyzed and appreciated independently of its performance, just as a traditional folk dance has a

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[14] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.
[15] Ibid. I do not believe Carroll's use of the term "constituents" constitutes a change from the position he takes in *A Philosophy of Mass Art*. In that work, he uses the term "non-detachable constituents," which he reserves, in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, to describe actors' performances in movies. See Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, 214.
[16] Noël Carroll, "Philosophy and Drama," in *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*, eds. David Krasner and David Z. Saltz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 104-121.
[17] Ibid, 106.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

design that can be scrutinized in isolation from any particular performance of it."[20] In short, the suggestion is that all performance plans are works of art inasmuch as they are products of "the art of composing performance plans."[21]

However, Carroll suggests, at the same time theatrical scripts are products of "the art of composition," they are also works of literary art.[22] This is a quick move that I shall look at more closely later. The conclusion Carroll draws, though, is that, ontologically speaking, play texts are on the order of other works of literature like novels—abstract types, to which we have access through token copies. That is, "your copy of *Middlemarch* and my copy are both tokens of the type created by George Elliot. These tokens are material objects that grant us access to the abstract type, the artwork *Middlemarch*."[23] So, Carroll thinks that such types are created and completed by their authors. "Likewise," he writes, "a drama as a literary work—*The Master Builder*, for example—is fixed as the art type it is for all time in terms of the relevant aesthetic elements that constitute it as determined by the intentions of its author, Ibsen."[24]

However, Carroll points out, dramatic performances of the same play texts obviously differ from one another. On his view, "This is because when viewed from the perspective of drama as performing art, play texts are regarded simply as recipes—semiporous formulas to be filled in by executors in the process of producing performance artworks—rather than as fixed artworks in their own right."[25] As recipes, Carroll writes, "play texts specify the ingredients of the performance—such as lines of dialogue, characters, and perhaps some props—as well as the range of global emotional tones or flavors appropriate to the work."[26] Or, to use another metaphor, he suggests, "they are blueprints rather than finished buildings, figuratively speaking."[27] The thought here is that the theatrical script necessarily underdetermines performances of it. The consequences of this are that every performance of a theatrical script necessarily requires an interpretation of it, and, therefore, has an identity that is distinct from the script. Carroll explains, "In order to be incarnated as a performance, every play text requires interpretative activity on the parts of the

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid, 107.
[23] Ibid, 108.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 109.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

executors who must extrapolate beyond what has been written or otherwise previously stipulated (as in the case of orally transmitted performance plans)."[28] It is actually this interpretive activity that, on Carroll's view, constitutes what he calls the art of performance.

Ontologically, then, a production interpretation of a play text is a distinct artwork—a distinct type. Carroll offers no specific example here, but we might think of the Classical Theatre of Harlem's setting of *Waiting for Godot* in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans as one such interpretation. "Thus," writes Carroll, "these interpretations of the recipe are themselves types that then generate performance tokens."[29] That is, individual performances of the post-Katrina New Orleans productions are tokens of the interpretation type. Now, there is something odd going on here—to which I shall return later—because what Carroll calls "the art of performance" turns out to be the art of interpretation. Individual performances amount not to distinct artworks, but to tokens of an "interpretation type," which is the artwork. It seems to me that Carroll recognizes this problem and attempts to explain it away, writing, "to enact that interpretation, to instantiate it tonight onstage requires thought—requires an interpretation of the interpretation relevant to the immediate circumstances of the live performance."[30] This proposition raises a number of interesting questions that deserve further explanation—e.g. why (and how) is one interpretation a type (and a distinct artwork), but the other interpretation a token?— but Carroll takes it to resolve matters and concludes, "drama is a two-tiered or double-decker art form. There is drama as composition and drama as performance."[31] Furthermore, Carroll writes, "we call an art a performing art just in case it exhibits this duality."[32]

In Carroll's *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, a condensed version of this account of the ontology of theater lays the groundwork for his discussion of the ontology of film. In one sense, his main point is, quite simply, that film is not a performing art. Yet he attempts to get at this point by focusing on this putative two-tiered nature of theater and the other performing arts:

> [T]heater, like music and dance, can be called a two-tiered artform. In music, at least since the advent of notation, there is the score—the

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 111.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

artwork created by the composer; and then there is also the performance—the score as played by a group of musicians. Similarly, there is the choreography of the dance which is one artwork; and then there is choreography as performed by the troupe which constitutes a discrete artwork. And in theater, there is the play—if not of the well-made sort [i.e. in the form of a script] then, at least, some kind of performance plan—and subsequently its execution (or executions).[33]

However, Carroll stresses, "cinema is not a two-tiered artform. There is one, and only one, artwork in cinema—the *finished* film or video."[34] Again, Carroll's main goal here is to show that film is not a performing art. More specifically, the point he wants to make is this: "the performance of a motion picture—a film showing—is not an artwork in its own right."[35] Indeed, typical film screenings are not performances properly so-called—at least on the order of theatrical or musical performances. Thus, Carroll argues that cinema is not a two-tiered artform because "performances" of the film, screenings, are not distinct works of art.

Yet the fact that argument is made terms of "two-tieredness" has consequences for the screenplay. That is, if film is not a two-tiered art form, then it appears that the screenplay must be a part of a single work of art. According to Carroll, "If, in theater, the play-text type is a recipe or sketch that the director and/or the actors interpret, and, furthermore, if the recipe and the interpretation can be regarded as different though related artworks, in motion pictures the recipe and the interpretations are constituents of the self-same integral artwork."[36] That is, he elaborates, "In contrast to the theater, where the recipe [i.e. the script] and the interpretation are two different artworks, in cinema the recipe and its interpretation are presented together in one indissoluble package."[37] On this account, then, the difference between theatrical scripts and screenplays seems to be that theatrical scripts admit of multiple interpretations, which are performed, whereas screenplays are only used once in the production of a single film. In sum, Carroll concludes, screenplays "are ontologically ingredients in the motion pictures with which they are associated rather than being independent artworks."[38] Call this the Ontological Argument.

The Ontological Argument is the core of Carroll's argument that screenplays cannot be artworks. To it, he adds what I will call the Transcription Argument. The

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[33] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, 69.

gist of the Transcription Argument is this: Screenplays cannot be artworks because they are not original compositions, but merely transcriptions of films. In Carroll's words, "The movie scripts that come to us in published form are not the scripts used during the production process—which were quite frequently being altered as the movie was being made—but are more of the nature of transcriptions or records of the words that finally would up being said in the finished product."[39] If screenplays are mere transcriptions of films, there is no reason to think that they are artworks in their own right.

Carroll uses the Transcription Argument to bolster the Ontological Argument. That is, one of the reasons he thinks that screenplays are inseparable from the films with which they are associated is that, *qua* transcriptions, they depend upon the existence of those films for their own existence. As he puts it, screenplays "are not the recipes that were used to launch an interpretation. They are documents of what got made—less recipes, and more parts of the dish that was served."[40] According to this metaphor, then, the screenplay is not—like a play script—a recipe, or set of instructions, that is an artwork in its own right, but rather a constituent part of an artwork.

But here we see a tension in Carroll's account of screenplays. First, he argues, "in cinema the recipe and its interpretation are presented together in one indissoluble package."[41] But then he argues that screenplays "are not the recipes that were used to launch an interpretation."[42] Clearly, these objections are mutually exclusive, but to be charitable I think we ought to parse them like this: (1) If screenplays are mere transcriptions of films, then they are not artworks (because a transcription is not an artwork); (2) If screenplays are not transcriptions, but recipes—on the order of theatrical scripts—then they are not artworks because, unlike theatrical scripts, they do not launch multiple interpretations. Furthermore, I think there is third, implicit reason for why Carroll objects to the screenplay as artwork. Because he has differentiated cinema from the performing arts by construing the latter as essentially two-tiered, he must maintain that cinema is not a two-tiered art because it is obviously not a performing art. Thus, Carroll's broader account of the ontology of the performing arts and of cinema commit him to denying that screenplays can be

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.
[42] Ibid, 69.

artworks in their own right alongside films themselves. I now turn to exploring these tensions in Carroll's ontology of theater and ontology of film, and I rebut his arguments against the screenplay as artwork.

The Counterargument to Carroll's Objection

Before beginning the counterargument in earnest, we ought to first dispute Carroll's characterization of our appreciative practices with regard to screenplays and claim that, on the contrary, we often do read screenplays as we read plays or novels. I will not make a case for this claim at length here because I do so in Chapter 10, which focuses on fan fiction screenplays, but here are a few ideas to think about. When we browse in bookstores these days, it is not uncommon to find more published screenplays in the Film section than published theatrical scripts in the Drama section. There are numerous publishers and imprints that now publish classic and contemporary screenplays on a regular basis. On the Web, there are two major collections of screenplays—simplyscripts.com and imsdb.com (The Internet Movie Script Database). In addition, there are fan communities in which fans share both screenplays based on previously existing television shows, movies, and characters, as well as original screenplays.

In short, I think that empirical investigation will reveal enough evidence to suggest that screenplays are frequently read as plays and novels are read. And if this account of our appreciative practices is right, we can add it to our account of the creative practice of screenwriting as a *prima facie* reason to think that screenplays are works of art in their own right. Nevertheless, as I noted earlier, Carroll does not explicitly appeal to our appreciative practices to support his argument, so let us leave this matter aside and address his Transcription Argument and his Ontological Argument.

The Transcription Argument is easily handled by simply conceding Carroll's point. We should, I think, accept his argument that a transcription of a film—published or otherwise—is not a work of art in its own right. Such a transcription is less like a theatrical script than it is like a video recording of the performance of a play. A transcription, like a video recording of a performance, is just a record of an artwork on which it depends for its existence and is not an artwork in its own right.

Nevertheless, I take it that screenplays are, by definition, not transcriptions of films. Both inside and outside of the film industry, a screenplay is roughly thought of as a document that is used to make a film—dare I say a recipe or blueprint for the creation of a film—rather than a record of a film that was made. Someone who calls a transcription of a film "a screenplay" simply misunderstands what a screenplay is.

I grant Carroll that in the 1970s and 1980s there was some confusion about this in the publishing industry. Publishers sometimes released objects that they called "screenplays," which were either screenplays that had been "corrected" to conform to the theatrical print of the film or were simply transcriptions of films. I suspect that part of the confusion stemmed from the fact that Hollywood, during the Golden Age, used to distinguish between something called a "continuity script," which was like a final draft screenplay used on set (roughly, what we now call a "shooting script"), and a "cutting continuity script," which was basically a transcript of the finished film that could be sent to the Production Code Administration, state censors, or exhibitors. In some cases, continuity scripts and cutting continuity scripts are confused, or it is thought that a cutting continuity script *is* a screenplay in the ordinary sense of the term. But this is simply an error. Publishing a transcription of a film, whether it is a cutting continuity script or otherwise, and calling it a screenplay is a mistake, for screenplays, properly so-called, are documents from which films are made. But, we should note, this is a mistake that has largely been rectified by the publishing industry. Most of the screenplays that are available now are published under imprints like Newmarket Press's "The Newmarket Shooting Script Series," and are, as the name indicates, shooting scripts or writers' final draft screenplays.

Even if the Transcription Argument depends on a simple misunderstanding about what a screenplay is (and what it is not), defusing it is significant because we have seen that it partially underpins Carroll's core argument—The Ontological Argument. One of the reasons Carroll insists that screenplays are, ontologically, inseparable components of the films with which they are associated is that screenplays are supposedly mere transcriptions. I have argued that this is false and that the Transcription Argument fails on this count. The Ontological Argument, then, is seriously weakened insofar as screenplays, properly so-called, are not ontologically inseparable from films in the way transcriptions are.

But if the Transcription Argument fails, are screenplays not still inseparable from the films with which they are associated in other ways such that Carroll's core

argument succeeds? Note here that Carroll has set the bar for success quite high. The Ontological Argument, as I have termed it, suggests that screenplays, in virtue of the kinds of things they are, are inseparable from the films with which they are associated. Recall that the argument is that "in motion pictures the recipe and the interpretations are constituents of the self-same integral artwork."[43] In other words, "In contrast to the theater, where the recipe and the interpretation are two different artworks, in cinema the recipe and its interpretation are presented together in one indissoluble package."[44] Because this is an argument about the essential nature of cinema, it implies logical necessity. This, in turn, means that a single counterexample will undermine the argument.

Is a screenplay logically inseparable from a film such that it could not possibly be interpreted differently in the making of a different (but related) film? I think the answer has to be "no" simply because we can easily imagine our filmmaking practices being slightly different, such that it was common for a single screenplay to be interpreted and shot on multiple occasions in various different ways. What could prevent this? Well, nothing; it has already been done. Just consider Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho* (1998), which used a very slightly modified version of Joseph Stefano's screenplay for Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Or consider, the 1952 version of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, which was shot from the same screenplay used to make the 1937 version.

In addition, I suspect that the widening accessibility of digital technology may further change our practices such that shooting a screenplay multiple ways becomes a more common occurrence. Consider, for example, a 2007 contest sponsored by the so-called "first on-line social network for filmmaking," www.livemansion.com. Spike Lee served as the executive producer for this project/contest called "LiveMansion: The Movie," in which five finalists made different short films with the same script and the same budget. Clearly in this case, we cannot speak of the screenplay as an inseparable element of a film or of, in Carroll's terms, "the recipe and its interpretation…presented together in one indissoluble package."[45] And even if this conjecture about the way in which digital technology may change screenwriting practices turns out to be wrong, the important point is that Chapter 1 and 2's argument regarding the historical malleability of screenwriting practices and the screenplay

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[43] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

gives us cause to believe that our practices *could* change such that it might become standard practice to interpret the same screenplay on multiple occasions; it is not a matter of logical necessity, but of contingent fact that the screenplay is typically only interpreted once in the production of a single film.

Furthermore, Carroll's account of screenplays as non-detachable constituent parts of films fails to account for the status of screenplays that are never shot. Surely fan-fiction screenplays, which are written only for the purposes of being shared, read, and discussed amongst an on-line community, do not fit Carroll's characterization. For these are screenplays that are not intended to be associated with any actual film and never will be. This would not pose a problem if Carroll was only offering a characterization of the screenplay, but his claim is that screenplays are not works of art in their own right because of their ontological status—their essential nature. Perhaps Carroll could deal with this argument by suggesting that screenplays are ontologically diverse and that unproduced screenplays are not ontologically precluded from being artworks in their own right. But this still does not get him around the core of my counterargument.

In any case, Carroll does not provide any argumentation for his supposition that the putative fact that screenplays do not admit of multiple interpretations entails that they are not works of art in their own right. Remember, it is on these grounds that Carroll contrasts the screenplay with the theatrical script. On the Transcription Argument, the claim is that "[screenplays] are not the recipes used to launch an interpretation," and on the Ontological Argument, the claim is that "In contrast to the theater, where the recipe and the interpretation are two different artworks, in cinema the recipe and its interpretation are presented in one indissoluble package."[46] Now, so far I have argued that most screenplays are, in fact, production plans—or recipes that require interpretations—on the order of theatrical scripts. But why should the fact that the screenplay is not interpreted on multiple occasions preclude it from being an autonomous work of art as long as it can be regarded and evaluated apart from its execution? Just as the theatrical script underdetermines performances of it and requires an interpretive filling-in of details, so too does the screenplay underdetermine the film made from it and require an interpretation. Thus, the screenplay, like the theatrical script, is subject to appreciation and evaluation independent of an

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[46] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 69, 68.

interpretation of it—even if there is only one interpretation. Indeed, theatrical scripts that are only interpreted once in a single performance are no less works of art for it.

To put the question in broader terms, why should we think the fact that a recipe launches multiple interpretations is necessary for it being an autonomous work of art in the first place? In fact, there are good reasons to think that no such necessary condition obtains. Think of architecture. Like cinema, architecture is not a performing art, but relies upon a kind of production plan, or recipe, for the creation of a (typically) single work. For like theatrical scripts, architectural plans necessarily underdetermine the works made from them. Some filling-in of details is always required to get from the plans to the work. (Whether we construe that filling-in of details as an interpretive, let alone creative, activity is not relevant here.) Yet architectural plans are frequently recognized as works of art in their own right.[47] Consider, for example, some of Zaha Hadid's drawings and paintings for architectural works.[48] Such drawings and paintings are clearly works of art in their own right despite the fact that they are only interpreted once—if at all—in the creation of an architectural work. So, admitting of multiple interpretations cannot be a necessary condition for a recipe or plan to be an autonomous work of art.

The example of architecture, I think, points to deeper problems with Carroll's notion of two-tiered arts and his account of the ontology of performing arts. In the first place, his claim, "we call an art a performing art just in case it exhibits this duality," seems to conflate two-tiered arts with performing arts. For it is clear architecture is sometimes a two-tiered art, yet it is not a performing art. However, this is not just a quibble. Equating two-tiered arts with performing arts necessitates denying the autonomy of the screenplay as a distinct artwork precisely because cinema is not a performing art.

However, I think that Carroll's conception of the performing arts as two-tiered depends on a rather contentious account of the ontology of those arts. Let us return to his discussion of theater. Recall that drama is supposedly a two-tier art because it comprises the art of composition and the art of performance. Now, one particularly unsatisfying piece of Carroll's exposition is, as I suggested previously, that the art of performance turns out to actually be the art of interpretation. On Carroll's view,

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[47] Here I do not have in mind blueprints, but rather architectural plans that are rendered in recognizable art forms like painting, sketching, and sculpture. For a discussion of the artistic status of such plans, see Stephen Davies, "Is Architecture Art?" in *Philosophy and Architecture*, ed. Michael H. Mitias (Atlanta, GA: Rodolpi, 1994), 31-33.
[48] Ibid, 32-33.

"interpretations of the recipe are themselves types that then generate performance tokens."[49] It is important to understand that on the type/token model, the artwork is the type, which—depending on one's view—is created, discovered, or initiated by the artist. So, on Carroll's account, the creation of the second (after the performance plan) type artwork involves the activity of interpretation—not the activity of performance. Now, I do not doubt that Carroll is right to say that an artwork is created in virtue of this interpretation, but it is deeply counterintuitive to call this activity the art of performance, and suggest that actual performances merely instance tokens of an artwork, but do not create an artwork.

As I mentioned, I think Carroll is aware of this problem and attempts to alleviate it by claiming that even though dramatic performances are tokens, they still involve interpretation. For example, he writes, "the successful delivery of a token dramatic performance involves a token interpretation of an interpretation type, and, inasmuch as that depends on artistic understanding and judgment, it is a suitable object of aesthetic appreciation."[50] However, this suggestion reveals a tension that gets at one of the core problems with the notion of two-tiered arts. On this account, we have two interpretations, each of which involves creativity and artistry, and each of which is "a suitable object of aesthetic appreciation." There is no principled reason to think that both interpretations are not types—that each interpretation is not a distinct type and a distinct work of art.

There is, on the other hand, a good reason to think that even if an individual performance is a token of an interpretation type, it is also a performance type. For not only do performances appear to be interpretations on the order of interpretation types, but we also recognize that the activity of dramatic performance—in and of itself and without regard for whether it does any interpretive work—is an art. Moreover, conceiving of the ontology of theater in this way allows us to say that two very different performances of a single production—say the London 2009 production of *Waiting for Godot* starring Sir Ian McKellen on one night and his understudy the next night—simultaneously instance the same works (Beckett's theatrical work and the interpretation of director Sean Matthias and his cast and crew), but are two different works of art. Therefore, I submit, drama is, at least, a three-tiered artform, and I suspect that this argument holds good for the other performing arts as well.

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[49] Carroll, "Philosophy and Drama," 111.
[50] Ibid, 116.

Yet, there is a second substantial tension in Carroll's account of the ontology of theater and the other performing arts, which has more direct consequences for thinking about the screenplay. What is especially odd about Carroll's suggestion, in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, that launching multiple interpretations is relevant to the art status of a performance plan, is that he makes no such suggestion in his essay on the philosophy of drama. That is, in the drama essay, he does not argue that theatrical scripts *are* works of art *because* they admit of multiple interpretations. On the contrary, he simply claims that, in the case of drama, there is an "art of composition." Intuitively, this seems right, but then Carroll goes further to claim, the "play or performance plan can be discussed and evaluated in its own right, that is, apart from its performance."[51]

Here, I think, is the nub of the problem: Carroll conflates "the play" and "the performance plan." The claim that there is an "art of composition," inasmuch as the playwright creates a play in virtue of composing a performance plan, is unobjectionable. But this is not the same as claiming that the performance plans *are* the works of art created through the art of composition. This latter claim suggests that performance plans, as a class of things, are works of art in their own right. According to Carroll, the fact that the theatrical script, as we know it, is a literary work is incidental to our regarding it as an autonomous work. Its status as autonomous artwork owes to the fact that it is part of that wider class of things, performance plans. But, as I indicated earlier, this move is too quick. Even if we were to agree that performance plans are works of art in their own right, then the theatrical script is an essentially different kind of artwork in virtue of its status as a literary object. But is the theatrical script's literary status really incidental to the fact that it is an autonomous artwork? That is, is the theatrical script actually a work of art in its own right because it is a performance plan and irrespective of the fact that it is a literary work? More broadly, is being a performance plan—a recipe that invites multiple interpretations—sufficient for being an autonomous work of art?

The answer to these questions is "no," and this is readily apparent when we inspect Carroll's attempts to expand his account to the other performing arts. On his view, it will be recalled, the performing arts are two-tiered because they involve two

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[51] Ibid, 106.

distinct artworks—a performance plan and the performance of it. According to Carroll:

> [T]heater, like music and dance, can be called a two-tiered artform. In music, at least since the advent of notation, there is the score—the artwork created by the composer; and then there is also the performance—the score as played by a group of musicians. Similarly, there is the choreography of the dance which is one artwork; and then there is choreography as performed by the troupe which constitutes a discrete artwork. And in theater, there is the play—if not of the well-made sort [i.e. in the form of a script] then, at least, some kind of performance plan—and subsequently its execution (or executions).[52]

Perhaps needless to say, the difficulty here is that the performance plan of a musical work—the score—*is not* a work of art. The musical score is just a set of instructions that one must follow to instance a musical work. Nobody sits down in the easy chair after a long day at the office and reads a good musical score; they just put on a recording of a musical performance. So, one point to note here is that if musical scores afford multiple interpretations that result in distinct artworks, but are not themselves works of art, then affording multiple interpretations cannot be sufficient for a performance plan like a theatrical script to be a work of art in its own right.[53]

However, the larger point is that although the musician creates a musical work in virtue of composing a score, the score—the performance plan—is *not* the work. Now a charitable reading of Carroll's passage suggests that he does not actually believe that scores are artworks in their own right, but he is simply using the term "score" as a stand-in for "musical work." I think this is right, but it means that his notion of two-tiered arts owes to a distinction between *work* and performance, where the work is distinct from its performance plan. The score is a work-determinative document—not the work itself, nor a work of art in its own right. Therefore, there is now no reason to think that performance plans are necessarily works of art. Is the theater any different from music in these regards? No. In the case of theater, the playwright creates a theatrical work in virtue of engaging in what Carroll calls "the art of composition"—i.e. composing a performance plan. So far, so good. But the theatrical work is *not* the performance plan. The theatrical work and the performance

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[52] Carroll, *Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 68.

[53] It is worth noting that the fact that musical scores are not works of art in their own right is also contingent upon our practices rather than a matter of logical necessity owing to the essential nature of the musical score. One could argue that some of Anthony Braxton's graphic scores might be works of art in their own right, or one could at least imagine a composer creating a graphic score that was indisputably a work of art in its own right. See Graham Lock, "'What I Call a Sound': Anthony Braxton's Synaesthetic Ideal and Notations for Improvisors," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 4, no. 1 (2008), accessed January 2, 2011, http://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/csieci/article/view/462. Murray Smith offered me this example.

plan are not to be conflated for the same reason the musical work and the score are not to be conflated: Just as musical works are things-to-be-heard, theatrical works are things-to-be-watched (and heard).

But if theatrical scripts are not works of art in virtue of the fact that they are performance plans, then to what factors do they owe their art status? I want to suggest that what makes the theatrical script a work of art in its own right is, quite simply, the fact that it is a literary work. Moreover, I submit, that its status as performance plan is entirely irrelevant to its art status. And if this is right, we not only have reasons to reject Carroll's argument that screenplays are not artworks in their own right, but we also have reasons to think that at least some screenplays can be autonomous artworks insofar as they are, like theatrical scripts, verbal objects—and, furthermore, special kinds literary works.

In order to mount these arguments, however, I need to develop an alternative account of the ontology of the performing arts in order to clarify the relationship between performance plan, work, and performance. In addition, I need to show how this account bears upon the relationship between production plans and works in the non-performing arts of architecture and cinema. These tasks are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Musical Scores, Theatrical Scripts, Architectural Plans, and Screenplays

At first glance, the screenplay seems easily recognizable as a particular variety of something that is quite familiar to us: a set of instructions for generating of a work of art. Because most—if not all—screenplays have this intended primary function, they fall into a broader category of things that includes musical scores, theatrical scripts, architectural plans, and dance notation. On closer inspection, though, we see that there is a good deal of diversity among the various kinds of instructions that comprise this category. As we established in the previous chapter, film is not a performing art, and, unlike theatrical scripts and musical scores, the screenplay is typically not interpreted on multiple occasions through performances that instance works, but is interpreted just once in the creation of a single film. In this regard, the screenplay initially appears to be similar to a set of architectural plans. For we do not think of a set of architectural plans as a plan for a performance that instances a work, but roughly as a set of instructions for the creation of a single work of architecture. At the same time, insofar as a screenplay is a verbal object that can be read and usually involves a narrative, it resembles a theatrical script. The theatrical script and architectural plan differ in another important way that is of particular interest to us here: Although nearly all theatrical scripts are works of art in their own right, some—but not all—architectural plans have this status. Matters are further complicated if we also consider the musical score—a set of instructions that is like a theatrical script insofar as it is used to instance a work on multiple occasions, but which is not an independent artwork. So although we might think of sets of instructions in the arts as a category or class of things, it is clear that not all instructions are alike.

The main questions I take up here, then, are these: What can thinking about the screenplay as one of several types of instructions in the arts tell us about the kind of thing it is? More specifically, can thinking about what kind of set of instructions the screenplay is help us theorize what kind of a thing it is in more general terms? And what bearing does this have on its art status? Is the screenplay the kind of thing that can be a work of art? If so, what kind of a work of art is it?

I begin by sketching the relationships between musical scores and musical works as well as theatrical scripts and theatrical works. I argue that there is a

fundamental similarity in these relationships. Both scores and scripts are work-determinative documents. By completing a musical score or theatrical script, the composer or playwright thereby completes a musical or theatrical work, which may be instanced on multiple occasions by following the instructions in the score or script. Despite this similarity, musical scores are not works of art in their own right while theatrical scripts are. I conclude that this difference owes simply to the fact that the theatrical script is a verbal object that can be intended and regarded as a work of dramatic literature independent of the fact that it is a work-determinative document.

I then contrast these work-determinative documents with architectural plans. Architectural plans are also instructions, but they are instructions for the creation of a work of art rather than the instancing of one. That is, no work of architecture is created in virtue of the completion of a set of architectural plans because the work of architecture has, as part of its identity, the physical materials with which it is built. Likewise, the screenplay is a set of instructions for the creation of a film, but not a work-determinative document, for no "other" work is created through the completion of a screenplay. However, there is no reason to think that this fact in any way precludes the screenplay from being a work of art in its own right. On the contrary, the screenplay's status as verbal object gives it equal claim to art status on the order of the theatrical script. That is, like theatrical scripts, screenplays can be special kinds of literary works.

Musical Scores

In *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism*, Steven Price writes, "the differences between a verbal text and musical notation, between the readerships of a screenplay and a musical score, and between the spectator at a film and the audience at a concert are almost too numerous to be worth unpacking."[1] This dismissal strikes me as a missed opportunity for Price, for, as I hope to show, reflecting upon the nature of the musical score and its relationship to the musical work can actually offer us a great deal of insight about the nature of the screenplay. In this passage, Price is discussing a juxtaposition of score and screenplay made in two different contexts by Peter Wollen and Douglas Garrett Winston, respectively, the

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[1] Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 47.

latter of whom wrote: "Just as no one would claim that reading an orchestral score is as satisfying as hearing it performed, equally no one would claim that a script or synopsis is an adequate substitute for a completed motion picture."[2] What is interesting to me here is the category mistake Winston thinks someone might make in attempting to enjoy a musical work by reading the score. Of course, there is no sense in which reading a score could be as "satisfying" as hearing it performed because the score neither is the musical work, nor does it instance the work.

This point may seem obvious upon reflection, and the thought of someone reading a score in an attempt to access a musical work probably strikes one as absurd. But, I think, mistakenly assuming the score to be a work of art at first glance is understandable enough. Consider the case of Anton Bruckner's "Nullified Symphony," or, as it is also called, Symphony No. 0. In 1869, Bruckner composed the score for a symphony in D minor, but shortly later he rejected it as "not counting" and it was never performed during his lifetime.[3] The problem is that we want to say that Bruckner created an artwork before he died because the Nullified Symphony has since been performed and continues to be performed. So, one might think that if Bruckner has in fact created an artwork, then that artwork must be the score because it appears to be the only thing he created. Or, to put it another way, it seems clear enough that the composer creates a musical work in virtue of writing the score. Therefore, it appears that the score is the work, which is instanced through a performance.

In order to understand why this view is wrong, as well as how Bruckner nevertheless created a work in virtue of composing the score, let us briefly consider what kind of a thing a musical work is. A cursory glance at contemporary debates about the ontology of music reveals that musical works are commonly, if not exclusively, thought of as abstract objects—usually types that are tokened through performances.[4] In these debates, the abstract nature of the musical work is a given, and the focus is on the question of just what kind of a type it is.[5] But for type theorists of

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[2] Quoted in Price, 47.
[3] Paul Hackshaw, "The Date of Bruckner's "Nullified" Symphony in D Minor," *19th Century Music* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 252-263.
[4] For a defense of musical works as "indicated" types, see Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is" and "What a Musical Work Is, Again," reprinted in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990): 63-88 and 215-263. For a defense of musical works as "eternal types," see Julian Dodd, *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[5] Ibid.

all stripes and even most philosophers of music who do not promote type theories, musical works are nevertheless either instanced or constituted by performances.[6]

It seems uncontroversial, then, to say that our access to musical works— whatever they are—depends necessarily upon performances of them insofar as musical works are things "to-be-listened-to." But if this is right, then the score-as-work view faces a two-pronged challenge: scores are not "things-to-be-listened-to," and musical works have properties their scores do not. Roman Ingarden summarizes the problem nicely, writing, "The work possesses characteristics that do not pertain to the score and vice versa. The work of music includes sounds, or strictly speaking, tonal qualitative aspects, melodic qualities, and qualitative characteristics of various kinds of harmony and disharmony… None of this forms part of the score nor characterizes it."[7] In his recent book, Julian Dodd notes this challenge to the score-as-work view and adds two more: "First…some pieces do not have a score…Second, works of music can survive the destruction of their original scores..."[8] In sum, we can say that although a musical score supplies the instructions for the instancing of a musical work, the work itself can only be instanced through a performance. Consider, for example, Debussy's *Suite bergamasque*, which is a musical work for the piano. As a work *for* the piano, the score of *Suite bergamasque* just cannot be an instance or a token of the work; the work can only be instanced by playing the piano in accordance with the instructions specified by the score.

But if a score is neither a musical work, nor an instance of one, then what is it? Insofar as the score grounds the facts about what a musical work is like, and insofar as correctly executing the instructions it specifies will generate a correct instance of the work, the score is a work-determinative document. "The score thus designates what the work is to be like," as Ingarden writes.[9] To put it somewhat more precisely, I suggest we think of the score as Stephen Davies describes it: "a score is a musical notation the main purpose of which is to serve as a work prescription. It records a set of

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[6] See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Toward an Ontology of Artworks," *Noûs* 9, no. 2 (May 1975): 115-142, in which Wolterstorff conceives of musical works as norm kinds that are instanced through performances. Also see Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson, "Defending Musical Perdurantism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46, no. 1 (January 2006): 59-69. Caplan and Matheson argue that musical works are "fusions of performances" (59).

[7] Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity*, ed. Jean Harrell, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 39.

[8] Dodd, 21.

[9] Ingarden, 39.

instructions, addressed to performers, the faithful execution of which generates an instance of the piece it specifies."[10]

Now, a few points of elaboration are immediately in order here, for it needs to be clear that the argument that the score determines the identity of a musical work is *not* the same argument famously made by Nelson Goodman. On Goodman's view, "a score must define a work, marking off the performances that belong to the work from those that do not," and, furthermore, "what is required is that all and only performances that comply with the score be performances of the work."[11] According to Goodman, "there is…a theoretically decisive test for compliance; and a performance, whatever its interpretive fidelity and independent merit, has or has not all the constitutive properties of a given work, and is or is not strictly a performance of that work, according as it does or does not pass."[12] This leads to a rather startling conclusion: "Since complete compliance with the score is the only requirement for a genuine instance of a work, the most miserable performance without actual mistakes does count as such an instance, while the most brilliant performance with a single wrong note does not."[13] Let us set aside criticism of Goodman's view for now and simply say that a conception of the score as work-determinative differs from it considerably.[14]

Claiming that the score determines the identity of the musical work makes no commitment to Goodman's view regarding the relationship between work and performance. We can say that Debussy's score determines the facts about what *Suite bergamasque* is like without worrying about just how many wrong notes would have to be played for an attempted performance of the work to fail. (Although, it is worth noting that the performance would have to be *extraordinarily* poor for us to not even identify it as a terrible performance *of* the work; to actually *fail* to give a performance of the work, it seems that the work would really have to be unrecognizable in the performance.)

However, the score as work-determinative view recognizes that although the score determines the identity of the work, it nevertheless underdetermines performances of the work. In other words, because a score never specifies all of the

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[10] Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 100.

[11] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1976), 128.

[12] Goodman, 117-118.

[13] Goodman, 186.

[14] For a discussion of the problem, see Stefano Predelli, "Goodman and the Wrong Note Paradox," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no. 4 (October 1999): 364-375.

constitutive elements of a performance, every performance of a scored work requires a kind of interpretation of the score. As Stephen Davies writes, "There is no instance of the work without a performance and no performance without an interpretation. Interpretation (and hence performance) is creative because it must go beyond what the composer supplies in order to bring the work alive for the performance's duration."[15] So, a performance of Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* requires an interpretation of, say, the score's specification that the *Prélude* be played *tempo rubato* since *tempo rubato*— by definition—calls for the pianist to alter the tempo at her discretion. Or, to use Davies's example, "The melody notated on the opening pages of Beethoven's score for his sixth symphony must be shaped and articulated in every actual sounding of the work with a detail that goes far beyond what is notationally specified (or *could* be specified in the kind of notation used)."[16]

In sum, this account of the score as work-determinative can explain how it is that Bruckner created Symphony 0 solely in virtue of writing the score without adverting to the unintuitive claim that the score is the work. On this view, a scored work is instanced through a performance, which itself requires an interpretation of the score. However, the question of what boundaries circumscribe these interpretations such that they result in authentic performances of the work is not one that this account needs to address.

We should also note here that we typically regard performances of musical works (and theatrical works) as distinct artworks in their own right due to the interpretive work and skill that is required to generate an instance of the work. In Davies's words, this is because "[c]omposers and playwrights know they are licensing the performers to exercise their creative talents by going beyond what has been specified as work determinative. Their works could not be concretely instanced otherwise. Audiences are similarly aware of the importance of the performer's contribution. Indeed, we typically recognize performers as artists and individual performances as 'works of art' in their own right."[17] For example, the famous VE Day performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra is a work in its own right, although it depends upon Beethoven's work for its existence. And, of course, musical works admit of multiple interpretations. In addition to the VE Day performance, we also count as distinct artworks the 1974 performance

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[15] Stephen Davies, "Performance Interpretations of Musical Works," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 33-34 (2006): 17.
[16] Ibid, 16.
[17] Ibid, 17.

of Carlos Kleiber and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the 1943 performance by Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and so forth.

Here it is important to recognize that because musical works can only be instanced through performances and we regard those performances as artworks in their own right insofar as they are creative interpretations, a performance of a musical work typically involves at least two works of art. In this sense, a performance of a musical work has a kind of dual nature. As Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it, "In listening to a symphony one hears two things at once, the symphony and a performance of it."[18] So, we might not only think of musical works themselves as types, but we might also conceive their interpretations as types that can also be tokened by performances.[19]

But we ought to acknowledge that a conductor's creative interpretation of a musical work can be repeated with important variations over multiple performances. For example, next month, the London Symphony Orchestra could conceivably perform Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as it was interpreted by Kleiber in 1974. Such a case suggests that (at least some) musical performances actually involve three works. For surely we would not want to say that the LSO performance merely instances Kleiber's interpretation of Beethoven's work, but is also a work of art in its own right. For how else could we comparatively evaluate a brilliant performance of Kleiber's interpretation led by the LSO conductor on one night with a mediocre performance owing to her illness on a different night? But there is a stronger case to be made here: The LSO conductor might not merely feel well for one performance and ill for another, but might intentionally lead two different performances that constitute slightly different interpretations of Kleiber's interpretation.

In short, a performance *itself* is a human achievement that requires creativity, originality, and skill, and is, therefore, valued and evaluated in its own right. Therefore, I think we want to say that a performance by the London Symphony Orchestra instances Beethoven's musical work and Kleiber's interpretation of it, but is also a work in its own right. In addition, we can imagine a much more plausible example than the LSO performing Kleiber's 1974 interpretation. Just think of any orchestra that develops an interpretation of a musical work under a particular conductor, but performs the interpretation slightly different on tour in different cities. Each distinct performance involves a distinct, specific creative interpretation of a more

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[18] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and World of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 41.
[19] Davies, "Performance Interpretations," 13.

general, guiding interpretation of the musical work. Performances of scored musical works, then, often involve three works of art: musical works, interpretations of them, and individual performances.

In any event, the main point I want to draw out here—and to keep in the foreground as we turn to theater—is this: A musical performance involves multiple works, but—no matter how many—the score itself is not one of them. That is to say, insofar as musical performances have the dual nature described by Wolterstorff, it is because they instance and creatively interpret a musical work—not because they in any way instance the score via which the work was created. For the score itself can no more be instanced by a performance of a musical work than *it* can instance a musical work.

Another, perhaps now seemingly obvious, point to keep in mind as we turn to theater is that musical scores are not works of art in their own right. Recall that the main reason for this is simply that the score is not a *musical* work. Therefore, if a score were to be a work of art, it would have to be some other kind of work. It seems possible for a score to be a work of art if it is presented it with the right sort of intentions (whatever one takes those to be) or, more simply, if it is created in a recognizable art form—as in the case of Anthony Braxton's graphic scores.[20] But barring such special cases, scores do not appear to be artworks. For what kind of an artwork could a score be? Written in musical notation, scores are not constituted by any artistic medium. Neither are they intended to be artworks in their own right, nor is it possible for them to be without any sort of Danto-esque transfiguration. Scores are valuable objects because of their work-determinative relationship to works of art—not because they themselves are works of art.

Theatrical Scripts

The fact that musical scores are not works of art is the crucial difference between them and theatrical scripts. For in most other ways, theatrical scripts are quite like musical scores. Unfortunately, this single, peculiar quality of the theatrical script can cause a great deal of confusion about the ontology of theater. Recall the quotation from Winston describing the category mistake made by someone who attempts to

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[20] For a discussion, see Graham Lock, "'What I Call a Sound': Anthony Braxton's Synaesthetic Ideal and Notations for Improvisors," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 4, no. 1 (2008), accessed January 2, 2011, http://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/csieci/article/view/462.

appreciate a symphony by reading the score or enjoy a film by reading the screenplay. I worry that there is no mention of theater here precisely because there is a common misperception that reading a theatrical script does in fact give one access to a theatrical work.

However, a theatrical work cannot be identified with a script for the same reasons we saw that a musical work cannot be identified with its score. For one, not all theatrical works have scripts. Most "happenings," for example, are dramatic works that are not linked to any scripts. Second, it is possible for theatrical works to survive the destruction of their scripts. As long as some theater company or troupe can stage a correct performance of any given theatrical work, then the work exists.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the theatrical work is not to be conflated with the script because just as musical works require performances because they are essentially things-to-be-heard, theatrical works require performances because they are essentially things-to-be-watched (and nearly always heard as well). Indeed, one might go even further and accept Paul Woodruff's recent argument, "The purpose of theater, stated simply, is watching."[21] But whether one accepts Woodruff's definition of theater is not as important as recognizing the validity of his more modest conclusion: "Literature has no necessary part in the definition of theater, which does not require a text."[22] Another philosopher of theater, James R. Hamilton, puts the point somewhat more sharply: "there simply is no theatrical mode of presentation of works of dramatic literature: as works of literature they are *only* texts to be read."[23] Despite the fact that this kind view seems to be rising to prominence only recently, the general point was made quite clearly by Wolterstorff some time ago:

> A copy of the script for a drama is not a copy of the drama but instructions for proper performances thereof. The script may of course be a literary work in its own right. And that work can have both readings aloud and copies. But the drama is not the script. And a copy of the script is not a copy of the drama. The drama has no copies. All it has are performances. Dramas are only performance-works.[24]

In sum, neither is a theatrical work ever a script, nor is it ever instanced by a script. On the other hand, if a script is a work of art, it is not a theatrical work.

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[21] Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.
[22] Ibid, 43.
[23] James R. Hamilton, *The Art of Theater* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 32. I do not, however, endorse Hamilton's stronger claim, "a performance is, accordingly, never a performance *of* some other work" (32). On the contrary, I maintain that some, if not all, theatrical performances are performances of theatrical works—if never performances of texts. For commentary, see Sherri Irvin, "Theatrical Performances and the Works Performed," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 37-50.
[24] Wolterstorff, "Toward an Ontology," 118-119.

As I suggested previously, the idea that scores and scripts cannot be identified as musical works or theatrical works (or instances of them) may initially strike one as counterintuitive because we want to allow that composers and playwrights create works even if they are never performed. For example, in 1947 Beckett wrote a play called *Eleutheria*. The play was not performed until 2005, but Beckett had created a theatrical work long before then. Indeed, we would still say that Beckett created a theatrical work called *Eleutheria* even if it was *never* performed. But here we must be careful not to confuse the script, *Eleutheria*, with the theatrical work, *Eleutheria*. For the theatrical work, *Eleutheria*, is not something to be read, but something to be performed and watched and, as such, has properties that a verbal object like a script does not.

The fact that the playwright creates a theatrical work in virtue of writing the script—but which cannot be identified with the script—becomes clearer if we consider that some scripts are not necessarily verbal objects. Consider a visual script— characterized by drama theorist as David Cole as "a non-representational graphic pattern" intended to be performed.[25] For example, Dick Higgins created a variety of different visual scripts for his *Graphis* series of theater pieces, which he describes as "the result of a feeling that conventional theatre notation in which one action follows another leaves untried an enormous variety of techniques that could enrich our experience."[26] In an article co-authored with Higgins himself, Letty Eisenhauer elaborates upon the nature of *Graphis 82*:

> At first glance, [the script] appears to be a series of half-connected lines and curves recalling the automatic writing used in some paintings (Mathieu, Tobey). Actually, the original form of *Graphis 82* came about by making incomplete and overlapping outlines from a pair of tin snips lying on a piece of paper…The plan of *Graphis 82* was enlarged onto a piece of black polyethylene, twenty feet by twenty-four feet, which could be folded up and easily carried to the theatre, where it was stretched out onto the stage floor. In this way it served as both set and script (or score) for the performance.[27]

Surely Higgins created a theatrical work, *Graphis 82*, in virtue of creating the script described above. However, Eisenhauer's description makes it clear that the script is not

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[25] David Cole, "The Visual Script: Theory and Techniques," *The Drama Review* 20, no. 4 (December 1976): 28. It seems possible that the screenplay could evolve such that, in the future, some were purely visual. This does not, however, undermine my definition of our *present* concept of the screenplay, which takes the screenplay to be essentially verbal.

[26] Dick Higgins and Letty Eisenhauer, "Graphis," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 123.

[27] Ibid, 126.

to be identified as the work, but is rather "the plan of *Graphis 82;*" *Graphis 82* is a theatrical work to be performed.

Thus, Higgins's *Graphis 82* script and other visual scripts like it should remind us that despite the potential confusion caused by the fact that theatrical scripts are usually verbal objects, they are, nevertheless, not theatrical works. Just as in the case of music, the composer creates a musical work in virtue of composing a score that is itself neither the work itself nor an instance of it, so too in theater, the playwright creates a theatrical work in virtue of writing a script that is itself neither the work nor an instance of it.

The visual script example also shows that a performance of a theatrical work cannot be said to instance its script. Perhaps this seems counterintuitive as well. After all, insofar as the script usually contains dialogue that is spoken in the performance of the work, don't we want to say that the performance instances the script? In order to see things clearly, we must again remember that scripts and performances are two different kinds of things. Theatrical scripts are usually purely verbal objects that contain dialogue and verbal descriptions of how the dialogue should be spoken, how the characters are to behave, what the lighting, sound design, and scenery are like, and so forth. Of these elements, a theatrical performance can only instance dialogue. For the performance does not instance verbal descriptions of dialogue delivery, character behavior, lighting, sound, scenery and so forth, but rather involves those actual things.[28] And, of course, a theatrical performance cannot instance a visual script comprising a series of lines or other graphics. Thus, we ought to conclude with Roman Ingarden, "it would be a mistake to claim that the stage play is…a *realization* of a corresponding purely literary work… In the stage play we are…dealing with a *different type* of work than the *purely* literary work. In spite of that, there is a close connection…"[29] What, then, is the nature of that connection between the theatrical script and the theatrical work?

Like musical scores, theatrical scripts are work-determinative documents. That is, even though theatrical scripts are neither theatrical works nor their instances, they determine the identities of theatrical works. In virtue of completing a script in 1949, Beckett created a theatrical work called *Waiting for Godot* even though it had no instances until 1953. For by completing the script, Beckett fixed the constitutive

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[28] On this point, see Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 317-322.
[29] Ibid, 321-322. Emphasis in original.

properties of the work and, thus, the work's identity. Therefore, correctly following Beckett's script, *Waiting for Godot*, to mount a performance will result in a correct instance of the theatrical work, *Waiting for Godot*. Furthermore, in the same way that new instances of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony can be generated from a score, Beckett's script can be used over and over again to generate new instances of the theatrical work, *Waiting for Godot*. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Beckett created a theatrical work in virtue of writing a script, there is no instance of the theatrical work without a performance. My copy of the script does not give me access to the theatrical work.

Not only is a performance needed to instance a theatrical work, but furthermore, the performance requires an interpretation in the same way a musical performance does. Like a musical score, the theatrical script necessarily underdetermines the performance. At the very least, interpretive decisions have to be made about how lines of dialogue are to be delivered, how the characters are to behave, how the lighting, sound, and scenery are to be styled, and so forth. Furthermore, every new production that instances the theatrical work is necessarily a new interpretation. Because theatrical productions—for example, the Classical Theatre of Harlem's post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans *Waiting for Godot*—require activity that we commonly regard as creative or artistic, we recognize them as works of art in their own right. Thus, the post-Katrina production of *Waiting for Godot* is a distinct work, the Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen production is another distinct work, and so forth.

Borrowing Wolterstorff's insight, we can say that watching a play is like listening to a symphony insofar as it involves watching at least two works of art: the theatrical work and a performance of it. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, because theatrical performances, like musical performances, themselves involve interpretations and can be evaluated in their own right, it is more accurate say that a theatrical performance involves three works of art: a theatrical work, a production interpretation, and a performance interpretation. For example, imagine that on one night during the run of the post-Katrina *Waiting for Godot*, Wendell Pierce's understudy had to fill in for him in the role of Vladimir. Or we might imagine that Pierce's own performances varied slightly from night to night. In these cases, we would want to say that the theatrical work and interpretation remained the same, but that a Pierce performance and an understudy performance or two different Pierce

performances comprised two different works of art. Recognizing performances as works of art that are distinct from interpretations would allow us to do so. Again, if one wishes to conceive of things in terms of a type/token model, then the theatrical work is one type and the interpretation of the work is another type. Both types are tokened in a performance, which is itself a distinct type. None of these artworks (or types), however, is the theatrical script.

This is the crucial point: Theater certainly is a multi-tiered art form, but this fact is entirely unrelated to the fact that theatrical scripts are works of art in their own right. Theater, like music, is multi-tiered art because the instancing of works requires interpretations and performances—not because the theater involves scripts. Moreover, theatrical scripts are not works of art in their own right *because* they are used in the creation of multiple interpretations and/or multiple performances of theatrical works. For musical scores are also used in the creation of multiple interpretations and/or multiple performances of musical works, and we regard various interpretations and performances of musical works as distinct works of art, but musical scores are not artworks. On my account, then, theatrical scripts must be distinct artworks—and distinct types on the type/token model—for a reason we have yet to discuss.

That reason, I think, is simple enough: Theatrical scripts—in most cases—are special kinds of literary works of art—works of dramatic literature. Once we acknowledge the fact that the script does not instance the theatrical work, but is only work-determinative, it becomes apparent that the script can only be a work of art insofar as it is some other kind of work. Because scripts are typically verbal objects, it seems clear that they are candidates for counting as literary works. There does not seem to be any other sort of work the script could be said to be or to instance. Furthermore, insofar as most theatrical scripts can meet whatever descriptive criteria one sets for counting as a literary work—say being created with the right sort of intentions or being worthwhile reading for its own sake—regarding them as literary works should not be controversial. So theatrical scripts are two things: theatrical work-determinative documents and exemplars of dramatic literary works.

Conceiving of theatrical scripts as having this dual status resolves the apparent paradox we face by noting that theatrical scripts are works of art in their own right, yet do not actually instance theatrical works. When we read a theatrical script as an autonomous work of art, we are regarding it not qua work-determinative document, but rather qua dramatic literary work. For even though the script does not furnish us with

an instance of the theatrical work, it is itself an instance of a distinct and different work. This work, to which we do have direct access, is purely verbal in nature. And insofar as this work is verbal in nature, it may be a literary work as long as it meets the conditions of being a literary work—whatever those are.

Architectural Plans

The first thing to note about a set of architectural plans is that it cannot be identified as the architectural work itself or an instance of it. Just as a musical score must be performed to instance a musical work and a theatrical script must be performed to instance a dramatic work, a building must be erected to instance an architectural work.

I have initially used the word "instance" here, rather than "create" because I suspect that with architecture, perhaps even more so than with music or theater, our first intuition is to allow that someone can create an architectural work that is never instanced. For as Stephen Davies points out, "One could work as an architect while realizing that one's design never will be realized for lack of money, or of interest, or of materials, or of suitably skilled craftspeople, or whatever."[30] However, we need to be careful here. We might speak of someone working as an architect even if one's designs are never realized, but has this person really created a work of architecture, properly so-called, in virtue of creating a set of plans in the same way a composer has created a work of music in virtue of composing a score?

I think the answer to this question has to be no. Architectural works, as we commonly think of them, are physical—not abstract—objects. As with music, there are some vexing ontological questions here that I do want to broach, but it seems to me uncontroversial to say that architectural works cannot be abstract objects because of how we value them. Consider, for example, The Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's architectural work has survived a 1992 interior restoration and addition, as well as a 2005-2008 external restoration. So, works of architecture can survive some changes in the materials that constitute them. But now supposed the entire building is leveled. And let us further suppose that Wright's plans for the building are extant, whether or not they actually are. My hunch is that we

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[30] Stephen Davies, "Is Architecture Art?" in *Philosophy and Architecture*, ed. Michael H. Mitias (Atlanta, GA: Rodolpi, 1994), 33.

would feel that the leveling of the Guggenheim constituted the destruction of the work—indeed that the work was lost to us. Moreover, we would not accept that using Wright's plans to "rebuild the Guggenheim" would re-instance the same architectural work, but would create a distinct (albeit closely related) work.

Yet thinking about the how architectural works are destroyed should not suggest that their identity resides merely in a combination of design and materials. It seems that architectural works also have essential properties that depend upon their locations in space and time. The Burj al Arab, for example, has certain artistic properties in virtue of the fact that it is surrounded by water that it could not have if it was in midtown Manhattan. But the physical site is not the whole of the matter. As Stephen Davies points out, the impossibility of re-instancing the Taj Mahal in Santa Barbara is not due just to the physical difference of the two sites, but because of when, where, and how the original Taj Mahal was built. Even if something like the physical site of the original Taj Mahal was recreated in Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara Taj Mahal would not be, as Davies puts it, "the supreme achievement of the Mughal style" but "merely…a copy of an old Indian building."[31] Like any other work of art, a work of architecture's artistic properties depend upon the socio-historical context in which it is created.

In sum, we have good reasons to think that architectural works must be built in order to be created and that it would be extremely difficult—if not impossible—to instance the same work of architecture on more than one occasion. Davies claims that it does not follow from his argument that architectural works are necessarily of the single instance variety: "If the execution of a design would result in a building that is an artwork, and if the design specified in detail how the site, as well as the building, is to be constructed, and if duplicates were made within the same area and era as the first, then the artwork would have multiple instances."[32] My intuition is that these buildings would constitute different works, but even if Davies is correct, the point remains that architectural works differ from multiple instance works of the musical and theatrical variety—not simply because architectural works are not performance works, but rather insofar as their existence and their identities depend upon their instancing. This is

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[31] Ibid, 46.
[32] Ibid.

clearly not true of (composed) musical works and theatrical works, which are created and whose identities are fixed before they are ever instanced.[33]

Therefore it seems clear that architectural plans are unlike musical scores and theatrical scripts in this important regard: Musical scores and theatrical scripts are work-determinative; a musical work or a theatrical work is created in virtue of the completion of a script or score. However, architectural plans are not work-determinative because no architectural work is created in virtue of the completion of a set of plans. A set of architectural plans cannot be said to determine the identity of a work of architecture because, unlike in music and theater, the identity of a work depends on its physical materials with which it is constructed, as well as the physical and socio-historical sites where it is located. This difference, of course, ultimately owes to the fact that musical works and theatrical works are performance works, while architectural works clearly are not.

But then what is the relationship between architectural plans and architectural works? Simply put, I think we want to characterize architectural plans not as documents that determine the identity of architectural works and serve as instructions for instancing those works, but rather as instructions for the creation of architectural works. In our standard practices, a set of architectural plans is usually used only once to create a single work of architecture. Think back to Wright's plans for the Guggenheim Museum. It is unlikely that Wright intended his plans for any further use once the Guggenheim was created. And we have seen that the plans could not be used to generate another instance of that same architectural work because they are not work-determinative. Using the architectural plans to erect another building would result in a different building—not another instance of the Guggenheim.

Nevertheless, this fact does not foreclose up the possibility that Wright's plans could be used to create a distinct architectural work—a work that would be closely related to the Guggenheim, but not identical to it. In terms of the type/token model, the two buildings would not be tokens of a single type, but rather two distinct types. So, although Wright's plans have some sort of close connection to the Guggenheim, they are not exclusively linked to it in the way that Beckett's script is tethered to the theatrical work *Waiting for Godot*. For correctly using Beckett's script to stage a performance will always and necessarily result in an instance of the theatrical work,

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[33] Perhaps needless to say, this is not true of purely improvised theatrical and musical works, which are simultaneously created and instanced.

Waiting for Godot. Yet correctly following Wright's Guggenheim plans to create an architectural work will not re-instance the Guggenheim but create a new architectural work.

Therefore we ought to be careful in characterizing the relationship between architectural plans and architectural works. Although a set of architectural plans is not work-determinative—its completion does not constitute the creation of an architectural work—it very often has an intimate relationship with a particular work of architecture. In many cases, a set of plans will be created for the sole purpose of creating a single work. Nevertheless, the fact that the identity of this particular work of architecture is not determined by the set of plans means that the two are not ontologically tethered, as it were. The fact that the plans do not determine the identity of any one particular work is precisely what allows for the possibility that they may be used to create a distinct work of architecture. In this regard, architectural plans are quite unlike scores and scripts. When scores and scripts give rise to distinct works, those new works are not new works of music or theatre, but are interpretations of the single musical work or theatrical work embodied by the score or script. When architectural plans give rise to distinct works, those new works are not interpretations of a single work of architecture, but new works of architecture altogether. Architectural plans are not work-determinative documents that provide instructions for the instancing of a work, but are plans for the creation of a new work or works from which they are logically independent.

Notice here that the preceding discussion of the nature of architectural plans has nothing whatsoever to do with their art status. Understanding why is very straightforward. As with musical scores and theatrical scripts, art status does not depend on the relationship between the set of instructions and the work it is used to create. In the case of musical scores and theatrical scripts, we saw that being work-determinative does not affect whether the set of instructions can be a work in its own right. Similarly, the fact that architectural plans are not work-determinative, but are nevertheless involved in the creation of architectural works, does not in any way determine whether or not they are works of art in their own right. On the contrary, all that matters is that they meet the criteria that any candidate artwork must meet.

This account easily explains why some architectural plans—like blueprints—are not artworks, while some sets of architectural plans—like Zaha Hadid's *Cardiff Bay Opera House* are artworks. Clearly the difference amounts to the fact that Hadid's

Cardiff Bay Opera House plans are paintings, and, as such, are uncontroversially acknowledged to be artworks. The only possible source of confusion here is that Hadid is commonly recognized not just as a visual artist in the broad sense of the term, but also as an architect. But I do not think that this is an insurmountable challenge. It seems fair to say that if Hadid is truly an architect, properly so-called, it must be because she has created plans that could be used to create a work of architecture. If her plans could not be used to create a work of architecture, then she is only an artist insofar as she draws or paints images of buildings.[34]

In any case, we can see that nothing about the relationship between a set of architectural plans and its use in the creation of an architectural work has any bearing upon whether the set of plans is work of art in its own right. Clearly the plans for architectural works that are never created can be works of art just as theatrical scripts are works of art even if they are never used to stage a performance of a theatrical work. On the other hand using those plans to create an architectural work does not, of course, in anyway change the art status of the plans themselves. Their art status is secured solely in virtue of the way it is for any other candidate work that does not happen to be involved in the creation of a distinct work.

Screenplays

So, what kind of a set of instructions is a screenplay? In terms of its relationship to the finished film, it is—surprisingly—more like a set of architectural plans rather than a theatrical script. Indeed, just about all of the preceding discussion of the relationship between architectural plans and architectural works can be applied mutatis mutandis to the relationship between screenplays and films.[35]

Crucially, screenplays resemble architectural plans insofar as they are not work-determinative documents like musical scores and theatrical scripts. It would be absurd to think, for example, that one had created a film in virtue of writing a

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[34] On this point, I follow Davies, "Is Architecture," 32-33.

[35] Here I should distance myself from the view, prevalent in writing manuals and critiqued most vigorously by Steven Maras, that the screenplay is a kind of blueprint for the making of a film. The thought here seems, at bottom, to be that the screenplay specifies all of the constitutive elements of a film such that the work of the filmmakers merely involves executing the plan the screenplay sets forth. On this view, making a film is simply a matter of following instructions. I agree with Maras that this is, at best, an overly general and, at worst, misguided view of film production. On the other hand, I have to register my objection to Maras's suggestion that one of the few virtues of the screenplay as blueprint analogy is that it "can serve as a counterbalance to the idea that the script is an autonomous entity as well as the idea that the screenplay is a new form of literature." In any case, my point here is to compare the ontological autonomy of the screenplay with that of the set of architectural plans. I do not suggest that thinking about the screenplay either as blueprint or a literary work is good way of understanding its role in film production. See Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009), 121.

screenplay in the same way a composer creates a musical work in virtue of writing a score. Although a screenplay is a kind of plan for creating a film, it does not determine the identity of a film. The facts about what a film is like are only determined much later on, as the film is shot, edited, scored, sound mixed, and so forth.

Furthermore, screenplays clearly cannot be work-determinative because although interpreting and performing a score or a script in two different ways instances the same musical or theatrical work, a screenplay cannot generate new instances of the same film. Similarly, using a set of architectural plans to build on multiple occasions does not create the same work of architecture, but multiple distinct works. This is not to discount the differences between the ontology of film and the ontology of architecture. Multiple instances of a film are generated from a sort of template (the film print), whereas a work of architecture is created just one time when its construction is completed. However, the relationship between the sets of instructions and the creation of the works in film and architecture is the same. Just as Wright's plans for the Guggenheim cannot be used to generate a new instance of the original work of architecture if it is destroyed, Joseph Stefano's screenplay cannot be used to generate a new instance of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) if all of the film's templates are destroyed. In both cases, the sets of instructions can be used to create new works that are similar, but necessarily distinct from the originals.

This conclusion leads to another important similarity between architectural plans and screenplays. Although screenplays are like architectural plans inasmuch as they are typically written with the intention that they will be used in the creation of a single work, they are, also like architectural plans, nevertheless independent of that work. For, as Gus Van Sant's use of Stefano's original screenplay in the creation of a new film demonstrates, a screenplay is not necessarily tethered to a particular film. Indeed, it cannot be precisely because it is not work-determinative. Every time the screenplay is used in a production, a distinct film will be created. In contrast, every time a musical score or theatrical script is used in a performance, the same musical work or theatrical work will be instanced. A screenplay, then, is logically independent of the films it is used to create, whereas a theatrical script is inextricably linked to a single theatrical work—despite the fact that a distinct work (or works) results on each occasion the work is performed.

Now one could protest here that even though we admit that Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998) are two different films, they might be said to

both instance something else. I agree, but caution against assuming that what these two films both instance is Joseph Stefano's screenplay. For although the two films used the same screenplay (although Stefano made some minor revisions), they cannot be said to have instanced the screenplay for the same reason a theatrical performance cannot be said to instance a theatrical script. Simply put, there is much more to both kinds of manuscripts than dialogue. The films do not, for example, instance descriptions of character behavior, settings, lighting, camera movements, and so forth. What is it that both films do instance? I would say that it is the same story type, but do not want to mount much of a defense of that claim here.

Perhaps it will here be challenged that here film's parallel with theater is closer than I am allowing. That is, insofar as Beckett's "Film" screenplay has been used to make two different but intimately related movies—a 1965 picture starring Buster Keaton and a 1979 remake by the BFI—both of which we call, *Film*, is it not the case that Beckett has created an essentially verbal work, the screenplay, and some other work that can only be instanced by shooting a movie? For in the theater, Beckett's script is used to make several different productions—all of which we call *Waiting for Godot* because they share work-identity—so we say he has created a dramatic literary work, the script, and a dramatic work that can only be instanced by a production. I think this is a reasonable—and even plausible—suggestion. I have already granted the premise that, by writing the screenplay, a screenwriter has created something else that can be multiply instanced, but I have chosen to gloss this thing as a story type. Why not bite the bullet and accept that this abstract thing is not just a story type, but in fact a kind of abstract work that is intended to be instanced by films—just like Beckett's dramatic work, *Waiting for Godot* is an abstract work intended to be instanced by theatrical performances?

I think this is a tempting argument, but my sense is that accepting it would be too much of a violation of the intuitions we hold based on what we know of screenwriting practice. Specifically, most screenplays are not written with the intention of creating a work that will be instanced on multiple occasions by multiple films. On the contrary, most screenplays go through multiple drafts, revisions, and re-writes in an effort to precisely tailor them for the purposes of producing one single film. That is, most screenplays are *intended* to generate a single film. And, as I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, our collective intentions, implicit in our collective practices, are paramount in determining the boundaries and nature of our concept of the screenplay as well as other

artifact concepts like "film." So, I think that the fact that the two versions of *Film* instance something that cannot be said to be Beckett's screenplay means that in addition to the essentially verbal work of the screenplay, Beckett has created an abstract object. But I would still prefer to call this a story-type rather than some kind of abstract artwork because this is how we implicitly conceive of things in our practices. Do our practices really have this kind of power to establish the boundaries of concepts and the ontological status of artworks? I think so and will argue further for this claim in the next chapter.

Finally, what about the art status of the screenplay? Is a screenplay the kind of thing that can be a work of art, and, if so, what kind of a work of art? The short answers are "yes" and "a special kind of literary work." Let's take each question in turn. First, we have seen in the cases of music and theater that if a work-determinative document like a script or score is a work of art in its own right it is only because it also has an existence as a work that can be intended and regarded as a complete, autonomous work apart from its status as work-determinative document. Thus, the status of Beckett's script, *Waiting for Godot*, as a work of dramatic literature is unrelated to the fact that the script is work-determinative of the theatrical work, *Waiting for Godot*. Think of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: We do not treat the score as an artwork in its own right because it is work-determinative of a great musical work. On the contrary, for such a work-determinative document to be a work of art, it must be the sort of thing that can be intended and regarded to be an artwork in its own right. Musical scores, because they are written in musical notation, are not these sorts of things. However, theatrical scripts can be, if only just because they are written in language.

Screenplays, it turns out, are not work-determinative, but as we saw in the case of architecture, this seems to only further solidify the possibility that some screenplays can be works of art. This is because sets of instructions like architectural plans and screenplays are not tethered to any particular work in the way that scores and scripts are. Moreover, architectural plans are easily identified as works of art when they are composed in some recognizable art form like drawing or painting. The relationship between the set of instructions qua set of instructions and the work it is used to create has no bearing on whether the set of instructions is also a work of art in its own right.

From this perspective, it would seem that the fact that screenplays are not work-determinative of films should make it easier to understand and accept their

aesthetic autonomy. In principle, it should be comparatively easy to grasp the idea that a screenplay is logically distinct from any particular film. In contrast, explaining how theatrical scripts could be works of art in their own right, as well as determinative of other works, was quite complicated. Because screenplays, unlike theatrical scripts, are not determinative of other works, we should be saved a lot of heavy intellectual lifting.

The bottom line, then, is that, as a verbal object, a screenplay is a kind of literary work just in case it meets whatever criteria one normally applies for a verbal object to count as a literary work. Its relationship to the film is irrelevant in this regard just as the relationships between musical score and musical work, theatrical script and theatrical work, architectural plan and architectural work are all irrelevant in determining the art status of those sets of instructions.

Returning briefly to Noël Carroll's objection, we see now that it fails even on its own terms. To the claim that screenplays are not works of art in their own right because they "are ontologically ingredients in the motion pictures with which they are associated rather than being independent artworks,"[36] we may reply that, in fact, a screenplay that is used to make a film is in fact not ontologically bound to it since neither does the film instance the screenplay, nor does the screenplay determine the identity of the film. On the contrary, a theatrical script is ontologically bound to a single theatrical work, whose identity it does determine (although a theatrical work does not instance its script). However, as we saw in both the previous chapter and in this chapter, the premises of Carroll's argument are flawed in the first place. Most crucially, theatrical scripts are not works of art for the reason Carroll takes them to be—i.e., because they are performance plans. On the contrary, theatrical scripts are works of art solely in virtue of the fact that they are literary works. So, too, are screenplays works of art in their own right if they are literary works.

All that remains, then, is to establish that some screenplays are literary works in roughly the same way as theatrical scripts by successfully identifying screenplays that meet the sorts of criteria commonly used in identifying any other work of literature. It is to this task, as well as a rebuttal of objections to the screenplay as literature, that I turn in the next chapter.

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[36] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 69.

Chapter 8: Objections and Ontology II: Is the Screenplay Literature?

Thus far, I have argued that screenwriting is an art practice insofar as it emerged out of the acknowledged art practice of playwriting. Inasmuch as much mainstream screenwriting still has its roots in playwriting, it is plausible that most, if not all, screenplays are artworks—more specifically, works of dramatic literature. In the previous two chapters, I defended this argument against the objection that unlike theatrical scripts, screenplays are not autonomous works. I argued that, in fact, while theatrical scripts are ontologically tethered to theatrical works, screenplays are not so bound to films. Moreover, I argued, the theatrical script's relationship to the theatrical work has no bearing upon its art status. On the contrary, what makes the theatrical script—but not a similar set of instructions like the musical score—a work of art in its own right is simply the fact that it is a work of literature.[1] If these arguments are good, then we have reasons to think that most screenplays are works of art insofar as they are works of dramatic literature akin to theatrical scripts.

But perhaps this is too quick. Here the skeptic might demand more support for the claim that screenplays constitute a kind of dramatic literature. Furthermore, one might wonder if—the question of dramatic literature aside—screenplays really seem to be the kinds of things that are literature according to various broader, more familiar characterizations or definitions of the concept. That is, it may be challenged that screenplays are not works of dramatic literature, specifically, or that screenplays are not works of literature writ large. Furthermore, if both these challenges can be met, certain critics may have one final objection, which I mentioned briefly in Chapter 6: According to some accounts of the screenplay influenced by poststructuralist theory, the screenplay is not the kind of thing that can be a work of literature because it is an essentially incomplete work. Call this the Incompleteness Objection. In this chapter, I attempt to meet all three challenges: First, I argue that the intentional-historical approach allows us to identify not only screenplays as a category of dramatic literature, but specific screenplays as dramatic literary works. Second, I sketch out some of the various ways in which screenplays can be identified as literature in a broader sense as it is construed according to several definitions or characterizations. Specifically, I

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[1] Following Peter Lamarque and others, I presume that literary status entails art status. See Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 16.

argue that the fact that most screenplays are verbal objects, which relate fictional narratives that engage us cognitively and deploy language in aesthetically relevant ways, indicates that many screenplays meet the conditions specified by prominent characterizations of literature including aesthetic (or other value-based) accounts, speech-act accounts, and institutional accounts. Third and finally, I reconstruct the Incompleteness Objection and refute it. Screenplays, I argue, are no more incomplete than those works of literature and other art that are revised by their authors on multiple occasions.

Identifying Screenplays as Dramatic Literature

Although some screenplays are literary works, we ought to admit that some are not. This point should clear enough even without a working characterization of literature. I doubt it will be controversial to say that when screenplays exist for commercials, instructional films and videos, and pornographic movies—although a screenplay for something like *Caligula* (1979) might be an exception—they are not works of literature. Beyond these cases, there are a host of others that are harder to judge. In particular, I have in mind screenplays for documentary films. My own intuition is that the screenplay for Werner Herzog's poetic *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) is probably a work of literature, but the screenplay for the expository documentary, *America: The Story of Us* (2010) is not. However, we need not decide such hard cases here. What is more important is that we recognize that insofar as most screenplays in the classical Hollywood tradition use dialogue and scene action to create fictional narratives, we have good reasons to think that they constitute a form of dramatic literature.

To be more precise, the argument is not that the use of dialogue and scene action for the purposes of creating fictional narratives is sufficient for something to be dramatic literature (although it might be), but rather that these properties evince an intention to create something that repeats (and changes) the core features of dramatic literature. In Chapter 4, I offered a general argument that because screenwriting emerged out of playwriting as a result of intentions to simultaneously repeat and modify the latter practice, and because screenwriting was at first conceived by practitioners and critics as a kind of playwriting, we have good reasons to think that screenwriting is a kind of dramatic literary practice and that the screenplay is a kind of

dramatic literature. Two theoretical ideas underlie this argument: Noël Carroll's intentional-historical model of identifying art and Amie Thomasson's theory of artifact concept change. Carroll's approach offers a way of identifying screenwriting as an art practice and screenplays as artworks by tracing their intentional and historical connections to playwriting, while Thomasson's theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how practitioners can expand the boundaries of an artifact concept like "playwriting" or "dramatic literature."

However, the argument in Chapter 4 was sketched in the broadest of terms. One may wonder, reasonably enough, if there is other, more specific evidence at hand. That is, the skeptic might want to know just what features specific contemporary screenplays have in common with dramatic literature—or any other form of literature for that matter. Therefore, in what follows I narrow my focus to specific screenplays and particular features that they share with dramatic literature and other forms of literature. It may seem that the success of my argument depends upon saying what dramatic literature or literature, writ large, is—or saying what features are sufficient for something to be dramatic literature or literature in general. But rather than proposing a set of essential features that define literature, I rely again upon the intentional-historical approach.

My strategy here is to pick out features that are, perhaps, not sufficient for something to be literature, but that offer evidence of an intention to repeat, change, or repudiate some acknowledged form of literature. For, it will be recalled, practitioners have a certain epistemic privilege in these matters; if an agent has a substantive and substantively correct concept of what literature is and successfully realizes her intention to create "something like that thing," then the object she creates is literature. Put in Carroll's terms, a successfully realized intention to repeat, change, or repudiate some prior literature is sufficient for us to identify a candidate object as literature. So, turning away from the history of Hollywood screenwriting and towards specific, contemporary screenplays, we are looking first for evidence of intentions to repeat, change, or repudiate dramatic literary practice and, secondarily, evidence of intentions to repeat, change, or repudiate literary practice writ large.

In general, if one compares a contemporary theatrical script with a contemporary screenplay, it is very hard *not* to see the two as related forms of dramatic literature. As mentioned above, the crucial similarity is that both forms relate a narrative through dialogue and stage/scene direction. This point may be brought into

particularly sharp relief by looking at the work of a contemporary writer who composes both theatrical scripts and screenplays: David Mamet. Undoubtedly, one may object here that Mamet is a special case—and, indeed, he is. Mamet, of course, was an extremely successful playwright before he began to write screenplays, and his stature undoubtedly accounts for the fact that most of his screenplays are published and are widely regarded as an integral part of his oeuvre.[2] However, I want to keep the question of value to the side here. While it is true that Mamet's screenplays are generally valued more than others, I deny, of course, that their value is what makes them literature. On the contrary, I want to look exclusively at the formal properties of one of Mamet's screenplays, for *State and Main* (2000), as a means of tracking his intentions. If the screenplay indicates that Mamet intends to repeat the central strategies of his playwriting practice—and I think it does—then the screenplay can plausibly be identified as a work of dramatic literature on the order of Mamet's theatrical scripts.

To establish a point of reference for Mamet's playwriting practice, let us look at a passage from his 1995 script, *The Cryptogram*. Here is how the script begins:

> *A living room. One door leading off to the kitchen. One staircase leading up to the second floor.*
>
> *Evening. **Del** is seated on the couch. **John** comes downstairs dressed in his pajamas.*

John   I couldn't find 'em.

Del   …couldn't find 'em.

John   No.

Del   What?

John   Slippers.

Del   Mmm?

John   Packed.

Del   …slippers are packed.

John   Yes.[3]

[2] See, for example, Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays, and Films of David Mamet: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[3] David Mamet, *The Cryptogram* (London: Methuen Drama, 1995), 1.

The script continues along these lines for three acts over the course of sixty-one pages. That is, the bulk of the script is constituted by dialogue, aside for occasional stage directions. Perhaps needless to say, the script relates a narrative, albeit a rather elliptical one: John is a ten year-old boy who is getting ready to go on a camping trip with his father, Robert, but Robert never comes home and, over the course of the play, we learn that he is leaving John's mother, Donny, for another woman. Moreover, Del, who is Donny's friend and a father figure to John, is complicit in the betrayal. The narrative does not come to a neat close, but ends on a note of uncertainty—especially for John, whose childhood has come to an abrupt end. "Each of us," Del explains to him, "is alone."[4]

Now, although I indicated that I do not wish ground my argument by proposing a set of jointly sufficient conditions for something to count as dramatic literature, it still ought to be noted here that those conditions seem, at least, to be minimal. Specifically, for something to be dramatic literature, it appears to be sufficient that an intentionally created verbal object, through the specification of dialogue and stage directions, relates a narrative. To put it another way, it does not seem possible to think of a theatrical script comprising these elements that would *not* count as dramatic literature in the classificatory sense. This is an important point not only because the bar for a screenplay to count as a work of dramatic literature seems rather low, but also because it move us away from worrying about the relative quality and value of Mamet's writing. For the thought here is that *all* Mamet had to do to create a work of dramatic literature was to write a theatrical script that employed dialogue and stage directions to create a narrative.

With these points in mind, let us consider a representative scene from the early pages of Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay:

EXT. WALT'S OFFICE – DAY

Joe reading the Burlington Banner. He stands up.

WALT
Mr. Bailey…Mr. Bailey…?

Walt and Mr. Bailey enter Walt's office.

JOE

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[4] Ibid, 56.

(to passing secretary)
I lost my <u>typewriter</u>...?

A.D.
(passing)
Yes, could I please speak to my <u>wife</u>...?

ANGLE interior Walt's office.

WALT
I have to tell you, I can not <u>express</u> to you how
<u>happy</u>...

MAYOR
And we're glad to have you here...

WALT
My golly, you know? All my life I grew up in the
city, but every summer...would you like a cigar?

MAYOR
(of cigars)
Aren't these <u>illegal?</u>

WALT
Why would they be illegal?

BILL
...there's a trade embargo against Cuba.

Pause.

MAYOR
Well, you know, Walt, I just wanted to say that
anything I could do.[5]

As this passage indicates, the screenplay comprises roughly the same elements as the theatrical script. Most of the screenplay is constituted by dialogue and scene action (roughly, the cinematic equivalent of stage directions). In addition, the screenplay also contains scene headings and, occasionally, camera directions. Although it is not broken into acts, the screenplay, like the theatrical script, also relates a narrative: A Hollywood film crew's decision to shoot a film in a rustic Vermont town causes a series of disasters, but eventually all the problems are resolved and the film is able to resume shooting and no one is worse for the wear.

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[5] David Mamet, *State and Main: The Shooting Script* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), 11.

Again, one way of making the argument that the *State and Main* screenplay is a work of dramatic literature is that it contains those features—dialogue, stage/scene direction, and a narrative—that appear to be sufficient for something to count as dramatic literature. However, the argument can also be made without appealing to any supposition of dramatic literature's sufficient (or necessary) conditions. Even if the combination of features I have mentioned is in fact not sufficient for something to be dramatic literature, it seems clear that the set of features does indicate an intention to repeat (while slightly modifying) recognizable forms and purposes of dramatic literature. In this particular case, perhaps "replicate" or "reproduce" is a more accurate word than "repeat"; saying that Mamet has written his screenplay with the intention of repeating the strategies used in his playwriting practice has an odd ring to it since it is unlikely that he set upon writing the screenplay with a kind of conscious intention to "re-do" what he did in the writing of his theatrical scripts. However, "replicate" gets at the crucial idea that the intentions with which Mamet writes a screenplay are roughly parallel to those with which he writes a theatrical script.

In other words, Mamet's intention in writing the screenplay for *State and Main* is to use dialogue and scene action to construct a narrative—more specifically, a narrative that will be ultimately be enacted. Likewise, his intention in writing *The Cryptogram* is to use dialogue and stage directions to construct a narrative that will be enacted. The similarities in appearance between script and screenplay are, then, not merely superficial, but owe to the fact that Mamet's intentions parallel each other in these cases. The medium through which the audience ultimately watches these dramatic narratives unfold is obviously different, but, as I argued in the previous chapter, this is orthogonal to the main point. The similar forms of Mamet's screenplay and theatrical script indicate that they have been composed with roughly the same intention. Thus, if Mamet's screenplay is doubted to be a work of dramatic literature, it can plausibly be identified as such in virtue of the fact that Mamet created it with the same kind of intention with which he creates acknowledged works of dramatic literature. Perhaps, then, Mamet's screenwriting does not involve an intention to literally repeat the strategies of his playwriting, but it involves a reproduction of them—which only makes a stronger case for recognizing his screenplay as a work of dramatic literature.

Screenplays and the Definition of Literature

Although I have made a case that some screenplays are works of dramatic literature on the order of theatrical scripts, one may protest here that in this discussion I have set the bar for something to count as literature too low. For even if my argument is good, the objection may go, it seems that I have really just smuggled screenplays in through the backdoor by connecting them to a putatively peripheral mode of literary practice. Dramatic literature aside, isn't our general conception of literature more robust? Does literature, as we commonly think of it, not involve, say, techniques and devices specific to the linguistic medium? Or, one might wonder, is literature not an inherently evaluative concept that essentially involves aesthetic value? In short, perhaps my first argument leaves a more robust conception of literature—and an explanation of how screenplays fall under the concept—to be desired.

I do not intend to either propose or endorse a particular characterization of literature here. What I want to show, however, is that many screenplays will count as literature on any one of several prominent accounts: linguistic definitions, semantic definitions, speech-act definitions, aesthetic definitions (or other value-based definitions), and institutional definitions. In addition, as the discussion proceeds, it is important to bear in mind that the features that allow us to identify screenplays as literature on these various accounts are, in most cases, also features that evince an intention to repeat, change, or repudiate literary practice in such a way that allows us to identify them as works of literature according to the intentional-historical approach. That is, I will attempt to explicitly show that screenplays count as literature on the terms of these various characterizations while simultaneously implicitly demonstrating that the reasons why screenplays succeed on these accounts also indicate that they can plausibly be identified as literature according to the intentional-historical approach.

Let us begin with what Peter Lamarque calls "the entirely plausible premise that there is something special about literary uses of language."[6] The idea Lamarque describes (but critiques) here is that the essence of literature is to be located in uses of language that are specific to literary works. Following Robert Stecker, we might refer to this variety of definition as a "linguistic definition."[7] This seems to be roughly what Adrian Martin has in mind when he claims that screenplays "rarely hold up as literary objects, because they are mere skeletons without flesh, tales without poetry or

[6] Lamarque, 46.
[7] Robert Stecker, "What is Literature?" reprinted in *Philosophy of Literature: Contemporary and Classic Readings*, eds. Eileen John and Dominic McIver Lopes (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 66.

metaphor, figures without life."[8] As Lamarque, Stecker, and others point out, however, the problem with such a conception is that paradigmatically poetic devices such as metaphor are neither necessary nor sufficient for something to be literature. According to Lamarque, "It is far from clear…that [such devices] can form the basis of a generalized account of literature as art. Poetic devices are not universal features of literary works and are not usual or mandatory in, for example, prose fiction. Nor, more interestingly, is their presence an automatic sign of the poetic."[9] Indeed, any number of acknowledged literary works would seem to fall afoul of Martin's complaint regarding screenplays, while it would seem that a greeting card that used metaphors might count as a literary work on this account.

Nevertheless, if one finds a linguistic definition of literature convincing, it ought to be clear that many screenplays do in fact deploy the kinds poetic devices Martin has in mind. The discussion in Chapter 5, for example, outlines several ways in which Ernest Lehman's screenplays mobilize various poetic devices. Here, I want to briefly consider one additional such device—free indirect discourse—which Cynthia Baughman and Jeff Rush have analyzed in the context of screenwriting. In a survey of narratology, free indirect discourse is characterized as follows: "While still representing the contents of an utterance in a narrative context, it draws stylistically and syntactically on the expressive power of direct speech. Thanks to the fact that there is no syntactic frame…the stretch of speech being depicted is incorporated into the flow of the narrative."[10] Baughman and Rush offer an example of the use of free indirect discourse in John Dos Passos's *Nineteen-Nineteen*:

> The Maiden Evelina used to go into Miss Mathilda's room when she
> was out and look at herself for a long time in the lookingglass [sic].
> Her hair wasn't mousy, it was quite fair if only they would let her have
> it curly instead of in pigtails and even if her eyes weren't blue like
> George's they had little green specks in them. Her forehead was
> noble.[11]

In this passage, according to Baughman and Rush, "the lack of quotes and attribution causes Mathilda's judgment to blend with that of the narrator, but in an ambiguous

[8] Adrian Martin, "Making a Bad Script Worse: The Curse of the Scriptwriting Manual," *Australian Book Review* 209 (April 1999), accessed October 5, 2009, http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/April99/mar.html (site discontinued).
[9] Lamarque, 47.
[10] Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 67.
[11] John Dos Passos, *Nineteen-Nineteen* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), 84.

way. We are not quite sure whether the narrator agrees with Mathilda's assessment of her looks or is allowing her to make a judgment the narrator does not share."[12]

While some critics champion free indirect discourse as an "exclusively 'literary' style,"[13] we ought to note that it is frequently used in screenplays. For example, Baughman and Rush analyze the ways in which free indirect discourse can be used in screenplays to allow the reader access to the interiority of characters despite the fact that there is no strict visual equivalent for this—no way in which the free indirect can be used instrumentally to specify a shot. They offer an example from the beginning of Gus Van Sant's screenplay for *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). The scene begins with rather straightforward scene action: "The clouds are puffy against a deep blue sky. The road is red. Purple mountains surround Mike on all sides far in the distance, ten miles away."[14] Baughman and Rush write that "[a]lthough we may not associate these environmental details with Mike's internal state at this point, the language used to describe them has an intensity and clarity that suggests it is far more than just background description."[15]

Shortly, Mike speaks in voiceover: "You can always tell where you are by the way the road looks. Like I just know that I been to this place before…There ain't no other road on earth that looks like this road. I mean, exactly like this road. One of a kind. Like someone's face. Like a fucked up face…"[16] Here the narrative perspective becomes ambiguous. The scene action tells us, "The road has a definite face. Two distant cactus for eyes – a cloud shadow for a mouth, mountains for hair."[17] Had the screenplay specified this image in a POV shot, we would clearly understand that it was Mike's hallucination and, furthermore, we would have a way of easily indicating this visually. Instead, however, the perspective of the writing remains purposefully ambiguous here. This ambiguity continues as we are told in the scene action, "Mike thinks about the loneliness of the road."[18] Then, Mike tells us, "This is nowhere. I'll bet that nobody is ever going to drive down this road. I'll be stuck here forever."[19] Echoing Mike's sentiments, the scene action states, "Mike looks at the road stressfully. The road looks back. He looks at the road his eyes growing heavy. The

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[12] Cynthia Baughman and Jeff Rush, "Language as Narrative Voice: The Poetics of the Highly Inflected Screenplay," *Journal of Film and Video* 49, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 33.

[13] Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 485.

[14] Quoted in Baughman and Rush, 35

[15] Baughman and Rush, 35.

[16] Quoted in Baughman and Rush, 36.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

road looks back…"[20] The scene ends with us watching Mike as he falls into a narcoleptic spell—before the screen goes black in concert with his own blackout.

Baughman and Rush write of this scene:

> We have been guided through a series of relationships between narrator and character, with no confidence we can identify where one's perceptions end and the other's begin. The narrator seems to be simultaneously telling and living the story, communicating a vivid sense of hyper-clarity that precedes Mike's sleep seizures.[21]

For our purposes, the significance here is that the effects Baughman and Rush describe are accomplished through the use of what is claimed to be a specifically literary device—free indirect discourse—rather than camera directions.

Unsurprisingly, the use of free indirect discourse is more common in art cinema screenplays and in the work of those who write in other literary genres. A particularly striking instance can be found in Dylan Thomas's screenplay, *The Doctor and the Devils*, which was published after his death in 1953 but not produced until 1985—after being revised by Ronald Harwood.[22] Consider the following scene:

INTERIOR OF TAVERN B

> The tavern is crowded. Many of the faces are familiar to us now: That old bag of female bones over there, she was the one who described to Fallon and Broom the profession of Andrew Merry-Lees; that fat woman with a pipe there, who tosses down her drink as a tamed seal swallows a fish, she was the one who kept the stall where Fallon and Broom bought clothes for their women; that humpback there, looking at everything with an idiot smile, he is the one called Billy Bedlam; one of those two very young men over there, being wise and waggish to a pretty girl of sixteen, is the student, Bennet; that tall man in a scarecrow's top hat, hiccupping solemnly, he is the one called Andrew Merry-Lees; and there are others we have seen before, in the tavern, in the street, in the Market, all of them, in their way, vice-residents of the tavern; and among them a few honest, very poor people. We see all this through Jennie Bailey's eyes.[23]

In this passage, the perspective oscillates ambiguously between that of the narrator and Jennie Bailey. Further ambiguity is created by the tension between the narrator's declaration that "Many of the faces are familiar to us" and the final assertion that "We

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Baughman and Rush, 36.

[22] Interestingly, when Donald Taylor, who had commissioned the screenplay, published it after Thomas's death, he claimed: "The screenplay of *The Doctor and the Devils* is the first to be published as a book before the film has been produced. There is no doubt to the literary quality, unusual in this medium." See his afterword in Dylan Thomas, *The Doctor and the Devils* (New York: Time Reading Program, 1964), 174.

[23] Thomas, 74-75.

see all this through Jennie Bailey's eyes."[24] Despite the apparent clarification of the latter statement, the tension is not assuaged. If we see everything from Jennie Bailey's perspective, we must wonder why we have been told that the faces are familiar to us now and to whom the tamed seal simile can be attributed. What is clear, however, is that in addition to describing a scene for a film, this passage offers a specifically "literary" experience. The use of language here plumbs the interiority of a character in a way that is simply not possible in film and, through the use of literary devices like simile, creates imagery with which only a reader can engage.

If one thinks it is unfair to use a screenplay by Dylan Thomas as evidence of the use of literary devices that seem intended to be read for their own sake, examples from mainstream screenwriting are easy enough to find. Here are two examples of free indirect discourse from Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess's *Sopranos* teleplay, "The Knight in White Satin Armor." The first is in a piece of scene action immediately after Janice shoots and kills Richie: "She turns back and looks into the kitchen, at Richie. Omigod."[25] The second example occurs in the final scene of the episode, upon Tony's arrival home after he has disposed of Richie's body and put Janice on a bus out of town.

<div align="center">

TONY
Richie's gone.

CARMELA
What do you mean, gone?

TONY
Gone.

CARMELA
Where?

TONY
Carmela, after twenty years of marriage don't make me
make you an accessory after the fact.

CARMELA
Accessory after the...?
(beat)
Holy shit.

TONY

</div>

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[24] Ibid.
[25] Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess, "The Knight in White Satin Armor," in *The Sopranos: Selected Scripts from Three Seasons* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 243.

Stop asking.

CARMELA
Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

TONY
I took care of it.

What can she say? He did. Only he could—and would. She shakes the cobwebs out of her head.[26]

In the first example, the "Omigod," seems to be from Janice's perspective, but it is odd to see such an exclamation appear in scene action as untagged discourse. Thus, there is an ambiguity here: Is this her reaction? The narrator's? Ours? And of course, this quick slip from the description of scene action from the standard, third-person perspective to "Omigod" cannot be translated to the screen. In the second example, the use of free indirect discourse is more sustained. All of the scene action here is ambiguously situated somewhere between the narrator's perspective and Carmela's. Again, what the screenplay presents here is specific to the linguistic medium; there is no way to visually represent a thought like, "Only he could—and would," from Carmela's perspective. At best, we could have a close-up of her expressing a sort of resignation—and perhaps admiration. But the specification for a close-up and a facial expression is just what the teleplay does not give us here. Rather, it gives us an understanding of Carmela's mental state in a way that is specific to the linguistic medium.

Yet because such devices as free indirect discourse cannot be sufficient for literature-hood, it is perhaps less productive to identify them in screenplays than it is to ask to what end literary works mobilize them. For, Lamarque suggests, a characterization of literature that is more plausible than a linguistic definition might suggest that despite the fact that such devices are not themselves specific to literature, they may fulfill some other function or to be directed towards some other end in such a way that is common to all and only literary works.[27] One such functional definition Lamarque considers is Monroe Beardsley's semantic definition of literature. According to this account, as it was originally formulated: "a literary work is a

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[26] Ibid, 255-256.
[27] Ibid.

discourse in which an important part of the meaning is implicit."[28] As Lamarque summarizes it, "What marked out literary language, on [the semantic definition], was 'semantic density,' or a high level of 'implicit meaning.'"[29]

As Beardsley himself indicates in the passage following the proposal of the semantic definition of literature, screenplays appear to count as literature on this view insofar as they meet the implicit meaning condition.[30] Consider, for example, Herman Mankiewicz and Orson Welles's screenplay for *Citizen Kane* (1941). The *Citizen Kane* screenplay employs imagery and metaphor in two early scenes to construct implicit meaning and establish two of the film's most important themes: Kane's insulation and isolation from the world around him and the prism of his identity. Here is the beginning of the screenplay:

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FADE IN

EXT. XANADU — FAINT DAWN — 1940 (MINIATURE)

WINDOW, VERY SMALL IN THE DISTANCE, ILLUMINATED
All around this is an almost totally black screen.
Now, as the CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY towards the window
which is almost a postage stamp in the frame,
other forms appear; barbed wire, cyclone fencing,
and now, looming up against an early morning sky,
enormous iron grille work.[31]
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This passage very obviously uses the images of the barbed wire, cyclone fencing, and iron grille work to create a metaphor for the barriers Kane sets up all around him in his personal life. Indeed, the barriers are sometimes literal and physical. But this opening passage uses the literal to establish a meaning that is implicit here and throughout the story. Consider, also, the passage that describes Kane's death:

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THE CAMERA PULLS BACK, showing the whole scene
to be contained in one of those glass balls
which are sold in novelty stores all over the
world. A hand — Kane's hand, which has been
holding the ball, relaxes. The ball falls out
of his hand and bounds down two carpeted steps
leading to the bed, the CAMERA FOLLOWING. The
ball falls off the last step onto the marble
floor where it breaks, the fragments glittering
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[28] Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 126.

[29] Lamarque, 47-48.

[30] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 126.

[31] Herman Mankiewicz and Orson Welles, "Citizen Kane," Third Revised Final Script dated July 16, 1940. Quoted in Claudia Sternberg, *Written for the Screen: The American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 1997), 67. Sternberg offers a good close analysis of the first four pages of the screenplay. See 71-76.

> in the first rays of the morning sun. This ray
> cuts an angular pattern across the floor,
> suddenly crossed with a thousand bars of light
> as the blinds are pulled across the window.[32]

Clearly, this passage uses imagery to initiate another of the story's important metaphors—the prism of Kane's identity. One of the most discussed implicit meanings of the film—and one which we see present in the screenplay—has to do with the inability to get at a kernel or core of truth about who Kane was—or who any person is. This implicit meaning is apparent in the film's narrative structure, its dialogue, and its imagery. But in many cases, it is the language of the screenplay that establishes that meaning by specifying the images we see in the film. In this case, the passage introduces splintered or rounded glass as a metaphor for the fracturing, distorting, and overlapping of narratives about who Kane is. So it seems that at least some Hollywood screenplays not only contain poetic devices, but also mobilize those devices to construct the kind of implicit meaning Beardsley takes to be the essence of literature.

Later, Beardsley's thinking shifted and he attempted to combine the semantic definition of literature with an illocutionary-act, or speech-act, definition.[33] The result is a disjunctive definition, according to which literary discourse "might be defined as 'discourse that is either an imitation illocutionary act or distinctly above the norm in its ratio of implicit to explicit meaning.'"[34] Although this proposal does not address the problem that having a high level of implicit meaning cannot be sufficient for something to be literature, the thought is that the illocutionary act disjunct allows that a sufficient condition for a discourse to be literature is that it is imaginative—i.e. that it presents a fiction—while the implicit meaning disjunct ensures the possibility of non-fiction literature in the form of speeches, sermons, and essays. According to Beardsley, the definition takes its force from the fact that the two disjuncts are connected inasmuch as "[b]oth are forms of verbal play that set a discourse notable apart from pragmatic functions—one by deficiency of illocutionary force, the other by excess of semantic display. Both help to make a discourse self-centered and opaque, an object of attention in its own right."[35]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] The example of an illocutionary act definition that Beardsley cites is Richard Ohmann's proposal: "A literary work is a discourse whose sentences lack the illocutionary forces that would normally attach to them. Its illocutionary force is mimetic. By 'mimetic,' I mean purportedly imitative. Specifically, a literary work purportedly imitates (or reports) a series of speech acts, which in fact have no other existence." Quoted in Monroe Beardsley, "The Concept of Literature," in John and Lopes, 55.
[34] Beardsley, "The Concept of Literature," in John and Lopes, 57.
[35] Ibid.

Again, one of the central problems with this account is that having a high level of implicit meaning cannot be sufficient for something to be literature, but, in addition, neither can the fact that something is an imitation illocutionary act, or a fiction, be sufficient for literature-hood. For example, a child's embellished fib or a joke may offer a fictional narrative, but that does not make it a work of literature. However, there does seem to be some sort of special relationship between fiction and literature, and if one finds Beardsley's disjunctive definition convincing, it seems clear enough that on this account many screenplays that do not meet the implicit meaning condition will still count as literature insofar as they meet the imitation illocutionary act condition.

Despite the inadequacy that many find in the two disjuncts Beardsley proposes, the thought that what connects them, and underlies the concept of literature more broadly, is that they are kinds of discourses worthy of attention in their own right seems quite plausible. Something like this idea motivates Robert Howell to conceive of literature "as, roughly, that body of works, essentially and significantly involving the use of words, that are, or that are put forward to be objects with aesthetically relevant features. Those are features whose reception, through reading, hearing, or speaking, is worthwhile for its own sake."[36] Howell goes on to offer a list of examples of such features, which includes "the striking use of metaphor, imagery, rhyme, and rhythm."[37] The thought here, then, is that while the possession of these features alone do not make something literature, the presentation of them as aesthetic objects or as objects with features whose reception is worthwhile for its own sake *is* sufficient for the work in which they appear to be literature.

On Howell's characterization, many screenplays will clearly qualify as works of literature. Here, too, one may return to Chapter 5's discussion of Ernest Lehman's work for detailed examples, but the general point can be made simply enough by briefly recalling the following passage from his final version of the screenplay for *Sweet Smell of Success*:

> It is 2:30 A.M. and the Broadway district is deserted. The spectacular signs are no longer shining. The sidewalks are littered with refuse. It is the hour when bright dreams have turned to ashes. Sidney is walking

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[36] Robert Howell, "Ontology and the Nature of the Literary Work," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 67.
[37] Ibid.

> slowly toward his apartment. There is no purpose in his stride. He is
> not going anywhere – not ever again – and he knows it.[38]

As noted in Chapter 5, the language in this passage clearly contains the kinds of aesthetically relevant features Howell has in mind—specifically, the use of imagery and metaphor. Moreover, their reception—in most cases through reading, one would assume—is clearly worthwhile (and intended to be so) for its own sake. As I suggested previously, the metaphor that describes unrealized dreams as ashes and equates them with the rubbish on the sidewalk may have some instrumental value to the production team inasmuch as it establishes the tone of the scene. However, the words that constitute that metaphor, and other words that bear aesthetically relevant features, are also clearly worthwhile reading in their own right. Moreover, Lehman intends them to be; the metaphor isn't in the screenplay to be shot; it is there to be read. Such aesthetically relevant uses of language appear throughout the screenplay and indicate that it and other screenplays are strong candidates for counting as works of literature on Howell's account.

Underpinning Howell's conception is the idea that being a literary work is a matter of possessing some degree of aesthetic value as a result of the use of words. Although this is a familiar and plausible characterization of literature, it has been challenged by Robert Stecker, who writes, "I deny that this approach provides an adequate characterization of literary value and claim the range of values characteristic of imaginative writing falls under several basic categories. Aesthetic value is certainly one of these, but so is a distinctive sort of cognitive value, and interpretation-centered value."[39] Stecker's own proposal is a disjunctive definition of literature that attempts to accommodate all of these values. Summarily put, it is this:

> A work *w* is a work of literature if and only if *w* is produced in a
> linguistic medium, and,
> (1) *w* is a novel, short story, tale, drama, or poem, and the writer of *w*
> intended that it possess aesthetic, cognitive or interpretation-centered
> value, and the work is written with sufficient technical skill for it to be
> possible to take that intention seriously, or
> (2) *w* possesses aesthetic, cognitive or interpretation-centered value to
> a significant degree, or
> (3) *w* falls under a predecessor concept to our concept of literature and
> was written while the predecessor concept held sway, or

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[38] Ernest Lehman, "*Sweet Smell of Success*: 'final version of the Lehman script'" (1956) in the Ernest Lehman Collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin (ELF120.006).
[39] Stecker in John and Lopes, 68.

(4) *w* belongs to the work of a great writer.[40]

One merit of Stecker's definition is that it is pluralist about the kinds of values that we take literature to have. One way of putting it is that this account allows that a verbal object might be literature insofar as it worthwhile reading for its own sake, but not necessarily because of its aesthetic value.

Stecker's definition not only avoids many of the objections that can be lodged against other accounts, but also lines up nicely with several of our intuitions and practices. For example, the notion that a verbal object might count as literature in virtue of its cognitive value seems crucial to explaining the fact that both theatrical scripts with sparse prose and "junk" fiction are no less varieties of literature than Romantic poetry. For example, a Dean Koontz suspense novel may not be the most aesthetically valuable literature, but is, on Stecker's account, literature nonetheless insofar as it is produced in a linguistic medium and possesses a significant degree of cognitive value, demanding (at the very least) that we mobilize our cognitive faculties to follow the narrative constructed by the words on the page, to anticipate the direction of the narrative, and, perhaps, to imagine ourselves in the place of one or more of the characters. As Noël Carroll points out, "Junk fiction can sustain interest, in part, because it affords the opportunity for self-rewarding cognitive activity, which, if it is not as arduous as higher mathematics, is not negligible either."[41] Moreover, much junk fiction engages us cognitively by raising and encouraging us to reflect upon ethical or moral questions: Do the ends justify the means in the detective's investigation? Or do his unethical tactics in apprehending the killer give us pause to think about the nature of justice? Insofar as even the most formulaic genre narratives that prompt us to consider such questions bear cognitive value, they quite clearly qualify as literary works.

The importance of this fact to the proponent of the screenplay as literature should be clear: Stecker's account not only assuages the worry that screenplays do not have the kind of poetry or aesthetic value commonly taken to be essential to literature, but offers a suggestion as to what non-aesthetic values screenplays might have that do make them literature. Specifically, it seems that although the aesthetic value of some, say Hollywood genre picture, screenplays might not be readily apparent, they clearly have the same kinds of cognitive value as terse, plot-oriented theatrical scripts and

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[40] Stecker in John and Lopes, 71.
[41] Noël Carroll, "The Paradox of Junk Fiction," *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 343.

junk fiction. Reading the screenplay of a workaday genre picture, say for *Shutter Island* (2010), offers the same sort of appreciable cognitive engagement as does reading a rather pedestrian theatrical script like *A Few Good Men* or junk fiction novel like John Grisham's *The Firm*—both of which are indisputably works of literature, albeit not of great aesthetic value. Indeed, very often the same sorts of formulaic narratives on offer in Hollywood genre picture screenplays are those on offer in the junk fiction of authors like Grisham and Koontz. Nevertheless, insofar as these genre screenplays, like junk fiction novels, allow us, as Noël Carroll puts it, "to exercise our cognitive powers, our powers of interpretation and inference, our powers of moral judgment and emotive assessment,"[42] they easily meet Stecker's cognitive value condition and count as literature.

Finally, let us consider whether screenplays meet the conditions set forth by an institutional definition of literature. One well-known version of an institutional definition is proposed by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, who claim, "A text is identified as a literary work by recognizing the author's intention that the text is produced and meant to be read within a framework of conventions defining the practice (constituting the institution) of literature."[43] Elsewhere, Lamarque elaborates that on this account, "the existence of literary works depends on a set of conventions concerning how they are created, appreciated, and evaluated; in other words, on attitudes, expectations, and responses found in authors and readers."[44]

Leaving potential criticisms of Lamarque and Olsen's institutional definition aside, we ought to note that it poses the greatest challenge to the idea that screenplays can be literary works. For is it really plausible that any screenplay is written with the intention that it is "produced and meant to be read within a framework of conventions defining [literary] practice"? Indeed, this question recalls Noël Carroll's objection that screenplays simply are not the kinds of things that are read in the same way as novels and theatrical scripts. On the contrary, many screenplays seem intended to be read not within the framework of the conventions that define literature as an institution, but within the framework of conventions specific to film (pre-) production. In other words, is it not the case that Hollywood screenplays are intended to be read only within the "institution" of the Hollywood system rather than within the institution of literature?

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[42] Ibid, 344.
[43] Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 255-256.
[44] Lamarque, 62.

I think it is plausible that, in some cases, the answer to this question is "yes," however much depends on precisely what one takes the conventions that define the practice of literature to be. If those conventions are understood relatively broadly, more screenplays would fall under the concept of literature; if the conventions are construed more narrowly, less screenplays would fall under the concept. Significantly, though, even if one assumes a very narrow construal of the conventions of literary practice, at least some screenplays will still count as literary works. This is because some screenplays are written and read entirely outside Hollywood (or any other institution of film production) and within the framework of the conventions of literary practice (understood most narrowly). The best example of this is the kind of web-based, fan-fiction screenwriting that I explore in depth in the final chapter. Briefly, however, the idea is that fans of various movies or television shows write their own original teleplays or screenplays with the specific intention of sharing them with other fans that read and respond to them. The thought here is that these fans constitute communities of writers and readers in the most conventional sense. The screenplays in these communities are created, appreciated, and evaluated within the same framework of conventions as a paradigmatic community of poets writes and reads the work of its members. Therefore, at least some screenplays will still count as literature even if one accepts an institutional definition that construes the conventions of literary practice in the narrowest of terms.

In sum, I hope it is clear that many, if not most, screenplays can plausibly be identified as literary works even without assuming any specific definition or characterization of literature. By my lights, offering an identifying narrative that traces the screenplay's relationship to the theatrical script is the most convincing way to establish the literary status of screenplays generally. Furthermore, as the examination of Lehman's work in Chapter 5 and the brief look at Mamet's work in this chapter showed, there is evidence to suggest that some screenplays are created with roughly the same kinds of intentions as acknowledged literary works. However, one need not accept the validity of the sort of intentional-historical approach I have advocated. For, as we have seen, many screenplays easily meet the conditions for literary status specified by various prominent definitions of literature, including linguistic definitions, semantic definitions, speech act definitions, aesthetic definitions and other value-based definitions, and institutional definitions. This suggests that however one ultimately wishes to conceive of literature, at least some—probably many—screenplays fall under

the category. Thus, the vexed question—"what is literature?"—need not be answered for us to plausibly identify screenplays as literary works.

The Putative Incompleteness of the Screenplay

In Chapter 6, we saw that Carroll's objection to the notion that the screenplay is an autonomous artwork is underpinned by an ontological claim—a claim regarding the essential nature of the screenplay. Similarly, the most prominent objection to the idea that screenplays can be literature—what I shall call the Incompleteness Objection—depends upon a particular conception of the ontology of the screenplay. On this view, the screenplay is essentially unfinished or incomplete; therefore, it cannot be literature. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the most prominent objections to the screenplay as art and the screenplay as literature both arise from worries about its supposedly peculiar ontological nature. Indeed, Steven Maras sees the question of autonomy and the question of completeness as linked: "The critique of the screenplay as an autonomous object…focuses on the ongoing relationship between a script and the film in the process of production, leading to questions about the script's completeness and its intermediate nature."[45] The thought here seems to be that in the same way the relationship between screenplay and film casts doubt upon the screenplay's autonomy, so too does that relationship cast doubt upon the screenplay's completeness.

However, it must be reiterated here that the burden of proof is on the skeptic rather than the proponent of the screenplay as art or literature to show what bearing ontology has on art or literary status. For the discussion so far has offered strong *prima facie* evidence to suggest that screenplays are, in fact, works of literature, and, as I argued in Chapter 6, ontology is normally a secondary concern in our attempts to identify art. For example, we have *prima facie* evidence to think that Schubert's Unfinished Symphony is a work of art. Now, the fact that the symphony is not complete may complicate matters as far as some philosophers are concerned; one might argue that this is a case in which ontological considerations militate against art status, and that insofar as the symphony is not complete, it is not a work of art. However, the burden of proof is clearly on whoever wants to deny the art status of the

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[45] Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 55.

Unfinished Symphony to convincingly show that these ontological considerations do preclude it from being a work of art; suggesting that the burden of proof is on whoever claims the symphony is a work of art gets the order of things backwards just because the *prima facie* evidence indicates that the symphony *is* an artwork. So too, I submit, it goes with screenplays, many of which, *prima facie*, appear to be literary works.

The burden of proof aside, I am willing to take the Incompleteness Objection seriously because several critics have raised it in various formulations. In fact, we ought to tease apart what we might call the Incompleteness Hypothesis ("screenplays are essentially incomplete") from the Incompleteness Objection ("therefore they are not works of literature"), since some critics hold the former without holding the latter.[46] Because the Incompleteness Objection depends upon the Incompleteness Hypothesis, I will rebut the work of critics who only advance the hypothesis, as well as those who put forth the objection. Finally, I will respond to a version of the objection that I myself construct because I take it to be the strongest form that the objection could take. Ultimately, I submit, all formulations of the objection fail because the underlying premise—that screenplays are somehow essentially unfinished in a way that theatrical scripts or other literary works are not—is unsound.

In beginning, the first thing to note is that although worries about the screenplay's autonomy and its completeness may both ultimately stem from questions about its ontological status, they are not mutually dependent. In his consideration of the screenplay's literary status, Steven Maras writes:

> The script is not simply an autonomous work of art, but is what some theorists have dubbed an 'intermediate' work. Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider suggest that the intermediality of the screenplay is at the centre of concerns over the literariness of the film scenario (2000: 89)...The intermediality of the script complicates the extent to which the screenplay can be considered an autonomous form. As Ian W. Macdonald suggests: 'there is never a definitive version of the screenplay of a film; by definition it must relate to the screenwork, but also by definition it cannot, as more work must precede the final outcome' (2004: 90a).[47]

The question of the screenplay's completeness is raised at the end of this passage, in Macdonald's quotation, but it is not necessarily connected to the question of

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[46] Nathanial Kohn, for example, takes the putative incompleteness of the screenplay to indicate that it is a "postmodern literary exemplar." See Nathanial Kohn, "The Screenplay as Postmodern Literary Exemplar: Authorial Distraction, Disappearance, Dissolution," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 4 (2000): 489-510.

[47] Maras, 48.

intermediality that is the focus of the passage. For it should be clear that the completeness of other works that would seem to count as "intermediate" on this view—say, Arthur Miller's script, *Death of a Salesman*—is not in doubt. And, on the other hand, many works that are indisputably "autonomous"—say, Schubert's Unfinished Symphony—may not necessarily be complete.

Because the question of the whether the screenplay is an autonomous work is distinct from the question of whether it is essentially incomplete are different, and because Chapter 6 has already addressed the former, let us then focus solely on the latter. Macdonald's quotation is a good place to start because he actually posits the Incompleteness Hypothesis in two different forms. For the sake of clarity, here is the quotation in its larger context:

> There are some things the screenplay is not: it is not a finished piece of work (in relation to the screenwork—the finished film)…It is not (ever) complete, as a description of all the aspects of the screenwork…[D]espite being text-based it does not appear literary in a traditional sense except in parts. There is never a definitive version of the screenplay of a film; by definition it must relate to the screenwork, but also by definition it cannot, as more work must precede the final outcome. At no point in its development can the screenplay be said to truly reflect the final screenwork.[48]

There are two important points to be noted here: First, Macdonald posits a version of the Incompleteness Hypothesis, but does not tie this to an objection to the notion of the screenplay as literature. Second, the version of the Incompleteness Hypothesis on offer here is quite specific and cogent.

Considering the passage as a whole, it is clear Macdonald's formulation of the Incompleteness Hypothesis has to do not with the screenplay itself, but vis-à-vis its relationship with the film. In a sense, the rhetoric of calling the screenplay unfinished and incomplete threatens to obscure two lucid points. First, the screenplay is "unfinished" if regarded *qua* part of a larger project—i.e. an effort to make a screenwork. We need to be careful here, though, for the idea is not that the screenplay itself that is unfinished, but rather that the screenplay cannot be equated with the finished film. This is right and ought to recall the discussion in the previous chapter, in which I pointed out that there is no sense in which a screenplay affords access to a film. Macdonald's second point, which is related to the first, is that the screenplay is "incomplete" inasmuch as it necessarily does not describe all the properties of the

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[48] Ian W. Macdonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," *Journal of Media Practice* 5, no. 2 (2004): 90.

screenwork made from it. Again, we have to be cautious because this fact does not mean that the screenplay itself is incomplete. However, the point is valid, for, as we saw in the previous chapter, the screenplay is not work determinative in the way a theatrical script is (and even theatrical scripts necessarily underdetermine the properties of theatrical works). If we regard these points as constituting one version of the Incompleteness Hypothesis, then the hypothesis is innocuous except perhaps insofar as its rhetorical flourish may lead one to believe that the claims it makes are more radical than they actually are.[49]

However, most critics who say that the screenplay is incomplete do have something more extreme in mind. Macdonald himself shifts from making these rather modest, plausible claims regarding the screenplay's completeness vis-à-vis the finished film to making much bolder claims regarding the putative incompleteness of the screenplay and Barthesian "writerly texts" more generally. Indeed, one might suspect that the rhetoric in which the truly modest claims is couched functions to imply that those claims support the bolder thesis that the screenplay itself is somehow unfinished or incomplete. In any case, the move Macdonald makes is to invoke the work of Roland Barthes to suggest that the screenplay—not only *qua* step towards a finished film but *qua* "writerly text"—is essentially incomplete. Macdonald endorses Nathanial Kohn's claim, "in Barthes's (1974) terms, screenplays are model 'writerly texts'—open to being rewritten—as opposed to closed 'readerly texts' which 'can be read but not written."[50] In his essay, Kohn elaborates: "Screenplays are always works in progress—invitational, unfinished, tempting… A writerly text demands a productive collusion on our part."[51]

In order to further clarify the notion of the writerly text, Macdonald goes on to cite an essay on Barthes by Bjørnar Olsen, who explains that a writerly text "is not a finished product ready for consumption. Such [writerly] texts invite the reader to 'join in', and offer us some kind of 'co-authorship'…"[52] The idea Macdonald wants to get at here is that, as writerly text, the screenplay is being endlessly rewritten. He approvingly cites Sheila Johnson's work on Barthes, in which she claims, "A work of art, then, should be seen not mechanistically, as a closed system, a completed, inert

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[49] A more straightforward statement of what Macdonald seems to be after here was made by Dudley Nichols in 1943: "There is one other circumstance which makes it difficult for the screenplay to be enjoyed as a literary form in itself: it is not and never can be a finished product. It is a step, the first and most important step, in the process of the making of a film." Quoted in Maras, 57.
[50] Quoted in Macdonald, 91.
[51] Kohn, 495.
[52] Quoted in Macdonald, 94.

object which will always remain the same, but dynamically, as an endless process of rereading and rewriting."[53] Macdonald writes, "Johnson is referring, of course, to the completed work, of which the physical presence is virtually unchanging, and not to the uncompleted work which is the screenplay."[54] Presumably, then, the screenplay, as writerly text, is even *more* incomplete—however one wants to try to conceive of that notion. Here, then, is the poststructuralist formulation of the Incompleteness Hypothesis.

In his recent book, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism*, Steven Price also draws upon Barthes's work to posit the Incompleteness Hypothesis, but furthermore to lodge the Incompleteness Objection. Price outlines and considers in relationship to the screenplay the seven "propositions" Barthes makes in his essay, "From Work to Text." Following this discussion, Price concludes:

> Although [the screenplay] is clearly to be differentiated from the Barthesian text, it is still in many respects the contemporary text *par excellence*, and at the very least this essay can take us further in distinguishing the screenplay from literature (or 'work'). It clearly functions within 'the activity of production' rather than as a closed work; it is not concerned with validating itself as 'literature'; its meaning is deferred, since it is a text of suggestive incompletion that demands the writerly activity of others; it is markedly intertextual, participating within the general fields of cinema and literature, but – other than in adaptation or historical drama – rarely concerning itself with 'source' materials; it is indisputably severed from the legal conceptions of authorship outlined by both Barthes and Foucault; and the reader of the screenplay, at least in its industrial context, directly participates in the activity of production and, metaphorically and very often literally, in the 're-writing' of the text.[55]

For Price, as for Macdonald and Kohn, Barthes's notion of the writerly text sheds light upon the open, incomplete nature of the screenplay and the reason it is not literature.

Indeed, Price claims, "conceiving of the screenplay in the ways prompted by Barthes's essay helps to explain its exclusion from the canons of literature."[56] But this cannot be so. First, note that the poststructuralist formulation of the Incompleteness Hypothesis conflates "finishing" the screenplay with completing the film. The thought here is that the screenplay "demands the writerly activity of others" for its completion.

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[53] Quoted in Macdonald, 93.
[54] Macdonald, 93.
[55] Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41.
[56] Ibid.

However, it is the completion of the film that requires further activity—not the completion of the screenplay. Suppose I write a screenplay for a short animated film that I intend to shoot by myself entirely as written. The screenplay is finished; it is the film that is not.

Second, and more to the point, whatever one makes of the Barthesian line as a general theory, it is nonsensical to suggest that screenplays are not works of literature because they are essential incomplete while simultaneously holding that *all* writerly texts, which include acknowledged works of literature, are essentially incomplete. This is precisely the trouble Macdonald runs into by endorsing Johnson's assertion, "A work of art, then, should be seen not mechanistically, as a closed system, a completed, inert object which will always remain the same, but dynamically, as an endless process of rereading and rewriting."[57] If one accepts this premise, then all works of literature are perpetually reread and rewritten, and the fact that screenplays are supposedly endlessly rewritten—even if this makes them "doubly" incomplete—cannot be what precludes them from being literature. Thus, the poststructuralist formulation of the Incompleteness Objection is, at best, untenable.

The poststructuralist tack is, I think, an unfortunate one because it obscures more lucid questions about the completeness of the screenplay. After all, there is no need to invoke poststructuralist theory to wonder whether the screenplay is ever truly finished (and when?) and if there is ever a definitive version of it (and which?). Indeed, I suspect that however misguided the application of poststructuralist thought to a theory of the screenplay is, it is underwritten by the plausible worry that the screenplay is essentially incomplete inasmuch as it is constantly being redrafted and may appear to never exist in a definitive form. These worries, I take it, are really at the core of most objections to the notion that screenplays are literature. So, another possible formulation of the Incompleteness Objection might be this: "Because the screenplay is constantly rewritten during the production process, it is never really finished nor does it ever have a definitive form; therefore, the screenplay is not literature." This, I think, is the strongest version of the objection, and something like it seems to be in currency. Therefore, even if no one has explicitly voiced it as formulated here, let me reply to it now.

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[57] Quoted in Macdonald, 93.

Even stated in this relatively cogent form, the objection fails because it depends upon unsound premises. In the first place, it is simply not true that all screenplays undergo constant (or extensive) revision. Think again of my hypothetical animated short. I write a single draft of the screenplay, consider it done, and use it to shoot the film. Not only have I composed a screenplay that was not rewritten, but there can be no question regarding whether it is finished or which version is definitive. Now, the complaint will come that this example is not typical. Recall, however, that the Incompleteness Objection makes an ontological claim—a claim that the screenplay, by its very nature, is incomplete. So if one counterexample can be produced that shows this claim is not true for all screenplays, the entire objection is undermined. And, as my hypothetical animated short shows, it is easy enough to produce counterexamples of screenplays that are indisputably complete and definitive.

For the sake of argument, however, let us admit that most screenplays are extensively rewritten. From this, however, neither does it follow that a screenplay is never finished, nor does it follow that there is never a definitive version of a screenplay. As a matter of fact, revisions on a screenplay normally cease when shooting on a film ends. So, again we see it is not true that the screenplay is, by its nature, never finished. There may often be doubt as to precisely when a screenplay is finished, but this is an epistemic problem rather than an ontological one. The fact that we do not know when a particular screenplay is finished certainly does not entail that it is never finished. Moreover, the epistemic problem is not insurmountable. As Paisley Livingston argues, the completion of a work is normally determined by the artist's intentions, which can be indicated in any number of ways.[58] For example, according to Livingston, publication usually provides good evidence that a work is finished although, ultimately, it neither determines whether a work is finished nor whether it is "aesthetically complete."[59] Thus, in the same way that the publication of Mamet's *The Cryptogram* is a fairly reliable indication that the script is complete, so too is the publication of his *State and Main* screenplay a good sign that it is complete. Again, the objection will come that this is not a typical case, since most screenplays are revised throughout production by the director, actors, and so forth. But again, it simply does not follow from this that the screenplay is never finished, and, even in such cases, pinpointing a final draft of the screenplay need not be impossible.

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[58] See Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53-61.
[59] Ibid, 54.

Now, the related worry is that all of this rewriting means that there is never a definitive version of the screenplay, but it is not clear why this should be so. Of course, in the case of some literary works—for example, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*—the constant rewriting of the book *and* the release of new editions may mean that no version is definitive. But the complication here is raised by publication—not by the rewriting itself. The fact that, say, Hemingway's "A Canary for One" went through multiple drafts that are available for the public to read does not mean that there is no definitive version of the story. On the contrary, we can be fairly certain that the definitive version is what has been published despite the fact that we have access to various drafts.

Here, some critics will become exercised because the specific conditions of film production practically guarantee that lots of different people work on many different drafts of a screenplay, thus preventing us from knowing which version is definitive. Perhaps the various writers even contest which version is definitive. Furthermore, it is charged, publication is not a reliable indicator of definitiveness. Consider, for example, Steven Price's claim:

> Publication represents merely one more transformation, and the copy text chosen for publication may be derived from any of the stages…or be a new construction compiled with the needs of another target audience in mind. The 'real' or 'authentic' screenplay is a chimera.[60]

Again, this is a view that confuses an epistemic problem with an ontological one. For from the fact that we do not know which version is definitive, it does not follow that there is not (ever) a definitive version. Likewise, it does not follow that because the version of a screenplay selected for publication is not definitive, no definitive version (ever) exists. Of course it is possible that in some situations there is no definitive version of a screenplay—just as in some cases there is no definitive version of a novel or poem—but from this it does not follow that there is never a definitive version.

In fact, skepticism about the *possibility* of definitive versions of screenplays courts incomprehensibility by overlooking the fact that a "definitive version" does not exist objectively in reality, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, "definitive version" is a socially constructed concept inasmuch as what is required for something to count as a definitive version is a kind of social agreement. That is, we always determine rather than discover which version of a text is definitive. So although in

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[60] Price, 49.

some cases there is, as a contingent matter, no definitive version of the screenplay, it is never the case there *couldn't* be a definitive version of the screenplay—that the screenplay is essentially without a definitive version. In other words, it is always *possible* for a screenplay to have a definitive version because definitive versions are things determined by us.

This should not be taken to mean that our decisions about which version of a text or work is definitive are completely arbitrary. In most cases in the world of literature, we agree that what counts as definitive is what the author(s) (and/or her editor) intend to be so. Therefore, one might also conceive of the definitive version of the screenplay as whatever version the writer regards as marking the completion of her work. Although Price is right to think that the publication of a screenplay does not guarantee that what is published is definitive, it can be a good indication that its writer intends it to be. For example, Richard Price's justification for publishing the first draft of one screenplay, the second draft of another, and the shooting draft of a third all in the same volume is that his "vision, [his] role as an independent artist, ended with these drafts."[61] Whether or not we accept a particular screenwriter's claims about which version is definitive is another matter, but there are at least some cases (e.g. most writer/director productions) in which such claims should not be controversial.

Determining which version is definitive when a screenplay is not published or when it is written by many different people may be more complicated, but, again, because "definitive version" is socially determined rather than objectively discovered, the problem is not insurmountable. One possibility is to regard the ultimate version— i.e. the screenplay as it exists after the final change or alteration has been made in production—as definitive. Or, one might regard the definitive version of a screenplay as the final draft completed by the writer(s) before production begins. Such decisions may need to be made on a case by case basis, where specific contextual information can be taken into account, but this is no different or controversial than when an editor takes it upon herself to decide which draft of a novel should be published as the posthumous definitive version.

Finally and most crucially, even if we accept, for the sake of argument, the claims that screenplays are essentially incomplete and that they never exist in definitive form, it still does not follow that they cannot be works of art or literature.

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[61] Quoted in Neal Gabler, "A Special Angle of Vision: An Interview with Richard Price," in *Three Screenplays* by Richard Price (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), ix.

This fact should be patently clear by briefly considering some of the myriad, acknowledged works of art and literature that are either incomplete or do not exist in a definitive form. Let us take each issue in turn. First, despite my earlier professed agnosticism regarding the art status of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, it seems to me that very few people would want to deny that the piece is a work of art. Again, I take it that largely owes to the fact that, *prima facie*, the Unfinished Symphony clearly appears to be art—even if it is not complete. Other such works of music whose art status is undisputed include Mozart's *Requiem Mass in D Minor*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 10*, Bruckner's *Symphony No. 9*, and The Beach Boys's *Smile* (although it has, arguably, been completed recently). The list of incomplete texts whose literary status is not a matter of debate is long and includes Kafka's *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *Amerika*, Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn," Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*. So, the claim that the putative essential incompleteness of the screenplay precludes it from being literature does not hold water because there are many other incomplete works whose literary status is not disputed.

Nor can it be the case that the putative fact that screenplays do not have definitive versions means that they cannot be works of art or literature. For if lacking a definitive version prevented a work from being art or literature, we would not regard Bruckner's symphonies or Shakespeare's dramas as art. Indeed, Bruckner scholars face what they call "the Bruckner problem," which, as Benjamin Korstvedt summarizes, is that "many of Bruckner's works exist in multiple versions and editions, some of which are clearly authentic, some of which are now know not to be authentic, and some of which are of unclear or disputed authenticity."[62] Moreover, it is worth noting that the problem is not that we once knew which versions were definitive, but no longer do. On the contrary, according to Korstvedt, "The existence of multiple versions of Bruckner's symphonies goes back to the composer's time; as is well known, he prepared more than one version of several of his works and the published texts of most of his works deviate in some way or another from his manuscript scores."[63] In addition, Bruckner sometimes made drastic changes to the symphonies after extended periods of time and on multiple occasions. For example, he composed *Symphony No. 4* in 1874 and significantly revised it 1878 and again

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[62] Benjamin Korstvedt, "Bruckner Editions: The Revolution Revisited," *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner*, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121.
[63] Ibid.

between 1887-1888. By no means, however, does the Bruckner problem—the difficulty of identifying the definitive version of the work or the "real" work—lead anyone to draw the conclusion that his symphonies are not art.

Likewise, the problem of determining the definitive versions of certain Shakespeare plays—indeed, if definitive versions of them exist—is well known. Indeed, much Shakespeare scholarship of the past century has focused on vexed questions of definitiveness and authenticity with regard to Shakespeare's texts. In a survey of the problems, Barbara A. Mowat explains:

> Editors and textual critics agree that the extant texts of the plays originated in manuscripts that are lost; and they agree that the plays were first printed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, some plays in individual quartos, some in the 1623 Folio, and some in both quarto and Folio. When, however, one looks for consensus beyond these very basic statements, one finds only problems and questions.[64]

Central amongst those questions is, as Mowat writes: "how do we construct an edition of that play which reproduces 'Shakespeare's text'?"[65]

Indeed, the idea that we have to "construct" the plays and the scare quotes around "Shakespeare's text" indicate the widespread hesitancy amongst scholars to suggest that something like authentic or definitive versions of Shakespeare's plays even exist. Two of the problems that have fostered such skepticism are that certain plays may have originally existed in multiple authentic versions, and that the plays were likely collaboratively written.[66] It is these sorts of problems that, perhaps unsurprisingly, have fueled many "applications" of poststructuralist theory to Shakespeare scholarship since the late twentieth century. Even a scholar who attempts to bring cognitive theory to bear upon Shakespeare criticism claims that certain Foucault-inspired critics, "quite rightly point out the many ways in which the Shakespearean text is fractured and multiple, a product of a 'collaborative field' rather than a single controlling genius."[67]

Regardless of the extent to which scholars in the field are influenced by poststructuralist theory, the twin problems of authenticity and authorship have led many to argue, as Stephen Orgel puts it in a seminal piece:

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[64] Barbara A. Mowat, "The Reproduction of Shakespeare's Texts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley W. Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 23.
[67] Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

> Self-evident as it may appear [that "the authority of a text derives from the author"]…this proposition is not true: in the case of Renaissance dramatic texts it is almost never true, and in the case of non-dramatic texts it is true less often than we think…[A]t the heart of our texts lies a hard core of uncertainty.[68]

Summarizing the conclusions of Orgel and other like-minded critics, Mowat writes, "Because Shakespeare wrote texts for performance, because such texts were collaborative, were in effect commissioned and owned by the company (not the scriptwriter), and were inevitably always under revision, [according to Orgel,] 'the very notion of the "author's original manuscript"…is a figment.'"[69]

I do not think it is too much of a stretch to suggest that there is a neat parallel between these kinds of concerns regarding definitiveness and authenticity in the context of Shakespeare's texts and in the context of the screenplay. We might substitute a few words in the above quotation and get: "Because screenwriters write texts for the production of films, because such texts are collaborative, are in effect commissioned and owned by the studio (not the screenwriters), and are inevitably always under revision, as Stephen Price writes, 'the "real" or "authentic" screenplay is a chimera.'" Now, earlier I suggested that with regards to screenplays, Price's skepticism is unwarranted insofar as the "authentic" or "definitive" text is always determined socially rather than discovered, and the problem Price identifies is epistemological rather than ontological. But now let us, for the sake of argument, grant Price his point and let us grant Orgel his. Only, let us also admit that their worries regarding definitiveness and authenticity are roughly the same. In other words, assume for a moment that it really is the case that neither does any given Shakespeare play nor any given screenplay exist in a definitive form, and, furthermore, the existence of such a form is an impossibility. The crux of the matter is that Shakespeare's plays are still indisputably works of literature. And because they are, it cannot be the case that the lack of existence of an authentic or definitive text can preclude a work from being literature. Therefore, contra the Incompleteness Objection, the putative fact that the screenplay does not have a definitive or "real" form does not entail that it is not literature. In short, even if one accepts all of the premises of the Incompleteness Objection, unsound as I have argued they are, it ultimately fails on its own terms.

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[68] Stephen Orgel, "What Is a Text?" reprinted in his *The Authentic Shakespeare and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.
[69] Mowat, 23.

Needless to say, although I have rejected the poststructuralist conception of the ontology of the screenplay and denied that the concerns raised by the other formulations of the Incompleteness Objection have to do with the ontology of the screenplay properly so-called, I have said very little about what kind of a thing I take the screenplay to be. That is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 9: Towards an Ontology of the Screenplay

In the previous chapter, I argued that David Mamet's screenplay for *State and Main* (2000) is a kind of literary work. Furthermore, I suggested that the publication of the final shooting script—as part of Newmarket Press's *Shooting Script* series—constitutes a claim by the Mamet and the publisher that it is "the" work (i.e. the finished work, the final work, the definitive version, the authoritative version, and so on). This is not to deny that the work previously existed in several manifestations; indeed, the cover page of the screenplay indicates that it went through several drafts, and within the screenplay there are notes where scenes have been omitted. However, I submit, Mamet's agreement to publish the final shooting script—moreover, to write an introduction to the volume—indicates that he intends the published version to be regarded as "the" work inasmuch as its publication ensures that it is the draft that we will read, discuss, analyze, evaluate, and so forth. It is possible for us to deny Mamet's claim—to argue that another draft constitutes the work or that there is no definitive work at all—but in our standard practices, we normally accept that the intentions of the author determine which draft, if any, is the work.

However, even if these arguments are good, there is a complication here. Months after Newmarket Press published the *State and Main* screenplay I cited in the previous chapter, Methuen Drama, which normally publishes Mamet's theatrical scripts, published the screenplay.[1] Now, the first thing to note about this interesting situation is that the things that Methuen published and that Newmarket published are substantively the same. That is, each text has the same scenes and the same words that comprise each scene in the same order. In short, it appears that Methuen, like Newmarket, published the final shooting script. In fact, even Mamet's introduction, "written exclusively" for the Newmarket edition, is reprinted as the introduction to the Methuen edition. So, while this case easily could have undermined my hypotheses that Mamet intends us to regard the final shooting script as the work, and that, therefore, according to our standard practices, the final shooting script is the definitive version of the work, both hypotheses remain intact.

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[1] David Mamet, *"State and Main": A Screenplay* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001).

One point to note, then, is that this case is a specific example to support the previous chapter's argument that the complications arising from the rewriting of screenplays—not to mention the often capricious publishing of them—does not necessarily stymie efforts to identify the definitive work. For the fact that two different companies have published the same version of the screenplay—the final shooting script—gives us even stronger indication that it is the final shooting script that Mamet intends us to regard as the definitive work. So long as we bear in mind that, ordinarily, what we regard as definitive is the version of the work is what the author intends us to, there should be nothing controversial about this claim.

A second point, however, is that even though Methuen and Newmarket have apparently both published the final shooting script, the two editions look quite different. Whereas the Newmarket edition is a facsimile of what is presumably the actual manuscript of the final shooting script that was copied and circulated amongst cast and crew, the Methuen edition has reformatted various elements of the text— font, typeface, margins, and spacing—such that it has the appearance of a theatrical script. One wonders what difference, if any, this makes. Is the Methuen edition actually not an instance of Mamet's screenplay? It seems that even after addressing the question of which draft of the screenplay is "the" screenplay, other important questions about the nature of the screenplay remain unresolved.

The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to make a first step towards an ontology of the screenplay. With regard to the above example, the central question is this: What precisely is the nature Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay? More broadly, of course, the question is: What kind of a thing is a screenplay? Recently, other theorists of the screenplay have begun to explore this question. For example, Steven Price claims that the screenplay exists in "a peculiar ontological state of non-being."[2] Furthermore, he asserts, "Because it is so difficult to grasp the screenplay as a text, the study of it tends towards metaphor, almost by default: metaphors of industry, but also those of loss, absence, erasure, and death."[3] This claim is Price's cue to conclude his study of the screenplay on a poetic note:

> Screenwriting…is 'ghostly writing' (p. 46) and the text of *Sunset*
> *Boulevard* is the autobiography of a corpse. In its creative exploration
> of its own instability, its knowledge of an afterlife in which it
> circulates unpredictably, and its demonstration of the potential of a

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[2] Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 42.
[3] Ibid, 44.

> pointlessly maligned form, it is the definitive, or definitively
> provisional, parable of the death and resurrection of the screenplay.[4]

Although I must confess to not understanding what Price means, this approach to thinking about the ontology of the screenplay surely has its own particular merits. However, in what follows, I will be interested in a very specific gloss on the question of the screenplay's ontological status—namely, one that derives from analytic philosophy of art.

On this view, an ontological investigation of the screenplay still wants to know what kind of thing a screenplay is, but it attempts to get at this by asking some very specific questions about persistence and identity: What are the conditions under which a screenplay is created, remains in existence, and is destroyed? What are the conditions under which screenplays are one and the same?[5] Although I suspect these questions may strike some non-philosophers as dry, if not incidental, they need to be addressed if we are to attempt to offer convincing answers to the practical questions we face. Thinking about the screenplay in terms of metaphors of death and the like may be thought-provoking, but it will not help us determine whether, for example, the Methuen text and the Newmarket text are two instances of the same screenplay or not.

I cannot hope to develop a full account of the ontology of the screenplay here. Instead, the bulk of the discussion will be devoted towards an argument about the nature of methodological approach we ought to take and the development of desiderata that ought to constrain any ontology of the screenplay we do develop. The central conclusion is that any ontology of the screenplay must be constrained by the conceptions that are implicit in our practices—in fact, that our practices determine the ontological status of the screenplay. As a consequence, questions about the persistence and identity conditions of the screenplay are only answerable to the extent that answers are implicit in our practices. Finally, I make some tentative suggestions about further practical and theoretical implications.

Introduction

At least three things about the nature of Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay seem immediately clear. First, the screenplay cannot be identified with any particular

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[4] Ibid, 170.
[5] Amie L. Thomasson, "Debates about the Ontology of Art: What are We Doing Here?" *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 3 (2006): 245.

copy of it. My Newmarket facsimile of the screenplay is not a forgery of the screenplay, but a genuine instance of it.[6] The second, related point is that the screenplay cannot be identified as the original manuscript because if that manuscript happened to be destroyed, the screenplay would not cease to exist. On the contrary, I and anyone else who owns a Newmarket edition would continue to have access to the screenplay, indicating that the work survives the destruction of any particular copy of it—including the original manuscript. Or, to put it another way, it seems obvious that the cast and crew had access to the screenplay, but not by taking turns looking at the original manuscript. Third, these points entail that it is not possible for the screenplay to be identified with the total set of its copies since the destruction or addition of a copy has no effect on the screenplay.

On the grounds of these three observations, it seems safe to say that a screenplay is a kind of thing that is repeatable or capable of having multiple instances, but is not a physical object. Now, I imagine that this conclusion will not strike philosophers as particularly note-worthy, but it will rub against the intuitions of non-philosophers—specifically, scholars of screenwriting. Isn't the materiality of the screenplay—its particular font, margins, and spacing—an essential part of what it is? And after all, is this not precisely why we have cause to wonder if the Methuen edition is actually an instance of Mamet's screenplay?

In fact, however, there is no tension between claiming that the screenplay is not a physical object and claiming that its peculiar format is an essential part of its identity. Think, for example, of shaped or concrete poems, which cannot be physical objects for the same reasons I have suggested screenplays cannot be, but whose specific formatting is also an essential part of their identity. Consider George Herbert's "Easter Wings":

<div align="center">

Lord, Who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:

With Thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day Thy victories:

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[6] For the moment, I want to leave aside the question of what the Methuen edition is. However, it is worth briefly noting that, whatever it is, it is not a forgery either. The question of how one might forge a screenplay is relevant, but I do not have space to address it here.

Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sickness and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.

With Thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day Thy victorie,
For, if I imp my wing on Thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.[7]

Now, although what we might roughly call the formatting of "Easter Wings" is clearly an essential part of the poem's identity, it does not follow that the poem is actually a physical object. Suppose I memorize the entire poem (both its words and layout) sometime before every copy of the poem is destroyed. As long as I remember the poem well enough to produce a correct copy of it, the poem exists despite the fact that no copies are extant. For surely we do not want to say that the poem goes out of existence with the destruction of all copies, yet I bring it back into existence when I create a new copy from memory. On the contrary, the poem is an abstract object that may continue to exist even when it is not concretely instanced. Similarly, the screenplay, despite its apparent "materiality," is an abstract object may continue to exist (perhaps in a PDF file rather than someone's memory) even if no concrete instances of it are extant. This is not to deny, however, that the screenplay's formatting may be an essential part of its identity.

As the example of visual poetry indicates, the fact that screenplays are not physical objects does not make them ontologically peculiar. Although they obviously differ ontologically from some artworks like paintings, they are ontologically similar to other things like musical works, theatrical works, theatrical scripts, novels, and poems. That is, like these artworks, screenplays admit of multiple instances and cannot be identified with any physical object—a concrete instance of the work where one exists (e.g. a copy of a novel) or otherwise. Thus the challenge of developing an ontology of the screenplay is, in large part, the perennial one regarding the ontology of multiple instance artworks: If a work cannot be identified as a concrete, particular object, then as what is it to be identified?

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[7] George Herbert, "Easter Wings," reprinted in *Poetry*, ed. Paul D. Moliken (Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2006), 142.

Once we reject what Richard Wollheim calls the "physical object hypothesis,"[8] the view that all works of art—including those of the multiple instance variety—are to be identified with concrete particulars, it appears that there are, broadly speaking, three ways we might think about multiple instance works like musical works, novels, or screenplays: Multiple instance works (1) may exist in only in our minds, (2) may exist as independent abstract entities, or (3) may not exist at all. The first option, idealism, is most famously endorsed by Benedetto Croce and R.G. Collingwood.[9] Collingwood, for example, writes of music: "The tune is already complete and perfect when it exists merely as a tune in [the composer's] head…The music, the work of art, is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer's head."[10] Furthermore, Collingwood claims, "The work of art proper is something not seen or heard, but something imagined."[11] More specifically, it is "an imagined experience of total activity" that the artist has and that qualified viewers reconstruct.[12]

This sort of idealist conception of the work of art has been subjected to serious criticism elsewhere and I will not review the arguments at length here.[13] The one objection I would emphasize is that if the artwork is "an imagined experience," then it becomes unclear how different people are able to experience and refer to the exact same artwork. The "imagined experience" I reconstruct when listening to Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* would presumably be quite different from that of a Holocaust survivor from Warsaw, and it is not clear how either of these "imagined experiences" could be the same as Schoenberg's.[14] This and other serious objections to the idealist account make it a non-starter at this stage in the debate.

The second option—that multiple instance artworks are some sort of independently existing abstracta—has been where the bulk of recent work on the ontology of art has focused. For example, Gregory Currie has argued that both multiple instance and single instance works are "action types," and David Davies has

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[8] Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4-10.
[9] See Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic*, trans. D. Ainslie (London: Noonday, 1909); R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). For a critical review, see Gary Kemp, "The Croce-Collingwood Theory as Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 171-193.
[10] Collingwood, 139.
[11] Ibid, 142.
[12] Ibid, 148-151.
[13] See, especially, Wollheim. However, a debate has recently emerged as to whether Wollheim and others are correct in characterizing Collingwood's theory as "idealist." See, for example, Aaron Ridley, "Not Ideal: Collingwood's Expression Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (1997): 263-272; John Dilworth, "Is Ridley Charitable to Collingwood?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 4 (1998): 393-396; and David Davies, "Collingwood's 'Performance' Theory of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 2 (April 2008): 163-174. It makes no difference to me who is right in this debate. My only aim is to show that a purely idealist ontology of art is implausible.
[14] On this point, also see Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 63-88; and Amie L. Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 78-92.

argued that they are kinds of performances.[15] Alongside these two theories, there is a group of realist theories specifically regarding multiple instance works that might loosely be called type-token theories. Following an argument first made by Wollheim, these theories argue that repeatable works of art should be thought of as types, which are instantiated through their (multiple) tokens. What is usually debated is the nature of the type. To take a more famous example from the literature, Peter Kivy holds that composers discover rather than create their musical works, which are pure sound structures of the eternal, platonic variety.[16] On the other hand, Jerrold Levinson, while agreeing that musical works are types, insists that they must be initiated types—that is types that do not exist eternally, but rather must be initiated by a particular person(s) at a particular time.[17]

Clearly, some of these theories are much more intuitively plausible than others. An initial question in an investigation of the ontology of the screenplay, then, is this: What bearing should intuitive plausibility have on our ontological decision-making? This question is manifested in specific terms when we wonder, as I think we must, whether it is a problem for Barthesian poststructuralist theories of the screenplay that they entail massive collective error about the nature of a variety of literary works including screenplays. Can Barthesian critics be right about writerly texts being endlessly rewritten if nobody besides Barthesian critics treats them this way? Put in more general terms, we need to ask a methodological question similar to the one we asked with regard to defining the screenplay: To what extent is our ontology of the screenplay to be descriptivist? To what extent is it beholden to our actual practices and intuitions?

As in the context of defining the screenplay, I take it that we want to opt for a strong version of descriptivism. Note here that while descriptivism narrows the field of potential theories of the screenplay's ontology, it still allows for many different approaches. Nevertheless, this is a more contentious position with regard to ontology than it is with regard to definition, and it requires me to mount an argument for what I follow David Davies in calling "a pragmatic constraint"—although I have something

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[15] Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989); David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

[16] Peter Kivy, "Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense," reprinted in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, eds. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 92-102.

[17] See Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is."

stronger in mind that what Davies proposes.[18] I will argue that any plausible theory needs to line up with our creative and appreciative practices as well as collective intuitions rooted in those practices because it is those practices that actually determine the nature of the screenplay. If the argument is successful, then, I submit, meeting the pragmatic constraint ought to be the first condition for any ontology of the screenplay.

Methodology and a Constraint

First, we ought to note that there are good *prima facie* reasons for taking our practices and intuitions under consideration in our attempts to develop a theory of the screenplay's ontology. As we saw in Chapter 1, in the context of defining art most philosophers accept that theories which attempt to circumscribe the concept of art fail. At this point, most admit that rather than attempting to delimit the boundaries of the concept, our theories need to take our creative practices into account because those practices actually determine the concept's extension. Furthermore, to the extent that our intuitions about what counts as art are rooted in those practices, our theories also need to take our intuitions into consideration. It is not clear why our theorizing about the ontology of art and art kinds like screenplays should be any different.

Of course our creative and appreciative practices do not amount to a robust definition or ontological theory and our intuitions may need to be refined, but if we accept that, as a starting point, our practices and intuitions constrain our definitions of art, then we ought to accept that, as a starting point, those practices and intuitions also constrain our theories of the ontology of art and specific art kinds. Andrew Kania has also made this analogy:

> [I]n working on a definition of art, a theorist may have some recourse
> to claims about the value of art, but it would be peculiar if she set aside
> our intuitions about the extension of the term 'art'. She might suggest
> revising our pre-theoretical intuitions about that extension, in the

[18] Davies, *Art as Performance*, 16-24. There has been a good deal of debate about how Davies conceives of the pragmatic constraint—particularly because he goes on to offer an ontology of art that strikes some philosophers as failing to line up with our practices and intuitions. Robert Stecker parses the matter quite helpfully, explaining that the debate turns on which practices one takes to be relevant. Stecker points out that for Davies, it is our "*reflective* critical and appreciative practices" (377) that must constrain our ontological theorizing. I do not have space to discuss it here, but Davies's pragmatic constraint strikes me as too weak because "reflective" opens the door for highly revisionist theories that do not line up with our ordinary creative and appreciative practices. I lean closer to the other camp Stecker describes—that which takes our referential practices (what we say about works in our ordinary discourse) as constraining our ontological theorizing. However, in what follows, I emphasize the centrality of our ordinary creative and appreciative practices and intuitions rooted in them over our ordinary speech. Thus, I believe I am immune to the objections Stecker raises against "the semantic constraint." See Robert Stecker, "Methodological Questions about the Ontology of Music," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 375-386, esp. 376-378.

> process of working out her definition, but to exclude such intuitions
> from the start would be to ignore the central data explained.[19]

A preliminary point, then, is that our philosophical work in the context of defining art suggests that, *prima facie*, our philosophical work on the ontology of art needs to take our practices and intuitions under consideration.

However, there is still a stronger point to be made here. For in the context of the definitional project, it is not merely the case that our theories of art need to take our intuitions into account. Rather, the reason our theories of art need to consider our intuitions is that our intuitions are underpinned by our ordinary creative and appreciative practices. And those practices actually constrain our theories of art. Insofar as a definition of art attempts to correctly identify the extension of the concept, "art," it fails if it does not take into account all of our actual art practices because it is those practices which determine the extension of the concept. In this sense, practice is necessarily primary, and the definitional project is parasitic upon it. We accept that it is up to philosophers to work out definitions that line up with our practices because those practices determine the extension of the concept, "art," that philosophers are trying to define.

The discussion in Chapter 2 suggested that this situation is not merely matter of stipulation or contingency, but rather owes to the nature of artifact kinds.[20] The conclusion there was that artisans determine the boundaries of artifact concepts through their practices. For where someone has a substantive and substantively correct conception of an artifact-kind and successfully realizes her attempts to make "one of those things," her creation *is* one of those things; it falls under the given artifact concept and, therefore, must be regarded as part of the concept's extension.[21] Furthermore, though, this allows that artisans can gradually expand the boundaries of the concept because they can successfully make "one of those things" that does not fully resemble the others that fall under the concept. Inasmuch as art is an artifact concept, then, practitioners necessarily determine its boundaries. More to the point,

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[19] Andrew Kania, "The Methodology of Musical Ontology: Descriptivism and its Implications," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 4 (October 2008): 432.
[20] Amie L. Thomasson, "Artifacts and Human Concepts," in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52-73.
[21] Ibid.

inasmuch as the screenplay is an artifact concept, practitioners necessarily determine *its* boundaries.[22]

Underlying this view of artifact concepts, it will be recalled, was Amie L. Thomasson's argument regarding the "qua problem" that plagues direct theories of reference—at least as applied to artifact concepts.[23] Direct reference theories, according to Thomasson, "hold that natural kind terms acquire their reference not in virtue of any concepts competent speakers hold about the nature of the kind, but rather in virtue of a causal relationship to a certain sample of entities, so that a term like 'iron' or 'maple' refers to whatever real natural kind all or most of the entities in the sample belong to."[24] This means that the relevant features required to belong to the kind and the nature of the kind are empirically discoverable, independent of our intuitions or beliefs. As philosophers of language Devitt and Sterelny put it, "Users of a natural kind term need not have true beliefs about the underlying nature of the relevant natural kind nor even have any beliefs sufficient to identify its members."[25] For example, we may successfully refer to bats even if we mistakenly believe that bats are not mammals. But a collective intuition that bats are not mammals does not change the fact that they are; on the contrary, empirical investigation can show that our intuition is wrong.

The problem is that, at least when it comes to artifact kinds, direct theories of reference cannot overcome the qua problem—namely, that in attempting to give a term to an artifact kind, "the reference of the speaker's term will be radically indeterminate unless she disambiguates the sort or category of kind she means to refer to…[f]or any sample of entities will instantiate many different kinds (chemical, biological, artifactual, cultural, legal, etc.)."[26] That is, for example, if I point to a stack of 90 pieces of paper and attempt to dub it "screenplay," I need to somehow pick out the "verbal-object-that-typically-specifies-constitutive-elements-of-a-film" from the other sorts of things to which I could be referring (paper stacked to a certain height; the biological kind of the tree from which the paper was made; the paper's molecules in their present formation; an object of a weight appropriate for a doorstop). The

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[22] One caveat, as stated in Chapter 2, is that practitioners are not totally unconstrained in this regard. I cannot suddenly expand the boundaries of the concept, "screenplay," to include chairs because thinking that a screenplay could be a chair means that I do not possess a substantively correct grasp of the concept.

[23] See Amie L. Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 221-229.

[24] Thomasson, "Artifacts," in Laurence and Margolis, 54.

[25] Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 90.

[26] Thomasson, "Artifacts," in Laurence and Margolis, 55.

thought here is that those who ground the reference of artifact kind terms like "screenplay" have a kind of epistemic privilege because in order to successfully disambiguate and establish the reference of a term, grounders must have a background conception of the features relevant to membership in a kind-category and the nature of the kind.[27] According to Devitt and Sterelny, "It seems that something about the mental state of the grounder must determine which putative nature of the sample is the one relevant to the grounding."[28]

This does not suggest that grounders of the term, "screenplay," (practitioners, industry professionals, etc.) have anything like a sophisticated definition of the screenplay worked out, but it does entail they are not susceptible to massive collective error about what counts as a screenplay. For, in fact, it is their disambiguation in the grounding and re-grounding of the term that establishes the boundaries of the category. In Thomasson's words, this disambiguation "establishes the category of the kind to be referred to (if the term refers at all), by establishing what sorts of features are relevant to unifying the kind."[29] Moreover, insofar as the disambiguation of artifactual kind terms is achieved through the intentions of artisans to create something of "that kind," it is, more specifically, the intentions of *practitioners* that establish the boundaries of the concept, "screenplay." As Thomasson concludes, "'*makers'* concepts of what features are relevant to being a member of the kind (whether function, shape, etc.) determine what *specific* features (shape, function, etc.) are relevant to being a member of a particular artifactual kind, and thus collectively determine the boundaries of the kind and the kind's specific 'nature.'"[30] If this argument is right, it has implications not only for defining the screenplay, but for theorizing its ontology as well.

On Thomasson's view, theories of the ontology of art that suppose that our practice-rooted intuitions about art's nature are susceptible to massive error depend upon direct theories of reference inasmuch as those theories support "the discovery view of knowledge."[31] According to the discovery view, for any given question we might have about the nature of the world—say, "Are bats mammals?"—empirical investigation allows us to discover whether p or not-p is the case because the facts are

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Devitt and Sterelny, 91.
[29] Thomasson, "Artifacts," in Laurence and Margolis, 55.
[30] Ibid, 59-60.
[31] Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge," 221.

"mind-independent." [32] Direct reference theories support this view inasmuch as they maintain that a natural kind term acquires reference based upon a causal relationship to a set of objects that are individuated by their underlying essence. Again, the idea is that we can successfully refer to bats while being completely wrong in our belief that they are not mammals. Our intuitions about the nature of bats in no way bear upon what their nature actually is.

Thus, Thomasson's idea is that the discovery view of knowledge, coupled with direct references theories, underpins the suppositions of some philosophers of art that our common-sense beliefs about the nature of things like artworks are (or could be) radically mistaken. In the same way we can establish empirically that someone who thinks a bat is not a mammal is wrong, it may seem possible that someone who denies that a screenplay is perpetually rewritten could also be wrong despite the fact that such a theory is extremely counterintuitive. Or, to put it somewhat less forcefully, we should not be surprised or worried if according to this or that theory, some of our basic beliefs about the nature of screenplays or other art kinds turn out to be incorrect.

The problem for theories of the ontology of the screenplay (or other art kinds) that run counter to our practices and intuitions is that the screenplay is not a natural-kind concept, but rather an artifact kind concept. And, as we have seen, whatever one takes the merits of direct reference theories and the discovery view of knowledge to be when it comes to natural kind terms, the qua problem casts serious doubt upon their plausibility in the context of artifactual kinds. As mentioned, the relevance to the definitional project is that in order to disambiguate the specific sort of kind to which they mean to refer, grounders must have a background conception of what features are relevant for membership, and, furthermore, this means that practitioners' conceptions of what features are relevant to membership in the artifact-kind "screenplay" actually determine the boundaries of the concept, "screenplay," and its nature.

It is the second part of this conclusion that has an important consequence for theorizing the ontology of the screenplay. For it means that practitioners (and other grounders) not only determine the boundaries of concept, "screenplay," but also determine the facts about what kinds of things screenplays are. In the first place, the qua problem entails, as Thomasson puts it, that "in order to unambiguously ground the reference of a general term to name a kind of work of art, the grounder must not

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[32] Ibid.

only have the idea that the reference of his or her term will be an art-kind, but must also have a background conception of what *ontological* sort of art-kind he or she means the term to refer to."[33] For example, to ground and re-ground the reference of the term, "screenplay," one needs to have a conception of the kind of thing a screenplay is. To return to our earlier example, when I point my finger at a 90 page stack of paper and call it "screenplay" and then point my finger at a PDF file on my desktop and call it "screenplay," I must already have a background conception the screenplay's ontology—to wit, that the screenplay is not a physical object although copies of it are physically instantiated.

Furthermore, according to Thomasson, this kind of background ontological conception "then disambiguates potential reference by determining the ontological kind referred to by the art-kind term (if it succeeds in referring at all)," thus establishing rough persistence and identity conditions for the kind.[34] In other words, just as grounders' collective conception of what features are relevant to unifying a kind actually determine those features, so too do grounders' collective conception of a kind's nature determine its ontological status. Moreover, because the grounding and re-grounding of such terms is established, collectively, through "the practices of those who use the terms and deal with the objects," it is practitioners and others who competently use and speak about a given kind that determine its ontological nature.[35] In the case of the screenplay, it is people like screenwriters, studio executives, actors, crew members, screenwriting festival juries, and casual readers of screenplays who ground and re-ground the reference of the term, "screenplay." Thus, it is their collective background ontological conception of the screenplay that determines what it is those things called "screenplay" are like.

This does not mean that those responsible for grounding the reference of artifactual or art kind terms like screenplay have fully developed theories about the ontology of those kinds. Rather, background ontological conceptions are implicit in their ordinary creative and appreciate practices as well as intuitions rooted in those practices. So, for example, my assurance that I am able to access Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay via my Newmarket copy of it rather than having to knock on his door and ask him for it indicates I have a tacit conception of the screenplay as a multiple instance work. So, too, does my belief that burning my copy will not destroy

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[33] Ibid, 225.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Thomasson, "Debates about the Ontology of Art," 249.

the screenplay. Suppose that before burning my book, I scanned the screenplay and saved it as a PDF file, and then all of the copies of the screenplay did happen to be destroyed. My understanding that the screenplay has survived in a kind of code speaks to a tacit recognition that although we access screenplays through concrete instances of them, the screenplay itself is not a concrete object. Furthermore, knowing that opening the PDF file to produce an instance of the screenplay does not constitute "creating" it points to yet another component of an implicit conception of the ontology of the screenplay.

Together, these sorts of beliefs and intuitions underlying our creative and appreciate practices amount to a rough picture of what kind of thing the screenplay is ontologically—if not a fully developed theory. As Thomasson summarizes, "such background practices thus embody a tacit ontological conception of what sorts of things works of that kind are, which (understood by grounders) disambiguates the reference of the relevant kind term, and determines *ontological* features of the members of the kind (if any) picked out by the term."[36] Therefore, although it would not make much sense to ask Jerry Bruckheimer what he takes the identity and persistence conditions of the screenplay to be, the ordinary practices of Bruckheimer and his ilk collectively reveal certain facts about the nature of the screenplay that our theories need to acknowledge. Indeed, if screenplays were actually, say, endlessly rewritten, one suspects that high-powered producers like Bruckheimer would not be paying script doctors millions of dollars for a final "polish"!

Thus, when it comes to theorizing the ontology of the screenplay, as well as defining of the screenplay, practitioners and other grounders have a kind of epistemic privilege. In the same way that what falls under the extension of the term, "screenplay," cannot be determined after the fact, as it were, by theories that do not line up with the practices of grounders, neither can the ontological status of an artifactual kind like "screenplay" be decided after the fact by highly revisionist theories precisely because it too is determined by the practices of grounders. The crux of the matter is this: Insofar as our collective intuitions about the ontology of the screenplay are based upon the ordinary creative and appreciative practices of people who deal with and speak about screenplays, those intuitions cannot turn out to be

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[36] Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge," 225-226.

wrong.[37] The ordinary creative and appreciative practices of people who deal with and speak about screenplays are determinative of rather than incidental to the screenplay's ontology, which means that our theories need to take them seriously.

It follows that the ontological status of the screenplay and other art kinds is not something that can be determined by "top down" general theories or radically revisionist theories that do not line up with our practices and intuitions. So, for example, although earlier I remained agnostic regarding Barthesian poststructuralism, it now must be said that inasmuch as this mode of theorizing texts does not line up with our background practices and intuitions about the kinds of things texts are, it does not offer an acceptable theory of their ontology. Because of the qua problem, it simply cannot turn out to be the case that despite the fact that we do not treat them as such, screenplays or other texts are essentially, say, endlessly rewritten. At best, the proponent of such a revisionist theory can claim that we *should* treat screenplays or other texts *as if* they are endlessly rewritten. But then the burden is on him to offer compelling reasons to accept such a proposal.

In sum, the general methodological implication should be clear: We must abandon as implausible theories of the ontology of the screenplay or other art kinds that do not line up with our ordinary creative and appreciative practices as well as our collective intuitions based upon those practices. For, as Thomasson puts it, "the *only* appropriate method for determining [artworks'] ontological status is to attempt to unearth and make explicit the assumptions about their ontological status built into the relevant practices and beliefs of those dealing with works of art…"[38] For us, what is needed to theorize the ontology of the screenplay is to analyze the conceptions of the screenplay's nature that are implicit in the practices and intuitions of screenwriters and other people who deal with and speak about screenplays. This is the nature pragmatic constraint I propose.

Desiderata

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[37] However, as Thomasson writes, "although such massive mistakes about the ontology of art are not possible, the limits of epistemic privilege must be carefully acknowledged: the relevant epistemic privilege is only *collective*, not individual, and concerns *only* ontological features of the kind referred to. The above alone does not entail that there is any protection from error about, for example, the causal role of the works of art in the relevant culture, any functions they can or do serve, their histories of production, aesthetic properties, and so forth. All grounders are assured of (collectively) is that, if there is any art-kind referred to by the terms they attempt to ground the reference of, it has the *ontological* standing they commonly (if tacitly) understand and treat it as having" Thomasson, "Ontology of Art and Knowledge," 227.

[38] Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art," in Kivy, 87.

Now, there is another benefit that I hope rehearsing Thomasson's argument has yielded: Given this broad methodological constraint, there are a number of more specific desiderata which should not require much further argumentation. The reason for this is that the conditions I suggest are all based upon strongly held collective intuitions, which are, in turn, rooted in our creative and appreciative practices.

First, following upon the discussion that introduced this chapter, I propose that any ontology of the screenplay must allow for multiple instantiability. I take it that I have already sufficiently set out the reasons why this must be so. It should be recalled that if screenplays were not multiple instance works, then, for example, it would not be possible for the cast and crew of a given production to have access to the same screenplay unless they took turns looking at a single manuscript. Clearly, however, photocopies of a screenplay suffice during film production since they afford access to the screenplay in the same way copies of novels, plays, or poems afford access to those works. So, the first desideratum is this: Screenplays must be the kinds of things that are multiply instantiable.

The second desideratum is creatability. By this, I mean that screenplays must be the kinds of things that are brought into existence by their authors. The belief that artists create their artworks is so intuitive that someone unfamiliar with recent debates in the ontology of art will probably wonder how things could be otherwise. However, there is a variety of argument that denies that multiple instance artworks are created, and it needs to be addressed because, as we have argued, screenplays are multiple instance works. Very roughly, the argument runs like this: Multiple instance works cannot be identified with any physical object(s). In order to accommodate this fact, a prominent account of multiple instance art—one instance of which we encountered in Chapter 6—holds that multiple instance works are abstract types, which are instantiated by tokens.[39] The problem is that, according to some such type-token theories, because types are abstracta, which do not exist in space or time, they are not the kinds of things that can be created.[40] Thus, on this view, we are forced to conclude that writers and composers do not create their works, but "discover" them.[41]

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[39] The version of this theory discussed in Chapter 6 is in Noël Carroll, "Philosophy and Drama: Performance, Interpretation, and Intentionality," in *Staging Philosophy*, ed. David Krasner and David Z. Saltz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 104-121. For a seminal brief, see Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*.

[40] There is some debate in the literature about whether or not types can be created and, if so, what sort of types can be created. For example, Julian Dodd claims,"if a work of music is a type *of any variety*, it cannot be created." But Saam Trivedi accuses Dodd of confusing types with universals. My only point is to show why some philosophers think that repeatable artworks cannot be created—questions about which sort of types (if any) are creatable and whether they are correctly called types or universals are beyond my purview here. See Julian Dodd, "Musical Works as Eternal Types," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, no. 4

Inasmuch as this account of the ontology of multiple instance artworks posits that artworks are not created, it is deeply counterintuitive, and I think we have a number of good reasons to reject it. In the first place, it ought to be clear that our broad methodological constraint proscribes any such extremely counterintuitive theory. According to the argument underpinning that constraint, massive collective error about the nature of artworks—in this case, "erroneously" believing that they are created—is not possible.

In addition, Jerrold Levinson offers a good argument for accepting a creatability desideratum, which we can make use of here.[42] As he points out, creatability is not any old intuition; it is perhaps the most inveterate and fundamental view most people hold about art. Now, one response to this claim is that it confuses creatability with creativity. According to this objection, this most foundational belief is actually just that artists are creative people, but not that they necessarily create things. And, the objection goes, this stands to reason because their works are more properly characterized as "discoveries." For example, Peter Kivy writes:

> What I am suggesting is that it may be more plausible to think of
> [Mozart's] works as Platonic objects of some sort and, therefore, things
> that could not have been brought into being…It takes nothing away
> from Mozart's creativity, in the important sense (or senses) of the word
> to think of Mozart as a discoverer rather than as an inventor or
> creator.[43]

However, as Levinson argues, it is precisely the fact that we think of *Don Giovanni* as Mozart's creation that gives the opera and Mozart part of the "status, significance, and value" they have. In his words, "We marvel at a great piece of music *in part* because we marvel that, had its composer not engaged in a certain activity, the piece would (almost surely) not exist; but it does exist, and we are grateful to the composer for precisely that."[44] So, too, I submit it is with literary works including poems, theatrical scripts, and screenplays. Part of what gives the screenplay for *High Noon* (1952) *its* status, significance, and value is our belief that a person, Carl Foreman, created it. Moreover, we take it that the screenplay would not have existed as it does were it not for the specific events that occurred while Foreman was writing it and influenced its

(October 2000):440; Saam Trivedi, "Against Musical Works as Eternal Types," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no.1 (January 2002): 73-82.

[41] For two such accounts of the ontology of musical works, see Dodd, "Musical Works as Eternal Types"; and Kivy, "Platonism in Music"

[42] Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 65-68.

[43] Kivy, "Platonism in Music," 94.

[44] Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 67.

creation—namely, his being called to testify by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.[45]

Another problem for the argument against creatability is that it depends on the questionable supposition that abstracta necessarily do not exist in space *or* time. Recall that the general argument runs roughly as follows: (1) Abstracta do not exist in space or time; (2) therefore, abstracta are not created; (3) multiple instance artworks are abstracta; (4) therefore, multiple instance artworks are not created. The first premise and the conclusions are commonly held views, but several philosophers have challenged them by arguing that some abstracta necessarily exist temporally and, thus, can be created.[46]

Without getting into the details of these robust arguments, we may mention that photographs appear to pose serious problems for the notion that abstracta do not exist temporally. For a photograph, if it exists, must be an abstract entity, since it cannot be identified with any concrete particular like a negative or a print. But if photographs are abstract entities, they must be such that they exist in time because photographs are causally dependant on reality. For example, it appears implausible that a photograph of me, say, just after my birth, actually existed before I was born. On the contrary, such a photograph appears to be counterfactually dependent upon my existence; we want to say that the photograph could not have existed until I was born—not that it already existed and was merely waiting to be discovered. Another way of putting it is this: it seems implausible that photographs are not created because some of the photograph's artistic and aesthetic properties depend upon its specific historical context; that is, it has properties that it could not have if it were not created in that specific historical context.

For a similar reason, it is also implausible that other multiple instance works are not created. Again, if literary works and musical works exist, they must be abstract entities. Yet such abstract entities must exist temporally since, as several philosophers have argued, at least some of the works' aesthetic properties depend upon their socio-historical context.[47] An oft-cited demonstration of this fact is Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in which the narrator reviews the life's

[45] See Brenda Murphy, *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 255-264.

[46] See, for example, Roman Ingarden, *The Ontology of the Work of Art*, trans. Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989); Amie L. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Andrew Kania, "New Waves in Musical Ontology," in *New Waves in Aesthetics*, eds. Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 20-40.

[47] See, for example, Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*; and Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 68-73.

work of Pierre Menard, a fictional 20th century French author, who "rewrote," word-for-word, certain parts of Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Despite the fact that parts of the two texts are identical, the narrator attributes different aesthetic properties to each. "The contrast in style," claims the narrator, "is…vivid. The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign, after all—suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time."[48] The fact that the two identical texts have different aesthetic properties suggests, as Amie Thomasson puts it, "a literary work is not an abstract sequence of words or concepts waiting to be discovered but instead is the creation of a particular individual or group at a particular time in particular social and historical circumstances."[49]

Jerrold Levinson makes this point with regard to musical works. As he puts it, "the aesthetic and artistic attributes of a piece of music are partly a function of, and must be gauged with reference to, the total musico-historical context in which the composer is situated while composing his piece."[50] One example he offers is this: Although Brahms's Piano Sonata op.2 (1852) is clearly "Liszt-influenced," if Beethoven had composed a work with exactly same sound structure it could obviously not have had the property of being "Liszt-influenced" but would have had a "visionary quality" that Brahms's work does not.[51] Again, we see that the aesthetic properties of the work depend upon a particular socio-historical context, which makes it deeply implausible that the work is not created, but discovered. For if a work exists eternally and is merely discovered, it is not at all clear how it has the socio-historically contingent aesthetic properties it does.

Despite Levinson's insistence upon this principle, however, his account of the ontology of musical works (and other multiple instance works) proposes a principle of creatability that is not as strong as what we need here. It is worth looking at his theory in some detail both because it is one of the most prominent alternatives to Platonist conceptions of multiple instance works, and because it will be useful in specifying a stronger sense of creatability for our desideratum. Levinson maintains that in addition to the pure structures normally associated with types, there is another kind of abstract structure—an indicated structure—that is a type of a different class. On Levinson's

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[48] Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quioxte*," reprinted in *Philosophy: Basic Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Nigel Warburton (London: Routledge, 2005), 555.
[49] Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 8. I realize this is not the only possible conclusion to be drawn from "Pierre Menard," and I address objections to my conclusion shortly.
[50] Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 68-69.
[51] Ibid, 70-71.

view, pure structures belong to a class of type he calls implicit, while indicated structures belong to a class of type he calls initiated. According to Levinson, "Implicit types include all purely abstract structures that are not inconsistent—e.g., geometrical figures…The other class of types, initiated types, are so called because they begin to exist only when they are initiated by an intentional human act of some kind."[52] For Levinson, a musical work is an initiated type—more specifically, a performed-sound structure-as-indicated-by-X-at-t where X is the composer and t is the time of composition.[53] The performed sound structure is a pure sound structure conjoined with a specific means of performance. On this view, however, the composer does not bring into being, strictly speaking, the performed-sound structure. Rather, it is through the action of indicating the performed-sound structure at a particular time that the composer brings into being the performed-sound structure as indicated by her at a particular time—and this is a musical work.

The relevance for us is that Levinson thinks this account of the ontology of musical works can be applied to literary works as well. This is because he views literary works as indicated word sequence structures that are initiated by a particular author at a particular time. "Musical works," he writes, "are indicated structures…and thus types that do not already exist but must instead be initiated. The same is true of poems, plays, and novels—each of these is an entity more individual and temporally bound than the pure verbal structure embodied in it."[54] And, presumably, the same is also true of screenplays. Levinson wants to deny that literary works are pure verbal structures for the same reason he wants to deny that musical works are pure sound structures: the artistic and aesthetic attributes of each are in part dependent on the context of their creation. Hence, he claims:

> [A] poem is certainly not just a given word sequence. A poem is the product of a particular individual at a specific time and place, with a reasonably definite meaning and aesthetic character that is in part a function of that time and place. A word sequence per se, on the other hand, existing as long as the relevant language has existed, cannot be the creation of a given person and possesses neither the sort of meaning nor the aesthetic character a poem bears in its context. By analogy with my proposal for musical works, I would be inclined to regard a poem of the standard sort as a word structure-as-indicated-by-X-at-t.[55]

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[52] Ibid, 80-81.
[53] Ibid, 79.
[54] Ibid, 81-82.
[55] Jerrold Levinson, "Autographic and Allographic Art Revisited," in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 97.

Thus, on Levinson's account of the ontology of literary works, a screenplay would be, roughly, a word structure-as-indicated-by-a screenwriter, X-at-a time, t. Despite the merits of this proposal, it suffers from two problems relevant to our present discussion—one of which I will note here and one of which I will detail shortly.

In terms of the creatability desideratum, the trouble with the work as indicated structure/initiated type view is that initiating or indicating a work is not the same as creating it in an ordinary sense. For if the writer is to indicate the structure, then the pure structure, the word sequence, already exists—as Levinson admits. That is, the writer does not create the word sequence, but indicates it at a time, t. One wonders, though, how much difference there really is between X indicating a word sequence at t and X discovering a word sequence at t. As I see it, Levinson's stating of the theory in this particular manner, alongside the claim that a pure word sequence cannot be the creation of a person, is part of what Andrew Kania identifies as the theory's appeal to metaphysical respectability.[56] The problem is that, parsed this way, the theory violates our intuitions nearly as much as platonic theories Levinson seeks to avoid in the first place. For it does not seem plausible that the word sequence of a work like Joyce's *Ulysses* or Foreman's screenplay for *High Noon* existed as soon as the English language existed, and that Joyce and Foreman have indicated these structures at a particular time rather than created them. On the contrary, the deeply held intuitions that we have, and which we need to respect, are that these writers *have* created the verbal structures of their works—and that other writers do, too (unless we are dealing with found-poetry or the like). Indeed, this seems to be *part* of the reason a work like *Ulysses* has the status it does.

Moreover, I wonder about the metaphysical picture implied by Levinson's theory. Is it not arbitrary to suggest that the word sequence of a literary work exists as long as the relevant language exists? How would this account handle a case like *Finnegan's Wake*, in which language seems to be invented in the work? Moreover, one wonders why the word sequence is said to *only* exist beginning when the relevant language existed. For it seems to me that the issue is the existence of the relevant language makes the existence of the word sequence *possible*. But why not go back a step farther? Why not say that the word sequence exists as soon as people exist since their existence is what makes the existence of the relevant language possible?

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[56] Kania, "The Methodology of Musical Ontology," esp. 436.

Perhaps this is the naïve worry of someone who is not versed in metaphysics. However, if our methodological constraint is good, the intuitions that underpin this and other worries about the initiated type view need to be taken into account. In short, Levinson's argument may be a victory for the creationist, but it comes at the cost of having to nevertheless accept a version of the fundamentally counterintuitive view we wanted to reject in the first place—namely, that there is still a sense in which the artist picks out an already existing pure structure. This, I submit, is not as strong a notion of creatability as is required by our broad methodological constraint.

In sum, although it seems plausible that multiple instance works including screenplays are abstract, it does not appear to be the case that they do not exist temporally and, therefore, are not created. The examples offered above indicate that multiple instance works are necessarily situated in specific socio-historical contexts and, therefore, cannot be the kinds of things that exist eternally. Moreover, denying that things like photographs, symphonies, and screenplays are created comes at enormous cost to the ways in which we normally engage with, think about, and speak about them. Finally, if we respect our methodological constraint, we need an ontology of the screenplay that recognizes that screenplays are created in the ordinary sense of "created." Therefore, the second desideratum is this: Screenplays must be the kinds of things that are creatable and, furthermore, do not exist until they are created (in the ordinary sense of the word) by their author(s).

These reflections on the historical contingency of multiple instance artworks that have come out of a defense of the creatability requirement motivate a third desideratum for any ontology of the screenplay. This condition, borrowed—as several of the preceding points are—from Jerrold Levinson, is that of "fine individuation."[57] In the context of music, Levinson explains the fine individuation constraint as follows: "Musical works must be such that composers composing in different musico-historical contexts [including a single composer on separate occasions] who determine identical sound structures invariably compose distinct musical works."[58] Amie Thomasson makes a similar proposal with regard to literature: "a work of literature depends rigidly on the acts of its particular author to exist, so that, even if two authors coincidentally composed the same words in the same order, they would not thereby have composed

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[57] Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," 73.
[58] Ibid.

the same work of literature."[59] I propose we bring a similar condition to bear upon the ontology of the screenplay: Screenplays must be the kinds of things whose identities depend upon the actions of one or more particular writers in a specific socio-historical context such that two writers who compose the same text do not thereby compose the same screenplay.

The reason for insisting upon a fine individual condition is this: Despite my claim that a screenwriter neither discovers nor indicates, but creates the word sequence of her screenplays, it is nevertheless the case that, strictly speaking, that pure word sequence is not to be identified as the work. Perhaps it seems paradoxical to simultaneously insist that the screenwriter creates a word sequence and claim that her word sequence is not the work. The point to be held in mind, however, is that the word sequence is not all that is relevant to a literary work's identity. It would strike us as odd if, tomorrow, someone named Joyce James composed a text that was identical to the text of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Surely it is less counterintuitive to say that James and Joyce unknowingly created the same word sequence than to say that James and Joyce indicated the same, already existing, word sequence at different times. But this clearly does not commit us to saying that James and Joyce have created the same work, for it cannot be the case that James's work is semi-autobiographical since she was not alive at the time the story is set. Moreover, on this view, we are still able to recognize that Joyce's work is more original and a greater feat, for James had the benefit of being exposed to nearly a century of Joycean-influenced prose.

But regardless of one's position on the ontological status of the word sequence—that is, the text itself—the relevant argument here is that the text and the work are two different things. The impetus for this desideratum comes from the claim that a literary work is, in fact, to be identified with a particular text. Nelson Goodman, for example, writes, "Merely by determining that the copy before us is spelled correctly can we determine that it meets all requirements for the work in question."[60] In other words, the thought is that the identity of a work is determined by the text, so compliance with the text is enough to identify a genuine instance of the work. Work and text are the same. Call this view textualism.[61]

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[59] Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 8.
[60] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 116. In the interest of space, this is a necessarily superficial gloss on Goodman's position.
[61] Gregory Currie, "Work and Text," *Mind* 100, no. 3 (July 1991): 325-340.

One immediate response is that the "Pierre Menard" example shows why textualism cannot be right. Here we have a case of a single text and two different works. However, in an article co-authored with Catherine Elgin, Goodman denies this point:

> We contend…that the supposed two works are actually one…What Menard wrote is simply another inscription of the text. Any of us can do the same, as can printing presses and photocopiers. Indeed, we are told, if infinitely many monkeys were to type for an infinitely long time, one would eventually produce a replica of the text. That replica, we maintain, would be as much an instance of the work, *Don Quixote*, as Cervantes' manuscript, Menard's manuscript, and each copy of book that ever has been or will be printed.[62]

And, indeed, it seems understandable that there are differing intuitions about the implications of "Pierre Menard." Perhaps there is a case to be made that Borges is being ironic, and we are meant to laugh at the absurdity of the narrator's understanding of two identical texts as having different aesthetic properties. In any event, because Goodman and Elgin contest the story's implications, we cannot insist that the story speaks for itself. What is needed is further argumentation that textualism is not plausible.

Consider, then, the following examples, which undermine the textualist's position: First, Preston Sturges wrote the screenplay for *The Power and the Glory* (1933). The screenplay is regarded as highly original for its use of flashbacks as a device to reconstruct a character's past.[63] But the exact same screenplay written in 1942, after the production of *Citizen Kane* (1941) would lack such inventiveness. Indeed, it could not have influenced Mankiewicz and Welles's screenplay in the way one might reasonably suspect it did. Second, Charles Lederer's screenplay for *His Girl Friday* (1940) contains dialogue that was, for its time, naturalistic. In an identical contemporary screenplay, however, the dialogue would be stilted and contrived.

One might object these examples depend on historically evolving standards and conventions rather than any properties that the screenplays themselves have. That is, it might be claimed that attributes such as "original" or "naturalistic" are relational properties not intrinsic to the screenplays themselves. I think this is debatable, but in

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[62] Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin, "Interpretation and Identity: Can the Work Survive the World?" *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 573.

[63] However, David Bordwell has pointed out that *The Power and the Glory* really belongs to a cycle of flashback films that appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s. What appears to remain a somewhat open question is whether the flashbacks employed by these films were specified in their screenplays or Sturges does in fact deserve the credit he has gotten for using the technique as a screenwriter. See David Bordwell, "Grandmaster flashback," *Observations on Film Art* (blog), January 27, 2009, accessed January 6, 2011, http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=3253.

any case, here are two further examples to head off such concerns. Todd Haynes's screenplay for *Far From Heaven* (2002), written in 2002 but set in 1957, is a Douglas Sirk-influenced ironic melodrama. The opening scene gives a good sense of the screenplay's tone:

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, 1957

EXT. NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE – DAY

The bells of a Gothic church are ringing down upon a comely square near downtown Hartford. The crisp fall day is alive with color, as cornflower skies burst through the autumn reds and golds, setting off the clean brick buildings and freshly painted homes that so proudly distinguish this New England township.[64]

Now this screenplay would have been extremely difficult to shoot in 1950s Hollywood because of its candid portrayal of homosexuality. But suppose the papers of a 1950s Hollywood screenwriter—say, Hank Todd—are discovered tomorrow and it just so happens among them is a screenplay written in 1957 that is identical to Todd Haynes's screenplay. Suppose further that, owing to some notes he has left behind, we know that Hank Todd intended his screenplay to be an earnest melodrama in the vein of Stanley Kramer's social problem films. It seems clear, in this case, that despite the fact that the texts of Todd Haynes's screenplay and Hank Todd's screenplay are the same, Hank Todd's work does not have the ironic tone—and certainly not the Sirk-influenced irony—that Haynes's work has.

Finally, imagine that "Unforgiven (The William Munny Killings)"—the screenplay eventually revised and used to shoot *Unforgiven* (1992)—was written not by David Webb Peoples in the late 1970s, but by Frank Nugent in the mid 1950s before he wrote the screenplay for *The Searchers* (1956). Nugent's "Unforgiven (The William Munny Killings)" would be nihilistic on the heels of his screenplays for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Wagonmaster* (1950) yet before the exploration of darker material in *The Searchers* screenplay. On the other hand, if we imagine that in the 1970s Peoples wrote what we know as the screenplay for *The Searchers*, that work would be tame and quaint following shortly after Walton Green and Sam Peckinpah's screenplay for *The Wild Bunch* (1969).

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[64] Todd Haynes, *"Far From Heaven," "Safe," and "Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story": Three Screenplays* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 3.

These examples offer compelling evidence to suggest that two instances of the exact same text are not necessarily instances of the same screenplay, and screenplays cannot be identified with pure word-sequence types or text types.[65] As Thomasson puts it, "By virtue of originating in a different place in literary, social, and political history, at the hands of a different author, or a different place in an author's oeuvre, one and the same sequence of words can provide the basis for two very different works of literature with different aesthetic and artistic properties."[66] Therefore, we should accept the "fine individuation" requirement, making the appropriate modifications so that it applies to screenplays: Screenplays must be such that screenwriters writing in different socio-historical contexts who compose identical texts invariably compose distinct screenplays.

The fourth desideratum I propose is tied to the creatability restriction. Screenplays must be things that are not only brought into existence by their authors, but that can go out of existence. This restriction is worth making explicit because anyone who denies that multiple instance works are created on the grounds that they are abstracta, without spatial or temporal existence, will also deny, on the same grounds, that they can be destroyed. However, our ordinary practices and beliefs indicate that, on the contrary, multiple instance works, including screenplays, are the kinds of things that can be destroyed.

We do not need to repeat all of the objections to Platonism that we made in the context of creatability. Suffice it to say that, again, the methodological constraint ought to ensure that screenplays are the kinds of things that are destructible. However, Thomasson has noted one additional challenge to the kind of destructibility proposed here.[67] Often, when a literary work is no longer accessible to us because no instances of it exist and no one can recall a correct instance of it from memory, we say that the work is lost. Does this not indicate that we merely no longer have access to the work—not that it is actually destroyed? I doubt this is the case. On the contrary, the implication that underlies our use of the word "lost" instead of "destroyed" is that, because the advent of the printing press and other technologies have made it easy to produce many occurrences of multiple instance artworks, it is hard to be *sure* that all

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[65] Amie Thomasson offers another example worth considering: "A screenplay with the same sequence of words as Oliver Stone's *Nixon*, if written in 1913, could have the properties neither of being about (the real) Richard Nixon, nor of being a sympathetic portrayal of the main character, nor of being revisionary and speculative." Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 9.
[66] Ibid, 8.
[67] Ibid, 10.

instances of a work have in fact been destroyed and that the work is truly unrecoverable.

But when we say that a multiple instance artwork is "lost," this does not mean we actually doubt that the work *could be* destroyed—that if, in fact, the work is not recoverable, it continues to exist in some platonic ether, waiting to be (re)discovered. Rather, the "lost" locution just owes to the impossibility of definitively determining that no instances of a particular, previously existing work still exist. As Thomasson argues, this idea "is reinforced by noting that, although we ordinarily speak of old or ancient works as lost, in the case of a modern manuscript burned by its author, we are more prone to count the work as 'destroyed' than merely lost."[68] Thus, I submit, no great violence to intuition is done in saying that Joyce's first play, *A Brilliant Career*, was destroyed and ceases to exist since we know that he himself destroyed the only copy.[69] We do not say that a work is "lost" rather than "destroyed" to exclude this sort of possibility, but rather to indicate our uncertainty about the existence of any extant instances of a work.

So, I claim that there is no surprising, platonic ontological commitment behind our references to "lost" works. In some cases, we do believe that all instances of the work have been lost but hope or suspect that one may be found. In other cases, though, we use the locution even though we know that all instances have been destroyed and the work no longer exists, and in these cases the locution is nothing but a colloquial way of saying just that. In these sorts of cases in which an author destroys the manuscript or other sole extant instance of a literary work and we say the work is "lost," we use the term figuratively—as when we say a doctor has "lost" a patient.[70]

Our practices, however, commit us to the notion that literary works—including screenplays—can and do go out of existence. We hope, for example, that the manuscript of Sylvia Plath's *Double Exposure* is in fact *only* lost precisely because otherwise the work no longer exists. We maintain archives in part so that sole instances of such works are kept safe from destruction and we mourn the loss of works that are destroyed. For as long as one instance of Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay survives, then the work exists. However, once every instance of that screenplay is destroyed and there is no possible way of generating a new instance of it (e.g. if it is scanned and saved as a PDF file that *could* generate an instance), the work ceases to exist. So, the

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Eric Bulson, *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

[70] Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 10.

fourth desideratum is this: Screenplays must be the kinds of things that can go out of existence.

However, we see here that screenplays raise particular questions that it may seem other literary works do not. Indeed, we have come full circle to the question of identity with which the chapter began. It is fine to say that Mamet's *State and Main* screenplay survives as long as there is an instance of it, but what counts as an instance? If a copy Methuen edition were all we had left, would we say that we had an instance of Mamet's screenplay or would we say that the work was lost? What about earlier drafts of the screenplay—would they count as instances? How close would an earlier draft have to be to the final shooting script to count as an instance? I will come to these questions shortly.

But first, let us address the question of whether Mamet's screenplay survives not in virtue of any copy of it surviving, but in virtue of a copy of the film, *State and Main* surviving. Intuitively, one might want to say that the screenplay survives as long as a copy of the film survives. For, it might be thought, such a situation would be equivalent to a case in which film negative, while not an instance of a film, provides a means by which an instance of the film could be generated. Is it not also the case that, although a film is not an instance of a screenplay, it might provide a means by which an instance could be produced?

No. A screenplay cannot survive solely in virtue of the survival of a film made from it. For as we saw in Chapter 7, the screenplay has properties the film does not, and the film has properties the screenplay does not. There is a rigid causal relationship between a film and its negative: the negative is a template from which an instance of the film is generated.[71] But no such relationship exists between a screenplay and a film. For example, any negative (in acceptable condition) of *High Noon* will necessarily generate a correct instance of the film. However, if Clint Eastwood (or anyone else) shoots Carl Foreman's screenplay, the result with not be an instance of the 1952 film, *High Noon*, but a different film altogether. *High Noon* survives through its various templates—its negatives, prints, DVD copies, and so forth—but it will not survive if all of these things are destroyed and only Carl Foreman's screenplay survives because Foreman's script cannot generate a correct instance of it. Shooting

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[71] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 66. Interestingly, Carroll claims that templates like negatives and DVDs are actually "tokens" of the film. But I wonder about this. Is the physical DVD actually a token of the work, or is it better described as a template that can generate a token of the work? My intuition is the latter…if one wants to accept the type-token theory at all.

Foreman's screenplay may generate a work that resembles *High Noon*, but must be a different work.

Working backwards, things are the same: Watching *High Noon*, someone might be able to reconstruct a screenplay that resembles Foreman's, but that screenplay will necessarily not be the same as Foreman's. The film, *High Noon*, cannot tell us exactly what settings, costumes, camera angles and movements, edits, sound effects, dialogue, and so forth that Foreman's screenplay specified. Or, more precisely, the film cannot tell us anything about the language Foreman used to specify the film's constitutive elements. And that language is an essential part of the identity of the screenplay. But even if someone, somehow, watched *High Noon* and composed a text that was identical to Carl Foreman's screenplay, that person cannot have thereby produced an instance of Foreman's screenplay. For, as we have seen, a literary work like a screenplay "depends rigidly on the acts of its particular author to exist."[72] Thus, survival of the film, *High Noon*, does not constitute the survival of Carl Forman's screenplay, "High Noon." Nor does the survival of any film entail the survival of a screenplay made from it.

Back to the Question of Identity Conditions

Finally, we return to the matter of the screenplay's identity via the question of what it takes to destroy a screenplay. This chapter started by asking whether the Methuen edition is a genuine instance of Mamet's screenplay, and that question is brought into sharp relief by asking whether or not the screenplay would survive if all we had was a copy of the Methuen edition. The related questions are whether the screenplay could survive through a different draft or version of it, and, if so, how different another draft or version could be before we were unwilling to say that it constituted an instance of screenplay.

Here, unfortunately, I do not propose to give definitive answers to such questions. However, this is because I doubt they are all answerable. This position should be regarded not as an unsatisfactory conclusion, but rather as a conclusion that is consistent with the arguments that have been made heretofore. Because the argument for the methodological constraint maintains that the ontological status of an art-kind

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[72] Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 8.

(indeed, any artifactual-kind) like the screenplay is determined by our practices and the beliefs rooted in those practices—not discoverable through any investigation other than the analysis of those practices and beliefs—we must conclude that such questions are only answerable to the extent that our practices and collective beliefs provide answers. As Thomasson writes, "since facts about the ontology of the work of art are determined by human conceptions, the resulting facts are, as we might say, ontologically shallow—there is nothing more to discover about them than what our practices themselves determine."[73] Thus, where our practices do not indicate sharp identity conditions for screenplays, we ought to accept that there are no discoverable answers to our questions about those conditions.

What does this mean for our practical problems with regard to the identity and persistence conditions of a screenplay like *State and Main*? We need not despair completely. Let us see if we can use this specific case to draw out some general principles implicit in our practices and intuitions. First, the issue of whether an incorrectly formatted edition of the screenplay should count as an instance of the work does appear to be decidable. The fact that Mamet seems to have endorsed the Methuen edition suggests that he thinks it is an instance of the work, and he is in a good position to know as much. As I argued previously, our ordinary practices allow that the intentions of the author can determine such issues. Mamet's intentions aside, though, the Methuen edition is clearly intended by someone to be an instance of the screenplay, and it is clearly recognizable as an instance of it—just not a correctly formed instance.

This is not to suggest that we ought to conceive of screenplays as "norm-kinds,"[74] but merely that in our standard practices we do acknowledge improperly formed instances of literary works (and musical works) as instances of the works they are intended to instance. Roughly, I think we want to say that to the extent that the Methuen edition is intended to instance the *State and Main* screenplay and is recognizable as an (incorrect) instance, it is in fact an instance of the screenplay, albeit an improperly formed one. And here we can probably extrapolate a general principle: A text that is intended to be an instance of a screenplay and is recognizable as such,

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[73] Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge," 228.
[74] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Words of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 57-58. Wolterstorff proposes to identify literary works with norm-kind word sequences that allow us to recognize improperly formed instances of works. One problem with this theory seems to be that the socio-historical context, which affects the aesthetic properties of the work, is not taken into account. However, Robert Howell has suggested that a modified version of Wolterstorff's theory might be plausible. See Robert Howell, "Ontology and the Nature of the Literary Work," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 76.

according to our ordinary practices, counts as an instance of the screenplay—even if it is not a properly formed or correct instance.

The next question, then, is whether something that is intended to be an instance of the screenplay can fail to be an instance of it. The answer clearly seems to be "yes." If such a text is unrecognizable as an instance of a given work, I take it we do not regard it as an instance. We still regard even a very badly formed instance of a work— say, an abridged version of *Ulysses*—as an (incorrect) instance *of* the work if is largely recognizable as such. However, it seems impossible to regard a text as even an incorrect instance if we cannot recognize it as such. I am thinking of when, several years ago, certain newspapers claimed to be giving away copies of the screenplays of famous films. Those texts, however, turned out to be something like lists of all of the films' dialogue. Thus, despite the intentions of the publishers that these texts be regarded as the screenplays, the texts were not even recognizable as incorrect instances of the screenplays. Indeed, the texts bore no resemblance to the screenplays whatsoever. Here, I suspect that our collective beliefs indicate that the newspapers failed to provide their readers not only with correct instances of the screenplays, but with any instances of the screenplays. For these texts appeared to simply be dialogue transcriptions rather than the kinds of things I argued in Chapters 1 and 2 we typically regard as screenplays.

Naturally, the difficult question is where exactly that line is: at what point does the text count as an instance of the screenplay and at what point does it not? How ill-formed must an intended instance of a screenplay be to fail to count as one? Unfortunately, I do not see that our practices give us much of an answer here. As a general question, I think this is one that is unanswerable. However, this need not impede us from adjudicating specific cases, where we can often successfully arrive at a decision based, I suspect, on some combination of consideration for the publisher's intentions to actually generate a correct instance of the screenplay, the extent to which the screenplay is recognizable to us, and perhaps some other rough intuitions. Again, I would emphasize that we ought not to be too troubled by this conclusion, though, since it is entirely consistent with the notion that it is our practices that actually determine these matters.

If the line between an improperly formed instance of a screenplay and a failed instance of a screenplay is fuzzy, then do the various drafts through which a screenplay goes count as instances? Does the *State and Main* screenplay survive

without any instances of the published final shooting script, but through instances of an earlier draft? Again, I think such questions will have to be made on a case-by-case basis. In general, though, it seems that the principle of recognizability holds here. Suppose there is a penultimate shooting script that differs from published, final shooting script by two words. Here it seems clear that the penultimate shooting script is an instance of the screenplay that is nearly (but not exactly) correct. The difficult questions arise if we have, say, a first draft that contains different characters, different scenes, and different meanings from the published, final version. Maybe, considering that this first draft is not recognizable as the final screenplay, our intuition is that this is a different work altogether. But now I think we would need to take authorial intention into account. If Mamet did not intend this imaginary first draft and the published, final draft as distinct works, then on what grounds would we regard them as such? In this case—and, I suspect, in most cases—drafts that are unrecognizable as instances of the final work are not distinct works, but simply drafts unless their author intends otherwise.

In this sense, I do not think that the situation with screenplays differs significantly from that of other literary works like novels and theatrical scripts. In most cases, we do not regard drafts as instances of the work, per se, because the writer went on to complete a final draft for a reason—namely, that she intended the final draft to be the work. At the same time, we do not typically regard earlier drafts as different works altogether. On the contrary, our ordinary way of speaking about things and dealing with writers' estates and manuscripts offers an indication of our beliefs: An earlier draft of the work is not a correct instance of the work, but it is certainly closely related. We do not, however, act as if the sole survival of a draft really constitutes the existence of the work in cases where instances of the final work no longer exist or the work was never completed. Nor do we regard an early draft that differs considerably from the final work to be a distinct work in its own right.

Alongside the question of whether different drafts constitute instances of a single screenplay, we also might ask the slightly different question as to whether different versions of a screenplay are in fact instances of the self-same work. Now, in the case of screenplays, I think we are typically dealing with different drafts of a work rather than different versions of a work, but it seems possible for there to be multiple versions of a screenplay. For example, imagine Joseph Stefano significantly revised his screenplay for *Psycho* (1960) to be used to shoot Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998),

and he decided to publish both as separate volumes. Here it seems we actually have two different versions of a screenplay rather than different drafts of it. But even to phrase things this way indicates that, according to our ordinary practices, Stefano's two (imaginary) publications are not two different screenplays, but different versions of the same screenplay. If we ask whether a copy of the 1960 version is an instance of "the" screenplay, I suspect we are likely to say "yes," but to qualify our response by clarifying: "it's an instance of the 1960 version." Perhaps this does not offer the kind of definitiveness one wants in these matters, but our practices are all we have to go by.

Moreover, the complications introduced by different versions have no stranger consequences for the identity of the screenplay than they do for the identities of other literary works. For example, Beckett and Brecht were both notorious for revising their scripts through and after various productions—in some cases after publication. For example, writing before Beckett's death, James Knowlson pointed out, "Surviving copies of *Waiting for Godot* from 1953, 1964 and 1975 show that Beckett has always been willing to modify his text in the light of difficulties encountered or highlighted by the process of staging the play." [75] It seems that these modifications constitute neither drafts—since Beckett intended the 1953 version to be final at the time—nor different works—since they are all recognizable as *Godot*—but different versions of a single work: the theatrical script, *Waiting for Godot*. The same questions about the identity of the screenplay are thus raised with regard to the identity of the theatrical script: Does each draft or version constitute an instance of the same work? Will the work survive if only one draft or version survives? How different do the drafts or versions need to be to constitute different works?

But note here that if such questions are not specific to the screenplay alone, neither are they specific to the screenplay and theatrical script qua instructions for the creation of a different work. On the contrary, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* poses the very same questions. *Leaves of Grass* was first published in 1855, and subsequent editions were published in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871-1872, 1881-1882, and, if one counts the "deathbed edition," 1891-1892.[76] So again, we are faced with questions about whether the different versions might actually constitute different works,

[75] James Knowlson, "State of Play: Performance Changes and Beckett Scholarship," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 10 (Autumn 1983), accessed January 6, 2011, http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num10/Num10knowlson.htm.
[76] All editions are available at webpage of The Walt Whitman Archive, accessed January 6, 2011, http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/.

whether copies of the different versions are instances of the same work, and whether *Leaves of Grass* survives if only, say, the 1855 version survives. Indeed, it seems that we have also come full circle to a point where we must again address poststructuralist skepticism about the existence of "the" definitive work in general.

However, this is not to say we have merely ended up where we began, for there is a significant conclusion here. Although Chapter 7 argued that there are some important differences between screenplays and theatrical scripts, we can now see that, qua literary work, the screenplay is not remarkably different from other kinds of literary works in terms of its ontological status. As the above examples indicate, questions about the identity of the screenplay are no more vexed than the questions about the identity of other literary works that exist in multiple drafts or versions. In short, there is nothing intrinsic to the screenplay—nothing about its ontology—that renders it any more ephemeral or fleeting than *Waiting for Godot* or *Leaves of Grass*. For in these cases, too, we may have difficulty pinning down "the" work. Therefore, I submit, the general theoretical trend that treats the screenplay as if it is in "a peculiar ontological state of non-being"[77]—evinced in Steven Maras's talk of "an object problem,"[78] in Ian W. Macdonald's claim that "there is never a definitive version of the screenplay of a film,"[79] and in Steven Price's assertion that "the 'real' or 'authentic' screenplay is a chimera"[80]—needs to viewed with an appropriate amount of skepticism.

However, if vexed questions about identity conditions are not specific to the screenplay, this does not mean that we should embrace the general poststructuralist line about literature either. From the fact that some works do not have a definitive version, it does not follow that no work has a definitive version. Moreover, whether or not a work has a definitive version is not something that is empirically discoverable, but rather something that we ourselves determine through the ways in which with deal with and speak about literary works. And this is not true only with regards to the matter of definitive versions, but with regards to the ontology of literary works and other art-kinds more broadly. As we saw, it is our ordinary practices and beliefs that actually determine the ontological status of such art-kinds. One consequence of this conclusion is that poststructuralist theories of all literary works as essentially

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[77] Price, 42.

[78] Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009), 11-15.

[79] Ian W. Macdonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," *Journal of Media Practice* 5, no. 2 (2004): 90.

[80] Price, 49.

unfinished and endlessly rewritten are untenable just because this is not the ontological conception implicit in our dealings with them.

The other important consequence is that it is perfectly natural that we cannot decisively answer difficult questions about the identity of the screenplay or any other art kind. Insofar as our practices do not indicate a general principle about the extent to which the text of a screenplay may be altered in publication before it no longer counts as an instance of the screenplay, this and similar questions are not answerable. The only answers we can have are those derived from our collective beliefs and intuitions rooted in our practices.

According to our practices, then, what kind of a thing is a screenplay? Although I will not argue for it, I think the most plausible answer is that it is what Thomasson calls an "abstract artifact."[81] Roughly, the idea here is that literary works are one of several varieties of abstracta that depend upon the actions of individuals situated in a particular socio-historical context. In her words, "although these entities are abstract in the sense of lacking a spatiotemporal location, many of them depend upon contingent entities... Moreover, abstract artifacts are not timeless but instead are created at a particular time in particular circumstances, can change, and can once again cease to exist even after they have been created."[82] This, I recognize, is a controversial proposal, and a defense of it is beyond my purview. I leave others to defend or reject it, or to propose their own theories. Its appeal, however, is that it meets the conditions that I have argued must apply to any ontology of the screenplay. Whatever they are, screenplays must be the kinds of things that are:

(1) multiply instantiable—screenplays must admit of multiple instances;

(2) creatable—screenplays must not exist until they are created by their writer(s);

(3) finely individuable—screenplays must be such that screenwriters writing in different socio-historical contexts who compose the same text compose distinct screenplays;

(4) destructible—screenplays must no longer exist when neither any of their instances nor the capacity for generating a new instance exists.

Beyond the methodological constraint and these desiderata, the nature of the screenplay, it seems to me is open for debate. But I leave this topic and, more specifically, the question of whether screenplays are best thought of as special kinds of

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[81] Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, xi.
[82] Ibid, 38.

creatable and destructible types, as abstract artifacts, or as some other kind of entities that meet the above desiderata to those whose expertise lies in the metaphysics of art.

Conclusion: Virtual Series and Screenwriting Theory

For years, research on the screenplay was sparse and ignored by mainstream film studies. Recently, however, the publication of a number of journal articles and monographs, as well as the creation of the first academic journal devoted exclusively to screenwriting, suggests that the establishment of screenwriting studies as a visible and important field within film studies is apparent on the horizon.[1]

As a consequence of these welcome developments, however, screenplay theory is now at a kind of crossroads, and theorists must decide if we are to continue in the direction we are currently headed or change course. As we have seen, a cluster of recent work has focused on the ontology of the screenplay and tended emphasize either its supposed lack of autonomy from the film or its supposed ephemerality.[2] Moreover, in some cases these sorts of ontological claims are hitched to broader arguments. According to one such argument, the screenplay's lack of autonomy from the film means that it is not a work of art in its own right.[3] According to another, the screenplay is not a work of literature because it is an unfinished, Barthesian "writerly text."[4]

As I see it, then, the crossroads at which screenplay theory finds itself is constituted by three interrelated questions—one about the screenplay's ontology, one about its art/literary status, and one about the methodology of theorizing the screenplay (both with specific regard to ontology and art/literary status, but also more broadly): (1) Are we to proceed in our theorizing under the assumption that the screenplay is, as the current theoretical trend suggests, an odd ontological beast— something that essentially lacks autonomy from the film or is essentially incomplete? (2) Are we to proceed in our theorizing under the assumption that the screenplay is, as

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[1] See, for examples of monographs, J.J. Murphy, *Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work* (London: Continuum, 2007); Kevin Alexander Boon, *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008); Steven Maras, *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Wallflower, 2009); and Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For work in journals, see Ian W. Macdonald, "Finding the Needle: How Readers See Screen Ideas," *Journal of Media Practice* 4, no. 1 (2003): 27-39; Ian W. Macdonald, "Disentangling the Screen Idea," *Journal of Media Practice* 5, no. 2 (2004): 89-99; Ian W. Macdonald, "Manuals Are Not Enough: Relating Screenwriting Practice to Theories," *Journal Of British Cinema and Television* 1, no. 2 (November 2004): 260-274; Jill Nelmes, "Some Thoughts on Analysing the Screenplay, the Process of Screenplay Writing, and the Balance Between Craft and Creativity," *Journal of Media Practice* 8, no. 2 (2007): 107-113. Intellect began publishing the *Journal of Screenwriting* in 2010.
[2] See, especially, Maras; Price; and Macdonald, "Disentangling." In a different vein, see Noël Carroll's brief remarks on the screenplay in the context of a broader discussion in *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2008), 68-69.
[3] Carroll, 68-69.
[4] Price, 41.

the current theoretical trend suggests, thus never a work of art or literature (in the classificatory rather than honorific sense of the terms) because of its putative ontological peculiarity? (3) Is our theorizing about the screenplay—specifically in terms of (1) and (2) but also more broadly—to be constrained by our actual creative and appreciative practices? Most proponents of the recent theoretical trend I describe would, I think, answer "Yes" to all three questions. However, I believe that answering "Yes" to (3) obligates us to answer "No" to (1) and (2).

In the previous chapter, I argued that our theorizing about the ontology of the screenplay is strictly constrained by our creative and appreciative practices because it is those practices that actually determine the screenplay's ontological status.[5] As I indicated, this is a very strong version of what we might call a "pragmatic constraint,"[6] but one need not accept it to acknowledge that our theorizing ought to be constrained by our practices to *some* extent. For example, a more moderate version of such a constraint, which I imagine that most theorists would accept, suggests that the point of our theorizing is to accurately, comprehensively, and coherently explain the data presented by our practices. On this view, a theory of the screenplay that does not account for all our practices related to the creation, use, and appreciation of screenplays is either incomplete or flawed, and needs to be modified or discarded. Another way of putting it is that our theories, if they are any good, ought to be able to handle potential counterexamples posed by our actual practices—if not hypothetical counterexamples as well. However, this is what theories of the current trend, which treat the screenplay as essentially lacking autonomy or essentially incomplete, cannot do.

Posing particular problems for such theories of the screenplay is a cluster of creative and appreciative practices that have emerged around the "virtual series." Roughly, a virtual series is a web-based, fan-authored television series that "airs" in the form of uploaded texts that usually either present an entirely original narrative (original virtual series), continue the storyline of an actual television series that has ended (virtual continuations), or use certain elements of an actual series as jumping-off points to tell an original story (virtual spin-offs). In one sense, virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs are nothing new, but fit quite neatly into two categories of Henry Jenkins's helpful typology of ways fans can rewrite television

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[5] On this point I follow Amie L. Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 221-229.

[6] David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 16-24.

shows: "Expansion of the Series Timeline" and "Refocalization."[7] However, the important difference for the present purpose is that many virtual series "air" in the form of screenplays (or, more specifically, teleplays).[8]

Undoubtedly, some fan fiction screenplays were written and distributed in fan-zines before the advent of the Web.[9] However, my research indicates that communication via the Web has allowed virtual series writers to form highly organized online communities, or virtual "networks," where their scripts are increasingly visible and popular. Typically, these virtual networks predominantly "air" virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs, but some also air original virtual series. A member of one of the most popular virtual networks explains:

> A "Virtual Series" is an episodic television show that airs, not over the airwaves, but over the Internet. A "VS" is usually written in script format (the same format that actual TV shows are written in) and posted as PDFs or HTML. Each episode is uploaded and aired weekly, unless stated otherwise… "Virtual Continuations" [are] series that follow on from real TV shows, usually ended ones…[10]

Together, these three varieties of virtual series (original, continuation, and spin-off) constitute a new way of writing and reading screenplays that has serious implications for screenplay theory.[11]

Specifically, my central argument is this: If the goal of theorizing the screenplay is to actually explain the data supplied by our practices, then theories that involve ontological claims about screenplay's putative lack of autonomy and/or incompleteness must be abandoned because virtual series traffic in screenplays that are indisputably autonomous and complete works. Indeed, it seems plausible that these screenplays are, furthermore, works of literature inasmuch as they are created with the kinds of intentions and treated with the same kinds of regard as acknowledged forms of literature. In Chapters 6-8, I presented theoretical arguments against what I called the ontological objection and the Incompleteness Objection to the art/literary status of the screenplay as well as the conception of the screenplay's

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[7] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 162-177.

[8] Fans seem to agree that virtual continuations are often written as screenplays, but not necessarily so. See, for example, virtual series writer Claire Rooney, "What Is a Virtual Series?" MZP-TV website, accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.mzp-tv.co.uk/virtual_series.php. For the purposes of ease and clarity, I will always use the terms "virtual continuation," "virtual series," and "virtual spin-off" to mean only script-based virtual continuations, virtual series, and virtual spin-offs.

[9] See the discussion in Francesca Coppa, "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, eds. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 225-244.

[10] Rooney.

[11] For the duration of this discussion, I will use the terms "script," "teleplay," and "screenplay" interchangeably because nothing relevant to the argument depends upon distinguishing them.

ontology presupposed by those objections. In this chapter, I attempt to bring my theoretical points into sharper relief by focusing on the virtual series as a specific counterexample. In short, if we accept our theorizing to be constrained by our practices in even a minimal sense, then the virtual series implies that for screenplay theory to move forward, we must accept, contra the current theoretical trend, that neither does the screenplay essentially lack autonomy from the film, nor is it essentially incomplete, but rather that it is, in at least some cases, autonomous, complete, and, perhaps, literature.

In what follows, I do two things: First, I adumbrate a rough picture of the virtual series in an attempt to improve our understanding of this sort of screenplay writing (and screenplay reading), which has received inadequate attention in the mainstream literature.[12] Second, I elaborate upon the implications for screenwriting theory that I have just sketched. I conclude not merely with a critique of current scholarship, but with this suggestion: If future theorizing of the screenplay is to take a descriptive, bottom-up approach, as I think it should, then it must constantly refine itself because "screenplay" is an historical concept that will continue to change as our screenplay writing and screenplay reading practices do.

The Virtual Series: Basics

It should be helpful to explain in some detail what exactly virtual series are before shifting focus to the theoretical implications posed by the screenplays that constitute them. First, original virtual series are, as the name suggests, original works of fiction developed by their creators, show-runners, producers, and/or writers for the purpose of "airing" virtually, via uploaded scripts, rather than being shot. The first question one might have is why, if the virtual series—original or otherwise—is not shot, positions like producer and show-runner exist. In fact, the division of labor in the production of virtual series resembles that of the pre-production of real television

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[12] A brief note on methodology: The largest part of my research of virtual series is an informal study of five virtual networks, each of which airs multiple series: Triple Five Productions, VBCtv, The Entertainment Network, Gypsy Verse Productions, and Monster Zero Productions and its subsidiary, Virtual Mutant. Of these, I looked most closely at Virtual Mutant, which specializes in virtual continuations of Joss Whedon television shows, because it is one of the most organized, active, and popular networks. Virtual Mutant was also an ideal focus for me because it airs several different virtual continuations and because the founder, Lee Chrimes, generously agreed to an extensive e-mail interview. I conducted several other interviews with founders of virtual networks and writers of virtual series. I also looked at a number of independent virtual series—those unaffiliated with any virtual network—with a particular focus on *Virtual Firefly*. My estimate is that between virtual series affiliated with virtual networks and independent virtual series, I researched close to fifty different virtual series in total. Triple Five Productions is at http://www.freewebs.com/triplefiveproductions; VBCtv is at http://vbctv.com; The Entertainment Network is at http://theentertainmentnetwork.blogspot.com; Gypsy Verse Productions is at http://gypsypro.net; Monster Zero Productions is at http://www.mzp-tv.co.uk; *Virtual Firefly* is at www.stillflying.net (all sites accessed December 15, 2010).

series. The actual scripts of individual episodes are usually written by one or two person(s), but they are not necessarily the person(s) whose vision has determined the narrative arc of the episode, let alone how that episode ties into the series' overall story arc. These broader decisions may be made collectively, in meetings of the entire writing staff, but the ultimate responsibility for long-term narrative structural planning belongs to the show-runner, who, in addition to developing the larger arc for a full virtual season or the virtual series as a whole, may also write individual episodes if she so chooses. The executive producer of a virtual series may have a creative function, but is also the person who, along with the show-runner, is responsible for overseeing the entire production of the virtual series and ensuring it airs on schedule. In fact, one of the ways in which virtual series writing distinguishes itself from other forms of fan writing is through the set scheduling of virtual shows. Most virtual series "air" on specific days of the week, and some even "air" in specific time slots. For example, the website of one virtual network, VBCtv, features a calendar that specifies the dates and times at which all of its fifteen virtual series "air."[13]

To concretize the idea of an original virtual series, consider the example of *Seers*, which is available online as a virtual DVD—a Zipped file that includes each of the season's twenty-two scripts in PDF files and the same sorts of "extras," such as writer commentaries, that a real DVD might have.[14] The first of two seasons of *Seers* aired on Fridays between 2003 and 2004. As is often the case in real television, the creator and show-runner, Matt Canon, wrote the first and last episodes of each season, as well as a number others. However, he assigned a large part of the writing duties to members of his "staff." Canon describes the production process as follows:

> We plan all of the major arcs well in advance...We have a chat meeting to plan any big new storylines or episodes. Then we'll sometimes outline what all is supposed to happen in a particular episode. If the script is being co-written, each co-writer will choose a half and begin theirs. If not, the writer will pen the first draft and send it to me. I'll do my edits, code it, and get it ready for air.[15]

Working in this manner to produce a polished teleplay in the range of fifty pages every week obviously requires substantial organization. For this reason, the production staff hierarchy on a virtual series serves the practical purpose of ensuring

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[13] VBCtv calendar, VBCtv website, accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.vbctv.com/index.php?option=com_jcalpro&Itemid=128.

[14] MZP-TV DVD sets, MZP-TV website, accessed December 15, 2010. http://www.mzp-tv.co.uk/vdvd_sets.php.

[15] Quoted in Henrik Anttonen, "Interview with Matt Canon," *Voice Over* 4 (2004), accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.simplyscripts.com/voiceover/voice_over_08.html.

that scripts continue to be written on time. In short, the production of a virtual series is usually highly coordinated in order to meet the implicit commitment to "air" a finished script at the same time every week.

The original virtual series has a complex, symbiotic relationship with the other main two types of virtual series—the virtual continuation and the virtual spin-off. Yet it is interesting to note that in principle there is no reason why an original virtual series necessarily needs to have any sort of connection to fandom at all. It would seem that I could gather a group of friends tomorrow and begin to produce an original virtual series based on my investigations of who continues to leave his rubbish sacks in my bin. In practice, however, it is authors of virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs who write original virtual series, and virtual networks tend to use original virtual series to supplement their fan fiction. For example, original virtual series constituted only two of seven total virtual series that were scheduled to air at The Entertainment Network as part of its autumn 2009 season. The largest virtual network divides its programming across two different websites: Monster Zero Productions has one website dedicated to original virtual series and another, through its subsidiary, Virtual Mutant, that is devoted to virtual continuations and spin-offs of television programs created by Joss Whedon. One virtual network "executive" has speculated that original virtual series writing emerged out of virtual continuation and virtual spin-off writing, but this would be difficult to verify.[16]

Another interesting point of intersection between original virtual series and fandom—one which offers an in-road to our theoretical concerns—is the fact that original virtual series, as well as virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs, often "cast" actors in the roles of their characters. Usually, this happens in at least one of two ways. The creator of the original virtual series may simply tell the reader whom to imagine in a particular role via a credits page at the beginning or ending of the script. For example, the cast list on scripts for *Seers* suggests John Goodman for the part of Frank Hembree, Colin Farrell for the part of Carlos Perryman, and so forth. In addition to or instead of a cast list, many original virtual series actually use photographs of real actors and/or celebrities in promotional art to help concretize the image of a character in the reader's imagination.[17] One might also suspect that by

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[16] Aaron Bielert, "VBCtv FAQ," VBCtv website, accessed October 5, 2009, http://www.vbctv.com/index.php?view=items&cid=1%3Avbctv-faqsinfo&id=2%3Awhy-do-some-series-have-names-im-not-familiar-with&option=com_quickfaq&Itemid=324 (page discontinued).

[17] This, of course, raises a host of legal and ethical questions that I cannot begin to address here.

using photographs of real actors or celebrities, the creators of virtual series draw upon their star personae to assist in characterization. This does happen, but it is interesting to note that virtual series creators often cast lesser-known actors who do not have particularly robust star personae.

In any event, this practice of "casting" virtual series raises an important question about their authors' intentions: What purpose or function is the virtual series intended to serve? That is, are the casting choices the fanciful imaginings of the writers, or do they reveal substantive intentions that the virtual series may one day be produced as a real series? One significant difference between original virtual series and the other types of virtual series that are more immediately connected to fandom—and the reason that I will focus more specifically on the latter in what follows—is that the intentions of the creators of original virtual series are harder to pin down.

Although there is little question that, in most cases, the primary intention of original virtual series writers is to create autonomous, complete screenplays written for the sole purpose of "airing" virtually, one wonders if some authors might write with a secondary intention that their scripts are eventually used to create screen works. Lee Chrimes puts it nicely on his *Somewhere InBetween* website: An original virtual series is "a series of episodic screenplays acting for all intents and purposes like an actual TV show, except of course we're not being filmed. Yet!"[18] This final "yet" perfectly captures what could be safely characterized as the multilayered or shifting intentions of original virtual series writers. A community of readers constitutes their primary audience, and the immediate or primary goal must be to engage with that audience—to offer it some sort of imaginative reading experience that is valuable in its own right. At the same time, however, an original virtual series creator might have the secondary intention of writing a series that she or someone else will film. In actuality, this sort of case is probably quite rare. An amateur production of even twelve episodes of fifty minutes each is barely imaginable. Furthermore, a substantial number of original series writers have, unsurprisingly, aspirations to write for film or television professionally, and many of them know a good deal about the industry. Therefore, they are likely aware that never in the history of television has a network agreed to produce a full season's worth of previously written scripts (with the lead roles already cast), let alone by an industry newcomer.

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[18] *Somewhere In Between* website, accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.somewhere-inbetween.co.uk.

Nevertheless, it is plausible that some original virtual series writers imagine or hope that at least one of their episodes, maybe the pilot, is read by someone in the industry who recognizes their talent and helps them produce it. In short, there is some remote possibility that at least one episode from an original virtual series gets produced. Consequently, any characterization of original virtual series writers' intentions that we might sketch becomes complicated insofar as those intentions may not *only* be to write screenplays that are complete, autonomous works. In fact, I do not think this poses any problems for arguing that the original virtual series screenplay is such a work because the fact that the writers have the *primary* intention of creating screenplays that air virtually ought to be sufficient. That is, at least *qua* part of an original virtual series, these screenplays are complete and autonomous works—even if one wants to argue that, down the line, *qua* "blueprints" for the production of an actual show, they are not. Nevertheless, to avoid this kind of complication, I now leave original virtual series aside, and focus upon virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs for the purposes of making my central argument.

Virtual Continuations and Virtual Spin-Offs

In contrast to original virtual series, virtual continuations and virtual spin-offs are virtual series that are based upon the fictional universes of real television shows. Generally, a virtual continuation picks up a storyline from where it is left when a real series ends, suggesting how things might have happened if the series had continued. For example, *Buffy: The Virtual Continuation* began airing on the Virtual Mutant website shortly after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB 1997-2001; UPN 2001-2003) ended its run. The creators of *Buffy: The Virtual Continuation* simply picked up where the real *Buffy* left off. They wrote scripts for a virtual Season Eight that they imagined could reasonably follow upon the real Season Seven (and all previous seasons). The *Buffy: The Virtual Continuation* webpage advertises the virtual continuation as providing "all of the *Buffy* action you've come to expect!"[19]

A virtual spin-off takes the fictional world of a real television show as its own, but departs from the storyline of the real show in some significant way. One of the more frequent manners in which this departure occurs is through "refocalization"—

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[19]Virtual Mutant website, accessed December 15, 2010, http://www.virtual-mutant.co.uk.

the process by which a (fan) writer re-centers the emphasis of the narrative away from main characters and onto secondary characters. [20] For example, *Faith* is long-running virtual spin-off that depends upon this notion of refocalization.[21] The character of Faith plays an important part in the Season Three storyline of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but reappears only sporadically in following seasons. The virtual spin-off, *Faith*, takes the fictional world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a starting point, but creates a narrative that focuses primarily on the character of Faith rather than Buffy.

However, as demonstrated by another example of refocalization, *Connor*, virtual series cannot always be neatly classified as either continuations or spin-offs since the boundaries between these two categories are often fuzzy. *Connor* is a sort of hybrid because it continues the storyline ended in *Angel* (WB 1999-2004)—which is itself a *Buffy* spin-off—but also shifts narrative focus from Angel to his son Connor.[22] So although there are some virtual series that fit squarely into the virtual continuation category and some that fit squarely into the virtual spin-off category, others straddle this boundary.

In dealing with such virtual continuation/virtual spin-off hybrids, in particular, it is useful to make a further distinction—which is of especial theoretical importance—between virtual series that could reasonably occur within the fictional universe of the "canonical" works[23] and those that could not. For example, *Faith*, *Connor*, and *Buffy: The Virtual Continuation* all share one common feature: Buffyverse. The portmanteau, "Buffyverse," refers to the fictional universe created by Joss Whedon in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* are set. Moreover, there is another Whedon universe in which *Firefly* (Fox 2002-2003) and *Serenity* (2005) take place. Typically, virtual series—particularly virtual continuations—based in a fictional world like Buffyverse strive to adhere to the internal logic governing that world and attempt to create storylines that cohere with the narrative events that have occurred in the canonical works. Thus, in at least some cases, a virtual series has the possibility, however remote, of becoming an actual series inasmuch as it is consistent with the rules and narrative events of the fictional world in the canonical works. In theory, Whedon could decide to continue *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, starting from

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[20] For a discussion of refocalization in fandom, see Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 165-168. However, as Murray Smith has pointed out to me, refocalization need not be connected to fandom. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, for example, is a mainstream example of refocalization.

[21] Virtual Mutant website.

[22] *Connor: The Virtual Series* website, accessed December 15, 2010, http://connor-vs.net/index.php.

[23] The question of what constitutes a canonical work for fans is interesting, but space does not permit me to address it here.

Season Eight, by using the scripts written for *Buffy: The Virtual Continuation*. And as long as such a possibility exists, we might wonder how the fan writers of such virtual series intend their scripts to function: Solely as virtual episodes and, thus, as ends in themselves—complete, autonomous works? Or as potential production documents and, perhaps, unfinished drafts—incomplete works lacking autonomy?

In some ways, therefore, the most theoretically interesting kind of virtual series is one that departs from the canon in some way such that the writer clearly intends her script *only* as an end in itself. Consider the case of *Virtual Firefly*. *Firefly* was cancelled by Fox in 2003, well before the end of the season. Thus, *Virtual Firefly* was, at first, "dedicated to a 'virtual continuation' of Joss Whedon's *Firefly* in the form of scripts of additional episodes."[24] However, the challenge for any *Firefly* continuation is that despite the show's cancellation, the canon has continued to expand through other media platforms. For example, the 2005 film, *Serenity*, picks up the *Firefly* storyline some time after the events of the final episode of the series. Whedon later co-wrote a three-issue comic book series, *Serenity: Those Left Behind*, that focuses on events that occur in the narrative time elapsed between the final episode of *Firefly* and the movie, *Serenity*. In its first season, then, *Virtual Firefly* not only continues *Firefly*, but also incorporates the expanding *Firefly* canon into its ongoing narrative.

At the same time, however, the *Virtual Firefly* writers explicitly recognize that the canon is likely to continue to expand in ways that they cannot predict—and in ways that may diverge from or conflict with events that occur in their virtual series. The creators assert, "We know that Whedon will return to us with another movie, book, or some other way to continue the tale he started in *Firefly*. Until that time, we'll be here."[25] Significantly, this admission implicitly accepts the fact that the virtual series will not be the basis for any actual, canonical continuation of the *Firefly* narrative. It also acknowledges that the canon is likely to expand in ways that make the narrative events of the virtual continuation logically impossible. But, it seems, this is orthogonal to the intentions of *Virtual Firefly*'s creators, for whom the airing of virtual episodes, rather than the actual filming of screenplays, is the final goal. And it seems plausible that this kind of conception of the virtual series—as an end in itself— is what leads the *Virtual Firefly* authors to rewrite the canon in Season Two, which "is

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[24] *Virtual Firefly* website.
[25] Ibid.

dedicated to exploring the question, 'What would things have been like if Joss Whedon had been able to tell the story of *Serenity* in twenty-two episodes rather than two hours?'"[26] That is, Season Two of *Virtual Firefly* rewrites Whedon's film, *Serenity*, as twenty-two virtual episodes—a project whose intended purpose is surely limited to offering a specific community of readers an imaginative experience and no more.

The theoretical implications of the kind of autonomous screenplay writing and reading practices suggested by *Virtual Firefly* are brought into sharpest relief by a similar but more striking example. *Charmed: Reset Reality* is a virtual series that sits uneasily somewhere in between the categories of virtual continuation and virtual spin-off. Because this virtual series picked up the *Charmed* (WB 1998-2006) storyline from a midway point—the end of Season Three—rather than the end point, its narrative diverged from that of the actual television show while it was still airing. A virtual series of this nature—that so radically departs from the fictional reality of the actual television show—is sometimes called an "alternate universe series," and in fact this is how *Charmed: Reset Reality* is regarded by its creators.[27] The very purpose of this virtual series is to relate a narrative that is at odds with the narrative of the canonical work—one that the actual show did not supply, but that fans would have liked to see. *Charmed: Reset Reality* embraces, then, the impossibility of the virtual becoming the actual. These screenplays are solely intended to be read and discussed amongst a community of *Charmed* fans—not, in any way, to function in a production context, leading to actual television shows. Therefore, they are complete and autonomous works.

Screenplay Theory

If the screenplays of at least some virtual series are autonomous and complete works, then we ought to accept neither ontological claims that the screenplay essentially lacks autonomy and/or completeness, nor denials of the screenplay's status as art and/or literature that are based upon such claims. Thus, we must reject Noël Carroll's argument that screenplays "are ontologically ingredients in the motion

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Camille, "Charmed by Four: Part One," *Charmed: Reset Reality* Season 4, episode 1, accessed December 15, 2010, http://resetreality.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=s4&action=display&thread=455. There is, however, some debate about what precisely constitutes an alternative universe series since, in a sense, all fan continuations posit alternate universes.

pictures with which they are associated rather than being independent artworks," as well as poststructuralist-influenced arguments typified by Steven Price's assertion that the screenplay "is a text of suggestive incompletion that demands the writerly activity of others."[28]

In Chapter 6, we saw that for Carroll, screenplays are not works of art in their own right because of their ontological status as non-detachable, constitutive parts of other works—namely, movies. "In contrast to the theater," he writes, "where the recipe [i.e. the script] and the interpretation are two different artworks, in cinema the recipe [i.e. the screenplay] and its interpretation are presented together in one indissoluble package."[29] Moreover, the ontological claims aside, Carroll seems to believe that screenplays are not literature in part because "in the world of motion pictures, as we know it, scenarios are not read like plays or novels."[30]

As I wrote in Chapter 6, we ought to be charitable to Carroll because his remarks come in the context of a broader discussion of the ontology of cinema. Moreover, he is clearly not writing with virtual series in mind. Nevertheless, the point to be taken away here is that the virtual series demands a broader conceptualization of the screenplay than the rather traditional one Carroll presents. We need an account of the screenplay according to which it is not *essentially* bound to production. For even if one is dubious of Chapter 7's theoretical argument about the screenplay's autonomy from the film, the virtual series makes clear that, as a matter of fact, some screenplays are never intended to be associated with any film. Therefore, a screenplay cannot *essentially* be something that is a non-detachable constituent of a film. As the word "virtual" suggests, these screenplays are not created for the purpose of guiding the production of any actual screen work. By their very nature, they are autonomous works. However, refuting the claim that screenplays are essentially constituent parts of films does not necessarily entail that they are themselves works of art or literature. It does, though, invalidate the argument that screenplays are not works of art or literature *because* they are essentially not autonomous works. Furthermore, the example of the virtual series shows that, contra Carroll, at least some screenplays *are* "read like plays or novels," and are, therefore, plausibly works of literature.[31]

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[28] Carroll, 69; Price, 41.
[29] Carroll, 68.
[30] Ibid, 68.
[31] Ibid, 68.

Chapter 8 addressed poststructuralist-influenced accounts of the screenplay, which claim, roughly, that it is essentially ephemeral and incomplete—and, therefore, not literature. For theorists like Steven Price and Ian W. Macdonald, the screenplay is like a Barthesian "writerly text" that is endlessly rewritten. Recall that Price claims, "Although [the screenplay] is clearly to be differentiated from the Barthesian text, it is still in many respects the contemporary text *par excellence*, and at the very least [Barthes's "From Work to Text"] can take us further in distinguishing the screenplay from literature (or 'work')."[32] Moreover, according to Price, the screenplay has been pushed "into a peculiar ontological state of non-being." Indeed, he asserts, "The 'real' or 'authentic' screenplay is a chimera."[33]

Now, Price and Macdonald also deserve some charity here, since they are primarily concerned with screenplays that go through production. For example, in one place Macdonald writes, "There is never a definitive version of the screenplay of a film."[34] Whatever one makes of this claim, one cannot use the example of the virtual series to attack it. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that the virtual series suggests that, if we are *theorizing* the screenplay, we need to conceive of the concept more broadly than screenplay-of-a-film. In any case, Macdonald's claims about the putative incompleteness of the screenplay are more emphatic elsewhere—for example in his endorsement of Nathanial Kohn's assertion, "in Barthes's (1974) terms, screenplays are model 'writerly texts'—open to being rewritten—as opposed to closed 'readerly texts' which 'can be read but not written...classic text[s]."[35] And this certainly sounds like an account of the screenplay's essential nature.

Even extending Price and Macdonald a certain amount of charity, however, it is difficult to see their assertions as anything other than general claims about the screenplay's ontology. Indeed, Price, at least, explicitly concerns himself with the ontology of the screenplay for an entire chapter of his book.[36] But as accounts of the screenplay's *essential* nature—which, of course, is what ontological accounts are— the statements cited above are obviously false if one considers the counterexample posed by virtual series. There just is no sense in which the *Charmed: Reset Reality* screenplays are incomplete or unfinished—or, at least, anymore so than any other type of text-based work. The screenplays posted to the website are unequivocally final and

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[32] Price, 41.
[33] Ibid, 42, 49.
[34] Macdonald, "Disentangling," 90.
[35] Quoted in Macdonald, "Disentangling," 91.
[36] Price, 43-62.

completed works because their authors present them as such to a community of readers, just as when an author implicitly signals the completion of her novel by publishing it. In other words, in our standard practices, we usually accept that evidence of an author's intention that her work be regarded as completed—like either print or Web publication—indicates that the work is in fact complete.[37]

One objection a proponent of the incompleteness argument might make here is that the author of a virtual episode could return to the website after the episode's "airing" and modify her screenplay, suggesting (supposedly) that the screenplays of virtual series are no more complete than any others. However, this objection is easily handled by noting that we allow for such possibilities in our dealings with all kinds of works that are indisputably completed (in an ordinary sense of the word) through notions such as that of the "revised edition." Recall the example of the previous chapter, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which was published in 1855, and re-published in revised versions in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871-1872, 1881-1882, and 1891-1892. Now, one can take a hard deconstructionist stance and say that the various editions indicate that *Leaves of Grass* is incomplete or unfinished—or that there is no "real" or "authentic" *Leaves of Grass*—but such a position is greatly at odds with our collective intuitions and everyday practices. For those intuitions and practices suggest that each publication of *Leaves of Grass* constitutes a different, completed version of the work—not that the work is incomplete or that there is no "real" work. So, too, if a writer of *Charmed: Reset Reality* were to alter her screenplay after "airing," it would be erroneous to conclude that the screenplay was never completed rather than simply revised after its completion. Furthermore, if one does take such a deconstructionist position with regards to a "rewritten" work like *Leaves of Grass*, then there are no grounds for supposing that a particular feature of the screenplay is its incompleteness. That is, if one accepts deconstructionist notions regarding "writerly texts," then incompleteness is a feature shared by all "writerly texts" and cannot be specific to the screenplay's ontological status.

Another move, which is open both to skeptics of the screenplay's autonomy and its completeness, is to simply claim that virtual series do not traffic in screenplays properly so-called. Perhaps the texts involved in virtual series can only be said to be screenplays insofar as the term is used metaphorically, or is used as a kind of

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[37] See Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53-61.

substitute term to refer to a concept for which we do not yet have an adequate name. Isn't "screenplay" a functional concept after all, the skeptic might ask? That is, the skeptic might embrace the position I outlined at the beginning of Chapter 1 and argue that most artifact concepts are defined by their intended or proper function, and, therefore, it is plausible that because screenplays are artifacts, "screenplay" is a functional concept. On this view, one might argue that, according to our present concept, something is a screenplay if and only if it is intended to have the primary function of specifying the constitutive parts of a screen work. The texts of virtual series are not intended to have this primary function. Therefore, they are not screenplays properly so-called. However, for reasons I explored in depth in Chapters 1 and 2, this line of defense is decidedly unpromising.

Here we should note that, in the first place, the burden of proof lies with those who would deny that virtual series traffic in screenplays because we have strong *prima facie* reasons to think that they do. First, there is often no perceptible difference between them and objects that are indisputably screenplays. Some virtual networks like Monster Zero only air virtual series that are written and formatted with the industry-standard screenwriting software, Final Draft. In other cases, the formatting of virtual series is not correct by industry standards, but these works nevertheless look like attempts to write screenplays. Thus, we have some prima facie evidence to suppose that virtual series screenplays are screenplays properly so-called. However, the skeptic may readily admit that virtual series screenplays *look* like actual screenplays while maintaining that the substantive difference between them involves their intended functions.

Yet, the *prima facie* evidence for thinking that virtual series screenplays are screenplays properly so-called amounts to more than perceptible similarity. More importantly, most authors of virtual series have the concept "screenplay," and intend their works to be "those-kinds-of things" in all regards except having the intended function of specifying the constitutive elements of a screen work.[38] Thus, we may admit that the difference in intended function is, as the skeptic claims, a relevant one, but maintain that it is extremely implausible that virtual series writers are failing to create screenplays in virtue of this single difference, since they intend to create things

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[38] As Amie Thomasson argues, successfully realizing an intention to make "that-kind-of thing," K, where one has a substantive and substantively correct concept of what a K is, amounts to the successful creation of a K. See Amie L. Thomasson,"Artifacts and Human Concepts," in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52-73.

that are screenplays in every other regard. This intuitive view is voiced quite clearly by Claire Rooney, a writer affiliated with Monster Zero Productions: "The world of Virtual Series can seem unusual at first, but really it's no different than reading the scripts of favourite TV shows—the only difference is, ours aren't filmed or aired on real television."[39] In other words, there seems to be no reason, in principle, why one could not write a screenplay in virtue of have created a text that is a screenplay in every way except that it is not intended to have the function of specifying the constitutive elements of a screen work. Or, to put it another way, it seems extremely unlikely that being intended to have the function of specifying the constitutive elements of a screen work could, in fact, be a necessary condition for something to be a screenplay.

However, this is precisely what the skeptic must maintain in order to deny that the texts involved in virtual series are screenplays: in short, he must argue that for something to be a screenplay, it must be intended for production. Yet this argument can easily be refuted. In the first place, it is far from clear what justification could be made for the imposition of such a condition. The adversary of virtual series owes a non-question begging account of why something must be intended for production to count as a screenplay. As far as I know, no such account exists.

On the contrary, we have good reasons to think that something need not be intended for production for it to be a screenplay. Consider, for example, television spec scripts. A television spec script is a teleplay for an episode of a popular, currently airing show that an aspiring writer creates and sends around in the hopes that a studio will recognize her talent and hire her. "Simply put, a spec script is a writing sample...Think of it as [a] calling card," advises the writer of a guidebook to writing for television.[40] It is a commonplace in the television industry that—unlike in the film industry—television spec scripts are not written with the intention of being sold or produced, but with the purpose of demonstrating a writer's abilities. As the author of another guide to writing for the television industry puts it, "Its sole purpose is to showcase [one's] writing talents."[41] Unlike in the film industry, in which "spec" refers to a screenplay sold on a speculative basis, in the television industry "spec" means, "you don't get paid for it. That script serves as a consummate sample of your

[39] Rooney.
[40] Martie Cook, *Write to TV* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2007), 11.
[41] Catherine Kellison, *Producing for TV and Video* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2006), 47.

ability to write for film and television."[42] Still another guidebook summarizes the dilemma of the television spec script writer with bitter humor:

> No one asked for it. No one's paying for it. No one wants to read it. It's a pitiful thing, the episodic spec script. Granted, lots of valuable writing has been done on spec. Almost every first novel. The vast majority of plays. Innumerable great movies. Just about the entire canon of English-language poetry. But all of that work was done with an expectation—or at least a hope—that it would some day find an audience. But an aspiring TV writer who sits down to write a spec episode doesn't have that hope. He's got to know that this script will never be produced, and at most will be read by a couple hundred people who'd rather be doing just about anything else. And no one will ever pay him a nickel for all that work.[43]

The television spec script is indisputably one variety of screenplay, yet the evidence cited above makes it clear that it is a type of screenplay that is not written with the intention of being produced. Therefore, something need not be written with the intention of being produced—more technically, of being intended to have the function of specifying the constitutive elements of a screen work—in order to be a screenplay. Without this necessary condition, the argument that virtual series do not traffic in screenplays fails because, as we have seen, the only difference between them and typical screenplays is that virtual series authors do not intend their work to be produced. They do, however, intend their screenplays to be complete, autonomous works read for their own sake, discussed, and evaluated by a community of fans. And this fact demands that we rethink what the boundaries of our screenplay concept are, what kind of a thing the screenplay is, and whether some screenplays might be literature.

The Way Forward

Despite my criticisms of current thinking about the screenplay, I believe that my proposal that we reconceive our theories should appeal to a broad spectrum of critics. The reason, as I indicated at the beginning, is that what underlies both my critique and call for reconceptualization is a methodological premise that I believe is uncontroversial. To wit, I think that most theorists will accept that the goal of our theorizing is to explain data constituted by our practices and artifacts thereof. And if

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[42] Richard A. Blum, *Television and Screen Writing* (Woburn, MA: Focal Press, 2001), 10.
[43] Lee Goldberg and William Rabkin, *Successful Television Writing* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2003), 31.

this is our goal, then we need to build our theories from the bottom up, looking at specific practices and instances of screenplays in order to extrapolate plausible general theories.

Now, some critics will reject this broad methodological assumption out of hand, but those who accept it ought to follow my argumentation in Chapters 2 and 8 for some further methodological constraints. For if we take seriously the idea that our theories must attend to what practitioners are doing, we will see that practitioners actually have quite a lot of power. As I argued in Chapter 2, assuming that the screenplay is an artifact, it is plausible that practitioners collectively *determine* what features are relevant to something being a screenplay.[44] For the screenplay is not a natural kind, like water, that has a timeless, mind-independent essence. On the contrary, it is a human invention—a product of intentional human activity—and, for this reason, alone, it is plausible that practitioners draw the boundaries of the concept. Indeed, although I showed that being-intended-for-production cannot be a necessary condition for something to be a screenplay by appealing to the example of the television spec script, I need not have. Because the screenplay has no mind-independent essence—because it does not have, say, a molecular structure that allows us to empirically identify all and only those things that are screenplays—the concept has no boundaries beyond those that we collectively determine through our practices. Thus, I could have made my point by elaborating an argument that I suggested only briefly: The texts involved in virtual series are screenplays in virtue of the fact that practitioners who have the concept, "screenplay," are intentionally making objects with *many* of the features relevant to the concept but *a few* features screenplays do not typically have, such that the boundaries of the concept are slightly changed.

As I explained at length in Chapter 2, if our practices determine the boundaries of artifact concepts like "screenplay," it follows that such concepts are historical in at least a minimal sense. By this I simply mean that as our practices gradually change over time, so too do the boundaries of the artifact concept. Because artifact concepts do not have mind-independent essences, what is relevant to successfully making an object that falls under an artifact concept, K, cannot be whether the candidate object has a set of features specific to all and only Ks. On the contrary, according to Amie Thomasson, "the relevant sort of intention to make a thing of artifactual kind

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[44] See Thomasson, "Artifacts," in Margolis and Laurence.

K…involve[s] a substantive (and substantively correct) concept of what a K is, including an understanding of what sorts of properties are K-relevant and an intention to realize many of them in the object created."[45] Thus, someone who successfully realizes such an intention succeeds in making a K. But the fact that the set of properties sufficient for falling under an artifact concept is somewhat variable allows for some maneuvering on the part of practitioners. For, as Thomasson puts it, "each subsequent maker needs only have a concept of which features are K-relevant that *largely* matches that of prior makers of Ks (if any there be). Thus, over time, the concept of Ks, spelling out which features are K-relevant, may gradually change."[46] Thus, the writers of virtual series slightly change the concept, "screenplay," by making objects that are like screenplays in nearly every way except for the difference in intended function. The general point, which is absolutely paramount, is that because our screenplay writing and screenplay reading practices have changed over time (and are *likely* to continue change over time), so too has our concept of the screenplay.[47] This is the sense in which our concept of the screenplay is historical.

If our concept of the screenplay is historical in virtue of the fact that its boundaries are determined by human practices, then some important conclusions for theorizing the screenplay follow. In the first place, it means that bottom-up theories of the screenplay not only ought to attempt to line up with our practices, but that they must pay extremely close attention to those practices and, in particular, changes in those practices.

Second, if the screenplay is an historical concept, it means that *any* definition of the screenplay must have an historical dimension to it. Whatever else one chooses to propose with regard to conditions for falling under our present concept of the screenplay, one must take the screenplay's historicity into account. Moreover, one can never offer anything other than a definition of our present concept of the screenplay or a definition of a past concept of the screenplay. Such definitions must be strictly constrained by our practices because it is those practices that determine the boundaries of the concept. Furthermore, one can never stipulate a definition of what the screenplay will be in the future because our future concept of the screenplay will be determined by future practices.

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[45] Ibid, 59.
[46] Ibid, 62-63.
[47] Note here that this is *not* a teleological argument that supposes there is an inevitable end towards which our practices and our screenplay concept are headed. See Chapter 2 for a full discussion.

Third, if the screenplay is an historical concept, it is at least plausible that an attempt to discover "the" ontological status of the screenplay is misguided. As the boundaries of the concept change historically alongside our practices, it is possible that the nature of the concept will change as well.[48] Indeed, as our practices change the boundaries of the concept and expand its extension, it seems possible—perhaps even probable—that our screenplay concept will admit of ontological diversity in the same sort of way that our "art" concept presently does. That is, like our present "art" concept, our screenplay concept may include or may come to include objects that differ ontologically. Perhaps one could salvage an argument that there is a sense in which *some* screenplays are essentially more ephemeral than things like novels. But any such argument would have to be made modestly, in such a way that recognized that the putative ephemerality was not an essential feature of all screenplays.

Finally, if we acknowledge the fact that the screenplay is an historical concept, then it ought to be clear that even if one rejects the argument that some screenplays are works of literary art *now*, there is nothing that precludes them from being works of literary art in the future. Indeed, this would be true even if one denied that the screenplay was an historical concept because it is virtually impossible to deny that our present concept of literary art is historical in the minimal sense I have described. In short, the historical nature of both concepts (or of either one) prevents us from foreclosing upon the possibility that they could change such that the screenplay's literary status was as uncontroversial as the literary status of the theatrical script presently is.

However, as I argued in Chapters 4, 5, and 8, it is entirely plausible that at least some screenplays are works of literature as we presently understand the concepts "screenplay" and "literature." I have already suggested that many mainstream Hollywood screenplays—including those of Ernest Lehman and David Mamet—are literature, and the screenplays involved in virtual series—particularly those unattached to any potential screen work—are additional examples. For like the examples I referenced in earlier chapters, the screenplays involved in virtual series are clearly created with the same sorts of intentions with which literary works are commonly created. To put it another way, if virtual series screenplays were not literary works, it would be very hard to explain why their authors write them with

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[48] See Thomasson, "The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics."

such particular attention to aesthetically relevant features such as careful plotting, the use of imagery, or the deployment of poetic devices like metaphor, and with the intention that these features will be read for their own sake, discussed and evaluated amongst fan community members. And, as I suggested in Chapter 8, we need not be troubled by the difficulty of defining literature because the screenplays involved in virtual series will meet the conditions of any prominent conception of literature in currency today: linguistic definitions, semantic definitions, speech-act definitions, aesthetic definitions, or institutional definitions.

Here I grant that when a screenplay is involved in the production of a screen work, matters might not seem so straightforward at first glance. However, I argued at length in Chapters 6-8 that the arguments regarding the screenplay's putative lack of autonomy from the film or incompleteness fail even when it comes to ordinary screenplays in production contexts. Rather than reviewing and these arguments and my objections here, though, I would like to close with a broader methodological reflection about resistance to the notion that the screenplay may be complete work of art in its own right.

The skepticism about this notion comes, I suspect, primarily from those who think that it does not recognize the complexity of the screenplay and its relationship to the creation of a film. Steven Maras, for example, shares Adrian Martin's concern that "there has been a historical drift towards scriptwriting as an autonomous activity, breaking apart the ideal unity of script conception and screen realisation—an alienation that the current manuals help to reinforce."[49] Maras reflects:

> Why should a drift towards an autonomous activity of screenwriting be of concern? Because it changes what it means to make film or cinema…[T]he movement towards autonomy takes the script out of its production context and potentially reinforces a fracture between conception and execution that impacts on the way we might imagine creativity and expression, and think about the medium.[50]

The general worry here seems to be that thinking about the screenplay as an autonomous work closes down space for dissident screenwriting practices by normalizing one particular mode of screenwriting at the expense of others. Maras already regards the screenplay as an idea around which "a normative idea of

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[49] Adrian Martin, "Making a Bad Script Worse: The Curse of the Screenwriting Manual," *Australian Book Review* 209 (April 1999), accessed October 5, 2009, http://home.vicnet.net.au/~abr/April99/mar.html (site discontinued).
[50] Maras, 5.

screenwriting...has been reinvented,"[51] and I suppose his concern is that granting the autonomy of the screenplay would further abet the shaping of a normative idea of screenwriting.

The motivations underlying such worries are laudable, but I believe the concern is unfounded for several reasons. First, *any* artistic, or more broadly, cultural, practice whose boundaries are established by the conventions and standards of the practice is normative in some sense. One cannot write an opera without any words because the conventions of the practice have in this sense made the idea of an opera a normative one: operas, as we understand them, must involve singing. In the same way, the screenplay is a normative concept insofar as the conventions established by our practices have come to require that screenplays also have words.[52]

However, there is nothing insidious about our concept of the screenplay being normative in this way. Obviously one can imagine certain artistic or other cultural practices being normative in insidious ways—but it hardly follows from this that all normative concepts are necessarily insidious. The concept of a movie, for example, is innocuously normative insofar as conventions require that there be an image on the negative that we project onto the screen. The fact that the concept of movie is normative in this sense does not foreclose upon the artistic possibilities of filmmakers. For example, Walter Ruttmann challenged this convention by making a film, *Weekend* (1930), which had sounds but no image—just a black screen. This experiment likely spurred both viewers and other practitioners to rethink the boundaries of movie-hood. In short, all artistic practices are necessarily normative insofar as they establish standards for something falling under the practice. Second, there is no reason to think that acknowledging that *some* screenplays are works of art in their own right would privilege a particular mode of screenwriting practice anyway.

Finally, the worry about normalization is stated in oddly normative terms. Maras expresses a rather general concern that thinking about screenplays as autonomous works could change what it means to make film. I fail to see either why this should be regarded as a problem or why we should be committed to trying to stabilize what it means to make film. Is this not just normalizing the screenplay in a different way? Maras also worries about the idea of the screenplay being removed

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[51] Maras, 2.
[52] And, as I indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, the fact that the screenplay is necessarily a verbal object is a contingent fact rather than a logical necessity. It just so happens that our concept of the screenplay has evolved this way, but we can easily imagine our practices changing such that in the future some screenplays, properly so-called, were entirely non-verbal.

from its production context. But there is no reason to think that reading a screenplay as an autonomous work precludes us from studying how the same screenplay is developed in a production context. Reading Bertolt Brecht's *Life of Galileo* as a work of literature in no way forecloses upon the possibilities of reading and studying the play as it was interwoven with the production of a work for the stage. Again, the suggestion that we should not treat the screenplay in a certain way is what seems to be the normative force here. Relatedly, Martin's invocation of an "ideal unity of script conception and screen realisation" sounds strangely teleological. He owes us a compelling account of why such a unity is ideal, but even if he has one, surely it too normalizes a particular mode of screenwriting—in this case, a mode of screenwriting that is unified with a screen realization.

In sum, if the goal of theorizing the screenplay is really to explain what the screenplay is and what kind of a thing it is *according to our practices*, then our theories need to be genuinely constrained by those practices—even if this results in a conception of the screenplay that is not to our taste—for example, if recognizing the literary status of some screenplays feeds into the capitalist designs of the publishing industry. Furthermore, if, as I have argued, our practices determine the boundaries of our screenplay concept, and that concept is, thus, an historical one, we must constantly revise our theories about the screenplay as our practices change. This will require work and flexibility—especially if a perceived "drift" towards a particular mode of practice appears somehow problematic or to diverge with our previously existing theories. But this is the price of good theory.

Virtual series offer strong evidence, I submit, that practitioners do determine the boundaries of our screenplay concept, that our screenplay concept has changed with history, that we are now in an historical moment when some screenplays are complete, autonomous works, and that we are also now in an historical moment when some people write screenplays with the intention of creating literature while certain communities of readers have agreed to regard them as such.

Thus, I have chosen to conclude this study by focusing upon the virtual series because it helpfully concretizes the more abstract theoretical arguments I have made. To recap, those were:

(1) The screenplay is an artifact concept and, therefore, an essentially historical concept, the boundaries of which are determined by the collective practices

of the creators of screenplays. Therefore, any plausible definition of the screenplay must be an intentional-historical definition of some variety.

(2) Because early Hollywood screenwriting practices intelligibly emerged out of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century playwriting practices (which are acknowledged art practices), Hollywood screenwriting can plausibly be identified as an art practice and at least some Hollywood screenplays can be plausibly identified as artworks. Other screenwriting practices and screenplays can plausibly be identified as art in virtue of their intentional-historical connection to acknowledged, prior art.

(3) Through their collective creative and appreciative practices, practitioners (and others who ordinarily deal with screenplays) determine the facts about what kind of a thing the screenplay is. Any plausible account of the ontology of the screenplay must, therefore, be strictly constrained by those practices. Furthermore, an analysis of those practices shows that the screenplay must be the kind of thing that is creatable, multiply instantiable, finely individuable, and destructible.

Moreover, as I indicated at the outset, I wanted to not only convince the reader of the validity of these three arguments, but also of the necessity for future theorizing about the screenplay to proceed in a particular way. Specifically, I hope I have made a persuasive case that *any* theorizing we do about the screenplay needs to be constrained by our practices—indeed, needs to proceed by taking stock of our practices and moving from the bottom up.

Of course, if this general methodological argument is accepted, and I am right about the primacy of practice and the essential historicity of the screenplay, then I ought to stand ready to modify the more specific ideas about the screenplay that I have proposed. I am happy to do so, and, indeed, hope that as research in the exciting new field of screenwriting studies moves forward, others will track and analyze emerging screenplay writing and screenplay reading practices in ways that prompt them to refine and to constructively revise the ideas I have offered here.
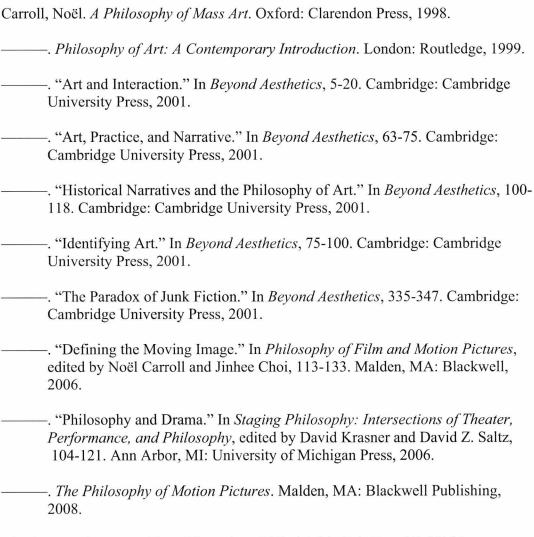
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